

**REACHING THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN:
THE IMPACT OF EMERGENT CURRICULUM ON THE PRACTICE AND
SELF-IMAGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
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Abstract

Emergent curriculum constitutes a direction for early childhood education teachers to ascend from a position of poor self-image and sometimes dubious practice to reach a peak of transformation. At the top of the mountain, a reframed self-image for the early childhood educator is possible. Teaching and learning in an emergent way empowers both children and teachers. Based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky emergent curriculum involves children and teachers in a process of co-construction. Inspiration for this innovative approach comes from the pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. This study examines the impact of emergent curriculum on four early childhood education teachers. The theoretical framework for emergent curriculum and this dissertation is Vygotsky's theory of social construction. Utilizing a case study methodology, data was collected through interviews, a focus group, and classroom observations. Through an analysis of the data collected, results indicate that emergent curriculum not only changed the daily practice of these teachers but has had a profound impact on how they view themselves. They have a fuller view, as if from the top of a mountain. Three of the four teachers have a renewed practice and an improved self-image. The factors contributing to the change are identified. Releasing control and sharing power with others has lead to change and transformation for both the researcher and the researched.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Lorne and children, Jeremy, Ben and Dory. This journey would not have been possible without my family. I knew as I climbed higher into unknown terrain that if I should tumble from the mountain, their love and support would spread like a safety net, absorbing the fall.

Chapter One:

The Early Childhood Education Journey

[I]mages of teaching can fill us with awe, and we can choose to see within them an abiding sense of challenge.

(Ayers, 2001, p. 1)

It is through others that we develop into ourselves.

(Vygotsky, 1981, p. 181)

Introduction to the Study

As I look back on the paths taken and those not yet traveled, I realize that my journey as an early childhood educator would not have been possible a century earlier. The term *early childhood educator* itself is only decades old. The occupational field known as early childhood education is a recent addition to the teaching continuum, which covers the spectrum from teachers of infants to teachers of adults.

What is it like to be an early childhood educator today? More than 96% of those working with the youngest learners are women. The occupation is “still viewed as having relatively low status even though the link has been made between quality and a qualified and skilled workforce” (Beach, Bertrand, Forer, Michal, & Tougas, 2004, p. 5). A trained workforce has been considered the most important variable in the provision of quality child care.

Until recently, the field has focused on research and activity that centred primarily on children and families. Turning the lens to the educator has been difficult when traditionally “our values and concern for others is higher than our value and concern for ourselves” (Chud, 2001, p. 21). Of all the critical issues facing the field, human resources

are inextricably linked to issues of quality. “How can we ensure positive early childhood experiences for children when so many of those who provide these services are neither respected nor remunerated for the value of their work” (Chud, 2001, p. 21).

For this reason, early childhood education is not considered to be well positioned on the teaching continuum. To take a position as an early childhood educator is to be located in a milieu fraught with issues of power. Those working with young children typically have little power (Novinger, O’Brien, & Sweigman, 2003). Becoming an early childhood educator is to accept inclusion in an occupation that has not realized its potential. Ayers (1989) refers to early childhood education, as “a vague and amorphous profession-in-formation” (p. 131). The result is that the value of the work remains largely unrecognized.

Historically, early childhood education finds its roots in a social welfare service. The role was custodial, aligned with substitute mothering or babysitting. Rust (1993) states “that early childhood education is not widely recognized as a distinct and well-articulated field of education. It is perceived as *women's work*, with concomitant low status and low pay” (p. 104). While this may be viewed as an oppressed position, at the same time it is less constrained, as official curriculum standards are largely non-existent (Ayers, 1989). As a result, early childhood educators have many more choices available to them than other teachers have. They can make choices for themselves and for children in creating an environment in which there is room for action and interaction for both the learner and the teacher.

Teachers will grow by making choices among teaching possibilities, observing children’s responses, and reflecting through dialogue with facilitative and knowledgeable colleagues. Choice is a crucial component

in enabling teachers to take responsibility for their own growth. Making choices is an empowering process. (Jones, 1993, p. xiv)

Ayers (1992) writes that “recovering the voice of the teacher—usually a woman, increasingly a person of color, often a member of the working poor—is an essential part of reconceptualizing the field of early childhood education” (p. 266). According to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Traule (1986), voice is a powerful tool for women’s development and silence, a developmental inhibitor. Development is seen as “constructive knowledge: integrating voices” (Belenky et al., p. 133) where “all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (p. 137). Recovering from a silent position of powerlessness and low status requires an integration of voices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine paths taken on a journey to become an emergent curriculum teacher. A particular view of curriculum delineates the paths. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest that curriculum “can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). The paths taken will reveal the impact of a curriculum that emerges from a process of co-construction between the researcher and the researched. The main research question guiding this dissertation is: How does the implementation of an emergent curriculum impact a teacher’s self -image and practice?

With the asking of this fundamental question, a series of secondary questions emerges. These include:

1. What is the perception of the participants about their past experience with a theme-based curriculum approach?

2. What is the perception of the participants about their current experience with an emergent curriculum?
3. How does the experience of the researcher intersect with the experience of the research participants?
4. What is the perception of the researcher and research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum and reframed images of teachers and children?
5. What is the perception of the research and the research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum, practice and theory?
6. What is the perception of the researcher and the research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum, power and voice?
7. What are the underlying constructs and context that account for these perceptions?

Applying a critical perspective to paths taken has led to my questioning the assumptions of power. Coles and Knowles (2000) state that “reflexive inquiry, unlike some forms and interpretations of reflective inquiry, is rooted in a critical perspective. Such a critical perspective is characterized by the interrogation of status quo norms and practices, especially with respect to issues of power and control” (p. 2).

These issues of power and control directly affect the status of early childhood educators and the image commonly held of them. A less direct influence, but perhaps a more important one, is the self-image early childhood educators have of themselves. Self-image is the idea, conception, or mental image one has of oneself. Images can be positive, giving a person confidence in his or her thoughts and actions, or negative,

making a person doubtful of his or her capabilities and ideas (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2005). The image an early childhood educator has of self can impact practice. According to Hill, Stremmel, and Fu (2005) knowingly or unknowingly, we construct a personal philosophy or theory of teaching that is brought with us at the onset of our journey to teach. This image of who we are or will be as a teacher, combined with a view of the child as learner, forms a pedagogical orientation. The image of the child and the image of the teacher merge to create a theory of teaching and learning which we know as pedagogy.

Belenky et al. (1986) studied women and voice, examining how women conceptualize the self, “to see what kind of picture of the self they were able to hold out for their own viewing” (p. 31). Women who live in silence had difficulty with conceptualizations of the self, “they remain standing in their own shoes, describing only what they see gazing outward from their own eyes. They find no vantage point outside of the self that enables them to look backward, bringing the whole self in to view” (p. 32). Early childhood educators who have a full and realistic view of their self-image are in a position to learn about their own teaching in order to develop professionally. In stark contrast to this are the early childhood educators who are not in a position to learn and develop because their view of themselves is limited by prevailing images.

The image that portrays the sector as less worthy reflects an educational field that generates very little by way of prestige, influence, or compensation (Mahmood, 2000). When early childhood educators believe that the “wider community undervalues and misunderstands their role and level of expertise” (Goodfellow, 2002, p. 4), they can internalize this negative image. In describing the paths taken by early childhood

educators who have adapted a reframed positive image, others may also be positively influenced, creating a community of voices to counter long-held devaluing attitudes.

In this thesis, I tell the story of four early childhood educators to reveal paths taken with others and for others. My own story intersects with theirs, and together all of our stories depict journeys of self-realization and the discovery of our individual and shared voice.

Background

This research is a phenomenologically based, heuristic investigation of a question that emerged from a journey of self-discovery. As the journey is chronicled, it reveals discoveries of self as teacher. Fundamental to this view is image. How I visualize myself as a teacher influences my self-esteem and my practice. I am a woman, an early childhood educator, a parent, and a teacher educator. As my path has been constructed, my learning and development have followed as natural outcomes. In my journey, learning preceded development and emerged from my experience and then my reflection on that experience.

This philosophy stems from the work of John Dewey (1916) who states that the educational process is one that is continually a “reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming experience” (p. 50). Dewey, an American educator, was profoundly influential in the Progressive movement. He espoused what is now considered constructivist theory as he emphasized the significance of experience in learning. He stated, “Education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process” (p. 46).

In emergent curriculum, the emphasis of the curriculum is focused on planning that needs to emerge from the daily life of children and adults, particularly from the children's own interests. An emergent curriculum builds on the theories of constructivism (Carter & Curtis, 1994). Of central importance to social cultural theories is the emphasis that learning takes place through joint activities and interactions with others. Knowledge is constructed when the learner engages with others, and in the interaction that accompanies, directs and reflects on their shared endeavours (Wells, 1994).

When I accepted this curriculum into my practice, my confidence grew. Allowing these theories to guide my practice has had a positive impact on my own self-image, enabling me to overcome personal issues of inferiority. Is there a correlation between my experiences and the experiences of others? Can the acceptance of emergent curriculum by others have a similar impact on their practice and self-image?

I am constructing layers of meaning as I move away from an inner focus on self to a focus outside myself, which allows me to see others, to accept them, and include them in my now-broader perspective. To develop into myself as a teacher, I look to case studies of early childhood educators to enhance the investigation that leads to understanding the impact of emergent curriculum. This *how* question proposes that there is a relationship between power, voice, practice, image and curriculum choice.

Inquiry Framework

This dissertation is based on a qualitative research framework. Qualitative inquiry is an umbrella term for various philosophical orientations to interpretive research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Case study research is one such orientation. Case studies have the power to inform practice (Rust, 1991). A case study methodology uses and encourages a

constructive process. It is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I will be chronicling the case studies of four emergent curriculum teachers working in the field of early childhood education.

According to Merriam (1998) “a qualitative design is emergent” (p. 155). As I immerse myself in the questions, related thoughts, ideas and conceptualizations will emerge from the process of researching the case studies of four early childhood educators who are implementing an emergent curriculum. The study of these cases leads to a composite depiction of how image and practice can be impacted by the implementation of an emergent curriculum.

Merriam (1998) states that case study research focused on “discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 1). My dissertation involves an attempt to get inside the working lives of four teachers to ask the question of how the use of an emergent curriculum implicates self and practice.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used.

Early Childhood Educator refers to teachers of children under the age of twelve who are employed in child care programs independent of the school system. Those concerned with the early education of children need to consider curriculum in terms of the developing abilities of the child to acquire knowledge as well as the culturally determined course content (Edwards, 2003). Spodek and Saracho (1991) explain “what children are capable of learning is heavily dependent on their level of development” (p. 119).

Curriculum has come to signify a course of study (Ellis, 2004). In this study, a distinction is made between a transactional curriculum with a traditional scope and sequence approach with an emphasis on drill and practice of isolated, academic skills, and a transformational curriculum, as is the case with an emergent focus (Bredekamp, Knuth, Kunesch, & Shulman, 1992). Since the creation of curriculum is a human endeavour, it involves cultural values, beliefs, assumptions and, theories and languages of its developers in its very construction. “Defining curriculum therefore becomes a task of identifying not only course content, but also the particular cultural values and theoretical constructs on which it is based” (Edwards, 2003, p. 251).

The term *emergent curriculum* is used to refer to an approach that emerges from the interests of the learner and is co-constructed with the teacher (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). However, the process of emergent curriculum assumes a higher level of effectiveness when it goes beyond interests to a focus on children’s thinking. It then assumes a transformational curriculum position that concentrates on personal and social change (Miller, 1993).and is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. In this study, knowledge is seen as constructed because of dynamic interactions between the individual and the physical and social environments (Bredekamp et al., 1992).

Co-construction is used to describe dynamic interaction. It increases the level of knowledge being developed. This occurs when active learning happens in conjunction with working with others (Carter & Curtis, 1994). Co-construction describes what happens when learning is socially created with the participation of children, parents and teachers.

Experiential or active learning is used to describe learning that involves active manipulation by the learner and is environmentally based. To learn something new, children must become aware, explore, inquire, use, and apply (Bredekamp et al., 1992). The Progressive Education movement and the writings of John Dewey (1910) support this position of learner as active. “Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at hand, seeking and finding his own solution (not in isolation but in correspondence with the teacher and other pupils) does one learn” (p. 182). Pratt (1948), an early follower of Dewey, believed that the use of open-ended materials would offer children the opportunity to re-create their world and dramatize the events occurring in it, addressing the mode of learning inherent in the child.

Voice is “what people mean when they speak of the core of the self” (Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi). Voice can be seen as a metaphor of development extending well beyond the expression of a point of view. “Voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds” (Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi). To have a voice is also relational; it depends on listening and being heard. Voice is also reflects the empowerment of those being heard.

Authentic refers to the teaching and learning experience as genuine, true to the individual teacher and child. It is fundamental to the Reggio Emilia approach, which is heavily influenced by John Dewey. Dewey believed that school and education should be rooted in the experiences of the child. In describing this approach, Malaguzzi stated that it “produces for the adults, but above all for the children, a feeling of belonging in a world that is alive, welcoming and authentic” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 64).

The Reggio Emilia Approach refers to an innovative approach to early childhood education that began in Reggio Emilia, Italy shortly after the Second World War. It is based on the theories of social construction and a philosophy that supports emergent curriculum.

Deliberation in this study refers to a systematic and dynamic process in which there is a search for the best alternative when making curriculum choices. It is based on the theories of Joseph Schwab (1978).

Community of learners refers to a function for teaching and learning that crosses the boundaries of culture, disciplines, schools, and ways of thinking, to explore possibilities based on the Reggio Emilia approach to education as a place where every student is a teacher and every teacher is a student (Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002).

Image in this study describes a picture in the mind. As well, it refers to a reputation or the opinion or concept of something that is held by the public. It is the image of the child or learner and the image of the teacher that influences pedagogical orientations (Fu et al., 2002). Eisner (1991) suggests that images have a powerful instrumental function because of their generalizing capacity. Images therefore can aid in the transference of what has been learned from one situation to another.

Underlying Principles

The underlying principles for this dissertation include Piagetian constructivism and, Vygotskian social learning theory. Constructivism as an educational paradigm is an epistemology, a learner meaning-making theory, which explains the nature of knowledge and how we learn (Richardson, 1997). According to the theory, knowledge is acquired

through active involvement with content instead of imitation or memorization of it (Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996).

The work of Piaget figures prominently in the principles that support this dissertation. Piaget reaffirms experiential learning and teaching; that in order to learn one must develop. Piaget's focus is environmental whereas a Vygotskian perspective supports the concept that one learns in order to develop (Rodd, 1997). Vygotsky (1962) believed that the only good instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it. While Piaget viewed knowledge as being constructed from personal experiences, Vygotsky's position maintained that personal and social experiences could not be separated. Social constructivism as defined by Vygotsky's work differs from constructivism which is the theoretical label associated with Piaget. It is social constructivism that provides the basis for this dissertation.

From an epistemological perspective, social constructivism is based on a view of the nature of knowledge constructed. According to Ellis (2004), there is knowledge received, knowledge discovered, and knowledge constructed. Knowledge received is knowledge gained as a result of being told, by text or teacher. Knowledge discovered is about finding out for oneself. Knowledge constructed is what happens when learners make meaning of ideas. These can be represented in three corresponding curriculum approaches. The technical approach suggests that knowledge is received and uses a pre-planned, teacher-directed curriculum to reinforce basic skills. The practical approach allows for discovery as embedded in project-based learning. The reflective approach occurs when teachers and children assess justice, truth, beauty, and relevance within a framework of voice and empowerment.

Narrative inquiry has provided the research methodology for this study. It shares the philosophy and epistemological assumptions of constructivism. Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. The case studies presented are the stories of four teachers told within the context of my own story. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) write about the overlapping of stories of those researched with the researcher:

The struggle for research voice is captured by the analogy of living on a knife edge as one struggles to express ones' own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to and reflect upon the audience's voice. (p. 29)

Narrative inquiry focuses on meaning-making. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative therefore is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers, characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2).

Creating these narratives has revealed a process that is metaphorically like walking through a labyrinth. “Stepping out of the linear mind is often the most challenging part of the walk. Even though the person has been assured that the path leads to the center, someone who does not surrender easily to experience might stop walking during the first part, trying visually to figure out where the path goes. Of course, there is not a right or wrong way to walk the path. This can be a valuable lesson about control and surrendering to process” (Artress, 1995, p. 77).

Relevance of Study

When I took a step backwards to deliberately retrace my own development, this reflective process led to a construction of knowledge and an ability to articulate it. The implications of finding voice on this journey have been powerful, leading me to reach out to others. Discovering emergent curriculum has been instrumental in the process, providing the vehicle for my journey towards self-actualization.

According to Maslow (1968) self-actualization is “an episode, or a spurt in which the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way.” The person is “more integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of lower needs.” (p. 97). In these episodes, the person becomes more truly herself, more perfectly actualizing potentialities, closer to the core of being more fully human.

Will the acceptance of an emergent curriculum propel early childhood educators toward self-actualization? Could finding an empowering curriculum that is true to one’s own voice change a negative self-image to a positive one? Before reaching this pinnacle according to Maslow’s (1968) theory of self-actualization, esteem needs must be met. The need for status and recognition precede the need for self-respect, including such feelings as confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom. The negative version of these needs is low self-esteem and inferiority complexes (Maslow, 1968).

This study will look at the classrooms of four individuals to see beyond to the field itself. It will ask the reader to consider the impact of emergent curriculum in this broader context. Could emergent curriculum influence a yet-to-be-professionalized,

emerging field? While beyond the scope of this dissertation, the assumption is that emergent curriculum has the transformational power to alter images that impede self-actualization.

Personal Background

Taking a narrative approach, I am creating a personal story of a path taken. The path is non-linear and circuitous, representing a labyrinth of recursive directions. Walking the labyrinth enables vision beyond the lines of linear thought through to imagination and intuition. It serves as an entryway to the unseen world, where transformation can occur (Artress, 1995).

The labyrinth is usually in the form of a circle with meandering but purposeful paths. From the edge to the centre and back out again, the labyrinth represents a metaphor for “our journey through life” (Artress, 1995, p. xii). The visualization of self as a teacher alters as the path leading to the centre and back out to the edge is constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed.

I recognize that my development as an early childhood educator has been driven by imagery, images connected to the power dynamic between the teacher and the learner. How I see myself as I walk into the labyrinth is fundamental to the journey. At the beginning of my walk into the labyrinth, the image I had of myself depicted was negative, connected to feelings of self-doubt and shame. I had internalized a perceived public image of the early childhood educator, which devalued our worth. Along the path of the labyrinth, while the image did alter, it did, nevertheless, re-emerge in its negative form at various points during the walk. As I move in and out, back and forth on the labyrinth’s circular network of paths, a reframed positive image emerges. Journeying to

the centre of the labyrinth can reveal self-knowledge (Artress, 1995). At the centre, I recognized a need for voice. Moving to the outside of the labyrinth, I saw a need to connect, to listen to the voices of others. This realization has been an essential and seminal transformational experience for me both personally and professionally.

Narratives of experience tell stories of the past, the present and the future. I tell my story and the stories of those whom I studied from this trinity of time. By bringing together individual past, present, and future stories of practice, a community emerges. Ultimately, it is the sense of community that adds spirit to the narrative as it grows from multiple voices. “The development of an individual’s voice takes place in the context of listening carefully to the voices of others and continually enriching and extending that voice in the light of new insights and understandings” (Beattie, 2001, p. v).

To construct my own understanding, I have looked to others. To reiterate Vygotsky, it is through others that I develop into myself (1981). Examining my journey within the context of the stories of others allows for multiple voices and deeper understanding. Bruner (1986) explains that we construct ourselves through narrative and make sense of our lives by telling stories of those lives. While teaching and learning is an autobiographical act (Coles & Knowles, 2000), it is also relational (Beattie, 2001).

Early learning experiences.

The foundation for my story resides in early childhood; it has provided the material or stepping stones laid along the path of the labyrinth that defines my direction and constructs my journey. As a young child, I had imagined being a teacher. I took on the persona during dramatic play in the form of reenacting a classroom. The roles available were that of teacher or learner, but I was always the teacher. At the time, I

modeled what I knew: Teachers were strict; teachers were in charge and teachers punished. Being a teacher was a position of status and power. From a place at the front of the classroom, the teacher commanded attention. It was a position that I envied as it allowed for voice. If I did not have playmates, I positioned dolls and stuffed animals to act as my students.

Constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing the labyrinth's path have led me to a focus on power relations and how they contribute to a sense of self or self-image. This struggle for recognition characterizes the narrative of my story as it appears throughout my development from early childhood onwards.

As a young child, I thought I knew what it meant to teach and learn. In retrospect, although I wanted to teach, I had not yet considered the learner's perspective. When my family moved, I attended a school that embraced progressive views of education which dramatically altered my perspective. *Living and Learning*, later known as the Hall-Dennis Report (1968) had provided the impetus for change within this new school I was attending. The report recommended an atmosphere within the classroom that would be positive, encouraging, and more open. The fixed positions of pupil and teacher, the insistence on silence, and a punitive approach were to give way to a more relaxed teacher-pupil relationship that encouraged discussion, inquiry and experimentation, and enhanced the dignity of the individual.

I was in grade five in this new school when the walls I had accepted and internalized literally tumbled down, opening a brand new path and laying a keystone for my journey ahead. We started the September term in a portable classroom and then moved to the renovated school in January. In that freshly carpeted, immaculate space

without walls, the teacher called me aside to give me an individual program different from my peers. This was not punishment but recognition of an independent style that benefited from active involvement in learning. I can remember writing a screenplay, editing a newspaper, and performing excerpts from Shakespeare; the influence on my sense of self was profound. For the first time, I felt what it was like to have voice.

Entering junior high school in grade seven after this *open education* experience was shocking. I entered a walled environment of lecture, homework, punishment, and tests. As a female student, I found the expression of voice was stifled, especially by male teachers. The teacher once again assumed a position in front of the classroom, controlling the power and owning the curriculum. As an outcome of feeling silenced, I became outspoken. I resented the teacher as authority figure. I was argumentative and talkative during lessons. In spite of high marks, I was no longer seen as capable and creative. I was called impetuous and outspoken. In retrospect, I realize that I felt compelled to use my voice in retaliation for the teacher's failure to share voice.

High school and university.

In high school, I became increasingly restless with the continued diminished opportunities for expression available to me. I would argue whenever given the chance, and if none existed, talk incessantly with my peers during lectures. Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) examined voice in the lives of girls and women and found that outspoken girls considered to have a *big mouth* often get into trouble, "but silence, the slow slipping into a kind of invisible isolation," is equally devastating for those girls and women who choose not to speak up (p. 3).

Despite my experience in high school, when I looked to my future, I still wanted to be a teacher. Teaching was a known entity, it was something I thought I could do, and it was something I had wanted to do as a young child. I applied to the concurrent education program at our local university and was accepted. Since I chose to study history because of my fascination with social history, I studied movements related to the empowerment of the disenfranchised. For me, history recreated the struggles of others.

When I was practice teaching, I looked for active ways for my students to engage in learning. I recall a lesson on the suffragette movement where we held gender-biased elections and discussed the impact of being voiceless on one's sense of self. As I saw a connection between what I was teaching and the students I was teaching, there was a sudden, unexpected shift of focus in my teaching from the teacher to the learner. This experience was riveting and vibrant; it became profoundly transformational and created in me a passion to teach, confirming my career choice. I could see that maintaining my position of power, as a teacher did not have to diminish the power of the students.

Family influence.

Having had the call to teach at such an early age, why did I choose to teach when almost all of my experiences with learning, with the exception of one memorable empowering experience in grade five, were at the least, forgettable and at the most extremely negative? Why has teaching become my life's passion and the focus of my academic study? The spirit to teach remained alive and strong, despite largely negative experiences as a student because new avenues of expression continually opened that positively reinforced my desire to teach? By examining past teaching and learning experiences these pathways have been revealed.

As a very young child, the teaching and learning that occurred for me outside the classroom, inside my parents' home and within my family also had an influence on my call to teach. By examining my early experiences, I have gained tremendous insight into my understanding of teaching and learning. As a child, my parents offered opportunities for me to play, to discover, and to experiment. My mother, herself an artist, was compassionate, caring, and nurturing. She had a joy for living. My father, on the other hand, hated life so much at times that suicide was a family concern. He was self-absorbed, often angry and very controlling. An engineer, he suffered from what is now called bi-polar disorder. I was, frankly, terrified of my father; he was an ominously powerful figure. It has taken me years to come to terms with being my father's daughter.

The one saving grace about my father was that he valued education, both formal and informal. My father was passionate about opening the world of knowledge to me. School projects became wonderful, collaborative science experiments or Shakespearean performances with my father facilitating, directing and encouraging. Our vacation time was spent visiting museums, historical sites, and monuments. Rock quarries; a favourite family destination, became a place of exploration and discovery for me.

At the same time my father and I were able to share these positive educational experiences, he was obsessed with my brother's academic achievements and barely recognized my academic successes. From my perspective now, I see that my experience as a student within a male-centric model of teaching and learning was reflected at home by my father's focus on my brother's achievements and his neglect and blindness to mine. How I was taught as a student was paralleled by how I was parented by my father. Both environments were filled with issues of gender, voice, and power.

I spent much of my school years trying to gain my father's attention by being a high academic achiever. As disappointing as his blindness to my achievements was, it had a life-saving benefit. With my achievements largely ignored by my father, I was usually not the recipient of his manic moments of extreme anger; these he fixated on my brother. As I watched my father's behaviour towards my brother, I could see that these outbursts of venomous tirades became increasingly unbearable for my brother. Although I found watching this painful and hated my father for being this way, I still longed for my father's recognition.

My father's own path was diverted by his illness; his potential never fulfilled. His legacy was his passion for knowledge. When his high-voltage energy was directed to learning, he was brilliant, charismatic, even charming. During these times, he was a great teacher. I feared my father but loved his brilliance and excitement for learning. I have reconciled painful memories by focusing on his teaching and learning legacy.

Within each of the intersecting paths of family and school, I encountered experiences that both allowed for and diminished voice. In my story, there is a connection between voice and self-image. Who I am as a teacher comes from a place deep within. Palmer (1998) suggests that the call to teach does not come from external encounters alone. Any authentic call comes from the teacher within, the voice that invites one to honour the nature of the true self.

Becoming a parent.

With declining enrolments and a looming teacher surplus, I encountered a roadblock on the journey to become a teacher. After 4 years of university—one year before teacher certification—I withdrew from the concurrent education program. Instead

of completing my education and realizing my goal of becoming a teacher, I was leaving home and getting married, taking an uncharted path. I could not afford to attend another year of school for what, at the time, I considered a pointless certificate.

I needed to earn a living and found work as a secretary. The role was unfulfilling; again, I felt my voice was stifled. For me, this experience highlighted another link between gender and power. I felt powerless and without voice as I followed the orders of male supervisors. With the birth of my first child, the focus on wages gave way to the demands of parenthood, and I became a stay-at-home mother.

Learning to become a parent was the most difficult life assignment to date for me. When I had two children, ages 3 and 1 respectively, and was in the midst of my struggle with what would be my most significant role in life, I felt powerless and voiceless with my own children. They were making their voices heard, exerting their power and I was overwhelmed; our voices were in competition.

Becoming an early childhood educator.

As a result of this state of affairs with my children, I became preoccupied with being a good parent and sought resources and advice from others. During this process, I discovered that I could enroll in a diploma program in early childhood education at the local community college which would provide not only some immediate answers to parenting dilemmas, but in time, employment as a teacher. I returned to my calling, moving once again towards the labyrinth's centre. In retrospect, this was a pivotal event in the journey to teach; a life force had interjected to once again open a path.

It was on the first night of the first course; Child Development, that I looked up at the teacher as she read from her lecture notes and contemplated the future, clearly seeing

that I wanted the status of being a college professor; I recognized that I envied this position of power. At the same time, I could feel my own inner conflict if power meant disempowering the students and I resented the way the teacher taught. I knew that the way this teacher of Child Development was teaching was not meeting my needs as a learner. I wondered if I could do better.

I recognized that I first needed to understand content in order to pursue my goals. I was easily distracted during lectures and troubled by my inability to grasp complex terminology. When terms such as accommodation, assimilation, and cognitive dissonance seemed incomprehensible, I questioned my capabilities. I was hearing but not really learning about Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's (1978) theory of cognitive development. However, it was not until I was further into the labyrinth of teaching and learning that I was able to fully comprehend its meaning, linking his theory to my practice.

I was experiencing what Piaget would call cognitive dissonance; the discomfort felt when a discrepancy occurs between what is already known and new information, or a new interpretation of what one already knows. There is a need to accommodate new ideas to resolve cognitive dissonance (Santrock, 2001). In terms of my own cognitive structures, accommodation of an altered image would be the key to enable me to progress through the labyrinth.

Piaget espoused a constructivist pedagogy that stands in contrast to more deeply-rooted ways of teaching. Traditionally, learning has been thought to be a *mimetic* activity, a process that involves students repeating or miming newly presented information (Jackson, 1986). Constructivist teaching practices, on the other hand, help learners to internalize and reshape or transform new information. When new information is added to

what the learner already knows transformation occurs through the creation of new understandings (Jackson, 1986; Gardner, 1991) that result from the emergence of new cognitive structures.

During this first course of my new program I contributed very little, closely guarding my concerns and secret ambitions. I memorized terms without understanding their true meaning because the information presented had no meaning for me. Being alone in the labyrinth, I was having difficulty constructing the path. With subsequent courses and my increasing confidence as I achieved high marks, some of my old patterns began to emerge. I became an outspoken student. But still I did not disclose my true career goals. Deep, inner thoughts continued to be unspoken, although I turned to speaking up in class in order to consciously and intentionally avoid what I knew to be the devastating effects of silence. I could see that there was a contingent of early childhood education students and teachers who perpetuated a negative image, one of a glorified babysitter not a teacher, and felt compelled to raise this in class.

Glorified babysitters rather than engaged teachers reflected individual early childhood educators struggling with issues of power. As a student in practicum, I found some teachers to be fulfilling custodial roles, displaying little interest in teaching and learning. They seemed to relish power and status. Why did these teachers, whose position lacked power, seek power from others to exert over others rather than from others? They sought to control the classroom, the students, and the curriculum. At the same time that I was critical of others, I, too, strived for status and power. As early childhood educators, do we seek power because traditionally we have had little?

In sharp contrast to this kind of experience, I had other practicum experiences where the potential for learning was realized daily. I was able to see the results of empowering relationships between child and teacher. I was challenged by the environmental focus of these programs and developed a repertoire of opportunities for active learning. The terms *active learning*, *experiential learning*, and *hands-on learning* which are often used interchangeably, stem from the work of Piaget. Piaget stressed the need for *concrete operations* in early childhood with the child manipulating materials in the environment (Bredekamp et al., 1992).

Through these experiences, I could see the correlation between the theories of cognitive development and the learning environment. Children need materials in their environment that encourage hands-on manipulation. Although the work of Piaget became my theoretical compass, the terminology was still unfamiliar and the writings intimidating. I did absorb the concept that children's cognitive development passes through a set of stages, but the importance of the theories of Piaget in relation to how children arrive at what they know was left unconstructed. The teacher's role in my mind did not go beyond the environment. I did not realize that although Piaget's work was focused on children, his theories had application to my own learning and the learning of other early childhood educators.

After successful completion of each course and field practicum, while my determination to become an early childhood teacher educator grew, my ability to put theory to practice continued to be limited. What was missing for me was the knowledge of how children learn. Without an epistemological framework, I was lost in the labyrinth,

unsure of my direction; still I was determined to forge my path alone. Until I took a view of learning that was supported by others, my perspective was restricted.

In my teaching experiences with children, I focused on the environment and facilitated my students' learning through the materials that were provided. Within this material-intensive environment, I left children to learn on their own. In tandem, my own development as teacher was limited by a solitary view. Artress (1995) describes the act of walking the path of a labyrinth as “realistically and symbolically the act of taking what we have received out in to the world” (p. 78). It is both empowering and integrating in its embrace of others.

Work Experience

Shortly after the birth of my third child, I graduated and began to work. As a nursery school teacher working without having a clear pedagogical orientation, I became influenced by colleagues, adapting the accepted scripts for action based on principles of active learning. Wien (1995) refers to scripts as repeated routines that are embedded in teacher actions.

While I was eager to expose children to the wonder of new experiences and discoveries, I looked for recipes and plans without critically examining teaching practice in relation to theory. I accepted a theme approach to curriculum development. A theme is usually a broad concept or topic like *seasons* or *animals* and is often based on holidays. In theme work, children are rarely involved in posing questions to be answered or taking initiative for investigation (Katz, 1994). Themes are teacher-directed and teacher-owned.

As I embraced the practice of early childhood education where theory was dismissed, the excitement of using a curriculum based on themes quickly evaporated. I

became bored with the approach of planning curriculum based on overriding weeklong themes. I knew that there was something more to teaching and learning. At the time, I was experiencing cognitive dissonance. “Deep understanding occurs when the presence of new information prompts the emergence or enhancement of cognitive structures that enable us to rethink our prior ideas” (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 15).

I was increasingly uncomfortable with what I had once believed to be an acceptable approach when children displayed disinterest in a particular theme. It was not during the theme activities that I could see learning taking place. It was during play, when the children themselves were faced with cognitive dissonance, realizing that in order to build a bridge from blocks, a foundational structure was needed.

As the children in my care began to develop more abstract thought, my own development coincided with theirs. I started to ask questions and reconsider choices. I was seeking alternatives and deliberating. I can now see the correlation with my own development. Child development is considered a life-long process characterized by stages or developmental milestones (Santrock, 2001). Teacher development is also a long-term progression or journey in which the teacher must pass from novice undergraduate to in-service practitioner (Katz, 1972). To become a teacher is to accept a process of education that is “guided by educational values, personal needs, and by a variety of beliefs or generalizations that the teacher holds to be true” (Eisner, 1994, p. 154). As beliefs and truths change, pedagogy is constructed and self-image is influenced.

While trained in child development, I was unaware of my own developmental needs as a teacher. I continued to be a wondering soul constrained by contextual factors, lost in the labyrinth. “If we do get lost, one of two things can happen: we either return to

the centre or return to the entrance” (Artress, 1995, p. 101). By returning to the entrance, I could construct a new path while, at the same time, being actively engaged in a dual process of development focused on both the children’s and my own.

The early childhood educator should have developmental concerns that are twofold. Many early childhood educators have complex lives and pressing needs that leave them with little energy to focus on their own development (Jones, 1993). When I considered my own development, while engaged in my deliberation on the theme approach, it was both liberating and empowering. The theme approach has very specific features revealed in linear, segmented ways as activities written into boxes, which appear on a piece of paper posted outside the classroom. This is the early childhood educator’s curriculum plan. Finding it very limiting, I was constantly searching for the ultimate format that could represent a more authentic view of what was happening in the classroom. Whatever the incarnation of the format, working with this matrix was restricting. I felt my voice diminished, as well as the voice of the children. I began to feel seriously disillusioned with my career path and, left the classroom after 4 years.

As an administrator.

Forging a path, I accepted a supervisory role as an administrator of a child care centre, one housed in a public school. Had I stayed working with children I may have ultimately discovered a curriculum approach that would personally satisfy. Conflicted by curriculum choices and affected by the negative connotations associated with my chosen field, I felt a need to elevate my status. In reconstructing this journey, I now see the link between voice and power. When I felt disempowered, I sought status as a way to gain voice and power.

The more involved in the field I became, the more I realized the full extent of the prevailing negative image of the early childhood educator. There was a perception that the larger society did not value the role. Colleagues constantly talked about getting out of the field. To stay in the field was to accept pay that was low with almost non-existent recognition. I was deeply disturbed to hear aspersions directed by others towards the field. Surprisingly, the most defaming remarks came from the teachers in the school, which I heard when I ventured into the staff room. There I felt the scorn of the teachers themselves who called early childhood educators *day care workers* and talked about children *just playing*. In comparison to the *qualified teacher*, I was the poorer relation within the teaching continuum. There was a realization that I had not yet reached the place where my voice was being heard. I began to visualize a new image of myself as a teacher educator.

As a college instructor.

The next step on my journey involved my securing a part-time teaching position at the local community college. The first course I taught was the same course I took as a beginning student, Child Development. As a student and practitioner, I had difficulty comprehending Piagetian terms related to the stages of cognitive development. In practice, I had supported and advocated for a play-based program, but had not considered the theoretical foundation for this philosophy.

Having to teach Piaget's theories, I was faced with a perplexing situation. I clearly recall re-learning the complex terms and trying desperately to find a way to teach the theory in a way that felt authentic. I floundered, relying on lecture notes and textbook readings. I became the teacher I had feared to be (Diamond, 1991). The inherent value

here, though, is that these experiences of cognitive dissonance lead to discovery. After reading, *Teaching Adults: An Active Learning Approach* by Elizabeth Jones (1986), the way I taught began to change:

Now we teach our adult students all about Piaget. True, they need to know his name, but it does not really matter if beginning students can distinguish accommodation from assimilation (I have trouble with that one myself). What they really need to understand is the concept of active learning; they need know it ‘in their bones,’ which is where they must have theory in order to be able to apply it. (p. 23)

From then on, in every course I taught, I stopped lecturing and instead provided opportunities for active learning. I wanted to allow students to construct their own knowledge and create their own meaning. In this way, students could see for themselves why this approach might work with children. I was inspired to take this view by the words of Carter and Curtis (1994):

Most disturbing to us is the fact that few teacher training programs, including those promoting Piaget and developmental education, use a pedagogy that parallels what we want teachers to do with young children. Ignoring, if not defying, the research and implications of constructivist theory, it appears teacher educators believe that all adults are at the stage of formal operations. They teach to one learning style that revolves around lectures, reading, memorization, and imitation. No wonder we see teachers perpetuating the cycle of inappropriate practices. (p. xi)

At this time, I would also come to hear of a term that would change my practice and direct my future research. I was completing the Masters of Education program, and correspondingly a deeper understanding of theory was emerging. I realized that the “emergent curriculum” referred to by Jones (1986) was constructivist in nature. Emergent curriculum builds on students’ own interests in order to engage their passions, their motivation to learn.

I was beginning to understand constructivism; however, it is not the Piagetian theories that would come to define my work. The theoretical compass for my practice could be found in the writings of Lev Vygotsky. Rather than a Piagetian image of teacher as facilitator, Vygotskian constructivism situates the learner within a social context and the teacher as collaborator or co-constructor of knowledge. The Russian psychologist is the principal theorist for emergent curriculum.

Driven by this solidified view of curriculum, I looked for applications of Vygotsky's theories and found inspiration in the work of Katz and Chard (2000) that developed a structure for emergent curriculum called *The Project Approach* and by the educators from the Reggio Emilia district in northern Italy whose transformational system of early childhood education supported my emerging pedagogical orientation.

The theoretical underpinnings for the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education are the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the approach, in conjunction with parents and other educators, developed a system of education for young children that is transformational for both the teacher and the learner. He is quoted as saying, "creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 76).

For Malaguzzi, the central notion for the philosophy of Reggio Emilia resides in the concept of images. The image of the child is one where children are seen as strong, competent, intellectual builders of theories. Stremmel (2002a) suggests that this image counters current perspectives of children as powerless, passive receptacles into which knowledge or skills are poured and suggests the Reggio image as an alternative. "Instead

of fixing children by teaching them to memorize and be obedient, we should be helping them to develop dispositions of caring, fairness, and justice or how to engage in ethical reflection and live responsibly within a democratic society” (p. 43). Fu (2002) suggests that teachers too can be positively influenced by a reframed image much like that espoused for children. Teachers can be seen as strong, competent, intellectual builders of theories.

I had little chance to reflect more fully on the potential applications of these ideas for the college student as economic issues within the college led to my seeking a position outside the college system. Even with a Master’s degree, permanent full-time employment seemed unlikely when teachers at the college level, with higher academic credentials than mine and full-time status, were being laid off. After 4 years of dealing with the uncertainty of semester-to-semester employment, I replied to a posting for a child care coordinator position with the local school district and was hired.

In this new position, I encountered more teachers, principals, and superintendents who needed to understand the value of early childhood education. This time, I was given the mandate to educate. With the support of the Director and Associate Director of the school district, I was also given the mandate to take an advocacy role. Working in this environment was rewarding and transformative. I was encouraged to reach my fullest potential. I found the status, power and voice previously missing in my life. Buoyed by this new orientation, I applied to the doctoral program to continue my academic studies. Still, I felt unfulfilled; I needed to teach. When the hiring freeze at the college was lifted, I returned as a full-time early childhood education professor. I chose an outward path to follow, moving from the centre in the labyrinth. I returned to my calling.

From the onset though, I was plagued with doubt about my choice. While the students supported and encouraged an active and reciprocal teaching and learning environment, I felt it was my duty to inform colleagues of the value of modeling an emergent curriculum. What I found was a resistance to teaching in an emergent way, as well as an opposition to teaching constructivism. I was increasingly frustrated with the *instructivist* rather than *constructivist* attitude of some of my colleagues, who insisted on covering content within a college-prescribed curriculum defined by learning objectives written in behavioural terms.

While Piaget was still the principal theorist taught, almost 20 years after graduating from the same program, the word constructivism was rarely heard. Now that I had found the curriculum approach I had been looking for, which had eluded my practice with preschoolers, I wanted to model constructivist teaching. In frustration, I gave up the advocacy role and sought out others with similar ideologies. Rather than seeking inspiration in covering content, it was my colleagues who spoke of transformative teaching to whom I turned to for inspiration. When the content becomes the obsession, it seems to be at the detriment of learning. I wondered whether we were meeting the needs of the early childhood education student. Jones (1986) explained the dilemma of content delivery or “covering” the content:

The notion of covering, incidentally, has nothing to do with learning. It means only that I have salved my conscience by exposing students to all those important things, through lectures or reading assignments. That is no guarantee that they have learned them. (p. 17)

McNaughton & Krentz (2000) describe the experience of implementing an early childhood teacher education program designed to foster critical thinking, challenge assumptions, and encourage reflection on practice. They suggest that this experience

relates to those aspects of active learning deemed as appropriate for young children: direct action on objects, reflection on actions, intrinsic motivation, invention, and problem solving (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995).

The method recommended is inquiry-based as it allows for varying types of representations of learning (Eisner, 1994) to facilitate active participation in the process. There is recognition that in “constructivist classrooms at any level, content and method must be congruent” (McNaughton & Krentz, 2000, p. 9). Seeking congruency, I see children, students, early childhood educators and myself as builders of our own theories. This is the reframed image for the field.

The educators at Reggio Emilia and the theories of Vygotsky inspire this image. This pedagogical orientation can guide practice with children and be modeled in the college classroom. Renewal in early childhood education is only possible if programs for teachers are designed to be experiential and inquiry-based (Kaye, 2002; Norlander-Case, Regan & Case, 1999). The social constructivist paradigm and an inquiry framework can lead to an altered image for early childhood education that supports empowerment and self-actualization.

Walking the labyrinth is about relinquishing control and the desire for ego (Artress, 1995). Ego is what drives the search for status. “When we are able to see through or step beyond the ego, the outside world becomes a mirror that reflects what we are seeking. The people and events in our lives become part of our path” (Artress, 1995, p. 88). Allowing for multiple voices creates a community of learners where learning is reciprocal and rights are respected, all within a more evenly distributed platform of power.

Inherent in an emergent curriculum is recognition of the right to inclusion in curriculum decisions. In an emergent curriculum the learner is an active constructor of knowledge, a social being; the instructor is a collaborator and co-learner along with the child, and a guide, facilitator, and researcher. Knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed, encompassing multiple forms of knowing, and comprised of meaningful wholes (Hewett, 2001).

The discovery of emergent curriculum, especially as embodied in the schools of Reggio Emilia, has defined direction on the labyrinth's path. The underlying theories of emergent curriculum support empowerment of both the learner and the teacher through the expression of voice. Malaguzzi refers to the hundred languages of children, a "hundred hands, a hundred thoughts, a hundred ways of thinking of playing, of speaking" (Fu, 2002, p. 23).

When I finally found a curriculum that was personally and professionally satisfying, my journey found meaning. However, I was now outside the centre of the labyrinth. I needed to engage others to create a community of co-constructors moving once again towards the centre. Without direct access to children, I could not speak authentically about the value of the approach in the preschool classroom.

What is it like to implement emergent curriculum with children, using project topics rather than themes to guide the curriculum? Does the implementation of emergent curriculum influence the image early childhood educators have of themselves as teachers? I believe emergent curriculum has had an impact on reframing my personally held negative image. It has been a vehicle for the expression of my professional knowledge and, ultimately, my own voice. It has helped to define who I am as a teacher.

As I articulate my experiences with emergent curriculum and incorporate the voice of others, actually working with children, my perspective and understanding broadens.

Audience

I am engaging in the process of inquiry in order to construct knowledge in conjunction with my research participants and with a view to ultimately provide readers with the materials for their own constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The challenge will be to provide cases rich in description to enable the reader to experience what the participants have experienced and relate it to their practice.

It is likely I will be emphasizing my interpretations more than the interpretations of those I am studying as I bring my own contexts to the process of inquiry. However, the eventual aim will be to try to preserve multiple realities (Stake, 1995). The particular audience that this dissertation is written for is the early childhood educator. The objective is to bring the practitioner into the discourse on curriculum.

While based on theories of learning and the nature of knowledge, child-centered practices in early childhood education are still being questioned. Emergent curriculum is not standard practice in early childhood education. Still there is a growing trend to take an instructivist rather than constructivist view of teaching (Katz, 1999). Without critically examining practice, early childhood educators are adapting scripts for action that render the child powerless. The concentration is no longer child-centered but teacher-centered, and the overuse of themes suggests a process that is mimetic with the children repeating or miming newly presented information.

When theorists, researchers and academics alone make decisions about pedagogy (Wells, 1994) the practitioner can be left speechless. Ayers (1989) claims that the voices

of preschool teachers are even less heeded than those of teachers generally. “Preschool teachers appear to be seen either as glorified babysitters whose working lives are unrelated to the lives of other teachers or as a subset of teachers generally, without exceptional and important characteristics of their own” (Ayers, 1989, p. 3).

Discourses on curriculum are constructed in power relations between teachers and learners with both positive and negative influence on the teacher’s ways of knowing and selecting practice. Assisting early childhood educators to take a critical perspective is to find a place within the curriculum discourse. There the ability to scrutinize the assumptions and knowledge underpinning the view of curriculum would be empowering for the practitioner (Kable, 2001).

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumptions that shape my research are based on a social constructivist perspective. The first assumption that guides my thinking is that teaching and learning should provide a transformational experience for the teacher and the learner. The second assumption is that my story needs to be an integral part of the telling of the stories of others. My development mirrors those whom I study. Who I am is an essential ingredient to the research process.

To make meaning of my research process, I focus on ideas that do not merely include me, but are me. For Eisner (1991), “the self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it” (p. 34). In essence, this is a heuristic process that requires a return to the self, recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one’s own experience (Moustakas, 1990).

An essential part of who I am and who my research participants are rests in gender. While this is a focus of my research, I recognize that it represents a limitation and that this dissertation could be considered female-centric. My research is also limited by a concentration on the perspective of the early childhood educator. The final limitation in this study is that it is grounded in philosophies from a North American and European perspective and is therefore Eurocentric in nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion this dissertation represents a journey of paths taken within the context of the field of early childhood education. It tells stories, depicted in case studies of four teachers working within an emergent curriculum framework. The purpose is to examine the stories of both the researcher and the researched to illuminate the phenomenon of emergent curriculum.

It is from a mountain top that a fuller view of the phenomenon is possible. The pages ahead will show the issues influencing practice and self-image has to do with power and voice. The stories of the researcher and the stories of the four case study teachers intertwine to demonstrate that a certain type of curriculum, called emergent, can empower the disempowered, positively affecting both image and practice.

Chapter Two:
The Journey's Backdrop:
The Professional Landscape
(Literature Review I)

People working in child care know that doing the job well requires specific knowledge and a broad variety of skills and abilities. However, their self respect, job satisfaction and ultimately their commitment to the job is constantly eroded by their recognition that society considers child care a low status, low skilled position.

(Doherty & Forer, 2005, p. 27)

Introduction

In order to study the impact of emergent curriculum on the practice and image of early childhood educators it is important to frame the research within a context, that describes the past, present and future for the field of early childhood education. The field of early childhood education and care is rapidly changing worldwide with an uncertain future path filled with predictions and possibilities (Morrison, 2004). This evolving backdrop provides a contextual frame for the journey of those, like me, who have chosen this occupation as their life's work. In Canada, fragmentation has defined the field, impeding progress towards actualization of the occupation as a profession. It is this prevailing landscape that looms large behind each individual early childhood educator's curriculum decisions.

What will the field look like 25 years from now? Morrison (2004) makes 20 predictions and what tops the list is a move from a "romantic/developmental" to a "rational/cognitive approach" (p. 1) that correlates with a shift from child-centred to

teacher-centred practice. Teacher-centred is not teacher dominated, directed, and dictated. “It does not mean straight rows and worksheets. It does mean that teachers are and will be held more accountable for children’s learning” (p. 3). The teacher’s future role will be defined by Vygotsky’s “social/cultural” theories (p. 1).

This shift in role definition places early childhood educators in positions of shared power. To reach this position, early childhood educators must move toward self-direction while in a period of flux considering that the field is not a fully articulated profession, but rather a patchwork of disparate bits and pieces (Ayers, 1989). This is the context in which my research takes place. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) context is the framework, the reference point, the map or ecological sphere that illustrates the physical, geographic, temporal, historic, cultural and aesthetic setting.

Studies have shown that contextual pressures can affect the confidence, self-esteem, and status of early childhood educators (Bennett, 1992; David, 1993). A study conducted by Blenkin and Hutchin (1998) included many statements from child care staff reflecting feelings of being “threatened, frightened for the future and under-valued” (p. 74). Laments of the practitioners signify the invidious position of early childhood educators; while their role is now being considered vital in the lifelong learning process, they remain underpaid and undervalued. A survey of the relevant literature that frames the professional landscape of the early childhood educator from a contextual perspective follows and naturally precedes a review of classroom practices, curriculum choices and self-image found in Chapter Three.

History.

Canadian child care has a long history, but in most jurisdictions it has only become a formally organized and regulated service in the past 30 years (Ogston, 1999). Prochner (2000) describes the history from a Canadian perspective with parallels to the United States. What is generally regarded as the first child care centre in North America was founded in Philadelphia in 1863. Industrialization, immigration, and a concern over high infant mortality provided the conditions for the development of similar institutions across the country. These day nurseries were part of a “broad social reform movement” known as the “Progressive Movement” that “aimed at improving the lives of children and their families.” The movement also “included the establishment of settlement houses, charity kindergartens, and children’s aid societies” (Prochner, 2000, p. 40). In 1892, there were 90 day nurseries in the U.S. (Prochner, 2000).

In Canada at this time, there were only a handful of day nurseries. With a smaller population and lower numbers of poor, wage-earning mothers’ demand was limited. Growth paralleled urban development and in 1912, six of the seven largest Canadian cities had at least one nursery. The nineteenth century day nursery was a place for women and children to seek assistance in times of need. It was a social welfare product; a charitable response from philanthropists to help families in peril (Prochner, 2000).

Modest growth of child care continued but the economic depression of the 1930s made it difficult for women to find work. Stagnation lasted until the outbreak of the Second World War. While wartime nurseries served relatively few families, group child care for the first time was promoted as a normal support for families. After the war many day nurseries closed; those that stayed open functioned in a custodial mode. In the 1960s when kindergarten education was rejuvenated to address social inequities, child care as

well was gradually undergoing restructuring, but again as a social service (Prochner, 2000).

Post war conditions in Canada created the potential for a publicly supported system. Canada's slow response put the country behind global counterparts. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports, the current state reflects a patchwork of uneconomic, fragmented services, within which a small child care component exists as a labour market support, often without a focused child development and education role (2004).

In 1998, The OECD's Education Committee launched a *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*. Many of the other countries that participated in the review, namely Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom have been progressing towards publicly managed, universal early childhood and care services focused on the development of young children. "In these countries, services are also expected to play a significant role with respect to social cohesion, the alleviation of the effects of child poverty, improved child health and screening, better parenting and family engagement in education" (OECD, 2004, p. 2).

What has emerged in these other countries has produced a specific early childhood professional profile. The result has been higher training levels, better pay and conditions for teaching staff, which in turn has led to improved outcomes for children (OECD, 2004). Canada's fragmented service is only now being seen as a government priority but only for liberal-leaning politicians. Researchers in fields from economics to health promotion who have recognized that early childhood education and care is

fundamental to children's development federal and provincial governments are finally responding (Friendly & Beach, 2005). There was promise of a national child care program prior to the federal election of a minority Conservative government in 2006 which put an end to an initiative that had nine provinces sign bilateral agreements-in-principle with the previous Liberal government on early learning and care (CRRU, 2006). A recent report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) ranked Canada last out of twenty OECD countries, including the United States when it comes to public spending on child care.

Terminology issues.

Past and present contexts indicate that there is a funding link between the occupation and the devaluing term of *babysitter*. "The tendency" in Canadian child care "has been to concentrate on protection and bodily care" (Bennett, 2000, p. 10). The term resonates with more meaning for early childhood educators here than elsewhere in the world. Lack of government support connects to the predominate view of early childhood educators and the corresponding terms used to describe them.

In Canada, a national proportionate study conducted in 2002 found that child care has passed hurdles in public perception with 66% seeing it as a development service for children. Conversely, 17% saw it as babysitting (CCCF/CCAAC, 2003). While public perception appears to be improving, early childhood educators, continue to struggle with their public and self-image. According to Tougas (2004) "there is always a deep feeling of impotence, frustration, dissatisfaction and fatigue that offsets the educator's pleasure and passion for their work with children" (p. 8).

While education staff in public schools are identified as teachers, the mix of child care and educational services within preschool programs causes confusion about what to call the early childhood practitioner. Ferguson (2004) has identified three similar and interchangeable terms, *early childhood educators*, *child care providers* and *child care practitioners*. In addition to these terms, those who work with children are called or call themselves, *day care workers*, *preschool* or *nursery school teachers*, and *caregivers* (Caldwell, 2004).

Looking for a common, singular term that more aptly describes the role is the aim of many across North America (Caldwell, 2004; Ferguson, 2004). If care is considered less important than education as it connotes a custodial function similar to babysitting and education has more status in society the question becomes where the emphasis should be placed (Ferguson, 2004). Caldwell (2004) sees the present-day terminology issues as an outcome of the merging of two fields. Early childhood education and care were once considered totally different from one another, mainly because of their different antecedents. Now according to Ferguson (2004) the borders between care and education have become blurred.

The dichotomous disparity in the field represents distinct images related to nursery schools and day care. Nursery schools are considered an educational service while day care, a social welfare program. The half-day nursery school is usually privately funded for the middle class and affluent, whereas day care is often publicly funded for the lower class and poor. Nursery school is seen as a service for children and day care is considered a service for parents, providing institutional, custodial care or babysitting (Caldwell, 2004).

Is this field connected to care or education? Should care be implied by education, rather than having them be mutually exclusive? Educational researchers focusing on older learners call for education to be more caring (Noddings, 1992). Eisner (1991) recommended that all teachers develop an ethic of caring and create a caring community. Care embraces the roots of the field (Ferguson, 2004). The directional thrust has become the combining of the two terms.

Suggested terms for the field include *child care and early education* or, with the concern for which word is first, *early education and child care* or *early care and education* or *early education and care*. These longer designations are verbose. According to Caldwell (2004), “Most people would agree...that these terms are long and cumbersome and have too many syllables” (p. 5). The term suggested by Caldwell to counter the length and awkwardness of these labels is *educare*, but it too has yet to be universally accepted and seems to signify a corporate branding that is inappropriate.

Moss (2000) examined the training of early childhood education and care workers across six countries and found that fundamental to differences in terminology were basic questions about early childhood education. What are the purposes of early childhood institutions and the work they undertake? Different understandings of early childhood institutions presume very different constructions of the young child, producing very different understandings of the early childhood worker (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Such diverse understandings are reflected in various terminologies used to describe groups of workers in different countries.

In the study by Moss (2000) three basic options for early childhood workers are identified. The *pedagogue*, trained to work with children from birth to 6 or older in non-

school settings, has an equally important but different role than the school-based teacher. The *early childhood teacher*, trained to work with children from birth to 6 within the education system, is viewed as occupying one branch or specialization within the teaching profession. Then there is a mixture of teachers working with children in the early childhood age range within the education system, as well as various types of child care workers employed in early childhood services in the welfare system. It is this last option that produces multiple and interchangeable terms.

The final example is from the U.S. and illustrates that the origin of multiple terminologies rests in the connection between the field and the welfare system. The extent to which the system is split between welfare and education correlates, according to Moss (2000), with levels of training and funding. Denmark, home to the *pedagogue*, has a longer and higher level of training, substantial and sustained public funding, and a drive to recruit males to the field. The result has been the achievement of increased public recognition and status for the early childhood worker in that country. Rather than reflecting a dichotomous situation, a more holistic approach is necessary for early childhood care and education; one that would meet the need for children to be engaged in stimulating early childhood education experiences and the need of families to have high quality care for their children while they work. The field is moving toward strengthening the connection between care and education; which term will come first remains an unknown.

Current Status

Early childhood education is a sector of the workforce that is still without the acceptance and recognition that it deserves given the importance of the work (Ogston,

1999). In 2001, there were approximately 137,000 early childhood educators and assistants working with Canadian children. Of this number, 93,000 work outside the home, in child care centres or nursery schools while the rest work in family child care in the home (Espey & Company, 2003). The sector is growing under current funding and policy arrangements. About 38,000 new child caregivers will be needed per year to meet projected growth of the child population and labour force participation of parents. With new funding initiatives the total demand will continue to increase (Beach et al., 2004).

The sector is now considered critical to the well-being of a healthy and productive society with child care central to providing support to children and families; this enables parents to contribute to the economy while ensuring that the learning, care, and developmental needs of children are met. Yet low income levels, few benefits, lack of respect and recognition, and barriers to training make it difficult to recruit and retain a skilled and sustainable workforce (Beach et al., 2004).

Statistics indicate the vast majority of the province's children are in unregulated care. Regulated services are expected to meet a set of standards and be monitored and enforced; unregulated settings do not have these potential safeguards. As of 2001, 53% of Canadian children were in some form of child care, up from 42% in 1995. "About 1 in 3 children are being looked after by relatives, 1 in 3 by non-relatives in someone else's home, with the remaining 1 in 3 in daycare centres (25%) and, to a lesser extent, looked after by sitters (9%)"(CCCCF, 2005, p. 2). In 2004 the percentage of children from 0 to 12 for whom there was a regulated child care space varied from 6.8% in Newfoundland/Labrador to 29.9% in Quebec. For the province of Ontario, children in regulated care represent 10.7% (Friendly & Beach, 2005).

In Ontario, over 90% of the 300,000 children who are 4 and 5 years old have access to junior and senior kindergarten programs within the education system (Cooke, Keating, & McColm, 2004). Kindergarten programs are accepted as a public responsibility in all Canadian provinces. Kindergartens benefit from stable funding, trained teachers, structured programming, and regular monitoring and evaluation (Friendly & Beach, 2005; OECD, 2004).

All provinces offer regulated child care services. However, the range and scope of services offered, eligibility, funding, training, wages, and monitoring vary greatly (Friendly, 2001). The professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) of early childhood educators and teachers in primary school are different, comprising separate languages, scenery, and cultures. What is spoken about and the language used to speak about it reflects disparate histories, theories, pedagogies, and academic dialogues between the schools of early childhood education and primary education (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Crossing borders between early childhood education and primary education may provide opportunities to challenge traditional ways of thinking and to create new professional knowledge.

Professionalism.

Growing out of the transparent work of women and motherhood as taken-for-granted unpaid labour, group care in exchange for fees is a relatively recent phenomenon and the field reflects an outgrowth of “commonsense” approaches that more nearly define an occupation than a profession (Fromberg, 1997, p. 189). Ferguson (1994) suggests that child care represents an invisible occupation that is linked to the invisibility of what is

perceived as women's work. The result is the devaluing of what is considered the work of women.

This experience has been well documented for other female-dominated professions such as nursing, social work, and teaching. For early childhood education the situation is complicated by the strong perception of child care as an extension of mothering (Kuhn, 1999). If practitioners want to have their expertise recognized as supportive to, but different from parenting, they must act as professionals within a sector that does not meet the criteria for a profession.

Professionalism as distinct from professionalization is considered the ability to plan knowledgeably and competently to make a sustained difference: to diagnose and analyze situations, to select the most appropriate interventions, to apply them skillfully, and to describe why they were selected (VanderVen, 1994). The definition describes the ability of a professional to do quality work and recognizes the types of decisions early childhood educators make several times a day (Kuhn, 1999). However, according to Spodek (1995) early childhood teachers possess an even lower level of professionalism than the primary school teacher as the field faces many barriers to increasing professionalization, including the lack of a theoretical base. The relationship between theory and practice is tenuous, with actual practice guided by each teacher's own set of underlying principles that may or may not include a theoretical basis.

Professionalization.

For a field to gain professional status it must actively and collectively pursue professionalization. Fromberg (1997) identifies distinct characteristics of a profession which include ethical performance, a high level of expertise and skill, a body of

knowledge and skills not possessed by lay people, considerable autonomy in practice and entry to the profession, commensurate compensation, and a professional organization. These dimensions differentiate a professional role from other types of occupations (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Saracho & Spodek, 1993).

Early childhood education as a profession is in process. Whitebrook (2002) suggests that the benchmarks in professionalization include defining a distinct and exclusive body of knowledge, establishing training and certification processes, increasing political influence, and increasing the economic well being of its members. Since its inception in the 1980s, the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF) has been working on the four benchmarks in its desire to advance the occupation of early childhood education and care (Ferguson, 2004). Many practitioners however, are ambivalent about professionalization (Kuhn, 1999).

Kuhn (1999) found that among practitioners the reservations expressed towards professionalization were related to what they perceived as negative attributes of an expert culture. Being an expert was associated with impersonal expert-client relationships, incompatible with the view of child care as caring relationships with children and supportive relationships with parents. Some viewed a professional status as exclusionary, setting the occupation too far apart from those being served and making entry into the profession difficult.

Pence (1999) suggests that the perspective of professionalism in early childhood education and care be widened to include a range of voices including parents, children, community and professionals. The classical construction of professionalism as found in medicine and law suggests that knowledge is a commodity that is held and produced by a

few (the professional group). With a process approach to professionalism the emphasis is on multiple points of view. “The essence of this approach is that there is no single best practice; rather many good ways. In practice, it means that early childhood education professionals must learn to share power” (p. 96).

Before sharing power, there is a need to understand relationship dynamics within the economic, political, and sociocultural frame that creates the current context of early childhood education. Hearing the voices of others is irrelevant if the voice of the educator is left unheard. The early childhood educator must become aware of the obstacles and opportunities that define the journey. From this knowledge base, a collective voice that advocates for occupational validation could resonate and redefine the course of the journey. Griffin (2002) addresses the fear of professionalization as a challenge to overcome as the practitioner is the fulcrum on which quality rests:

Why is the practitioner the fulcrum? Because the practitioner has the opportunity to be both an actor and a director in the play – the person who delivers the service and the person who is or can be the change agent in the quality of the service delivered. And professionalism is the determinant. (p. 3)

Educational background.

Early childhood educators and those who work in positions as assistants to early childhood educators generally have more education when compared to the broader public. However, the level of education in the general population is growing at a faster rate than it is for the early childhood education sector. In 2001, 60% of early childhood educators and assistants had a post secondary education (up from 54% in 1991), compared to 53% in the general working population (up from 43% in 1991) (Beach et al., 2004). Still a number of the positions within Canadian child care centres are filled by

staff members who do not have specific training (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, &, Tougas, 2000). No province in Canada requires all child care staff to have a post-secondary credential in early childhood education. In fact, in some jurisdictions only a minority of staff are required to have early childhood education specific training (Friendly & Beach, 2005).

A child care teacher can be defined as “a person who has primary responsibility for a group of children. This person may also have supervisory responsibilities for assistant teachers” (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 78). The study, *You Bet I Care!* (2000) compared child care teachers to other fields that involve similar responsibilities and found a correlation with kindergarten teaching and pediatric nursing. All Canadian jurisdictions require a university degree of three or four years before a person can work as a kindergarten teacher. In many provinces, there is a requirement of additional specialized training. The minimum requirement to become a registered nurse in Canada is a three-year diploma and successful completion of a national credentialing examination (Doherty et al., 2000). In contrast to the training requirements of these occupations, there isn’t one Canadian jurisdiction that requires child care staff to have university level training (Friendly & Beach, 2005).

Under the Constitution of Canada, province or territorial jurisdictions have the authority to establish standards for post secondary early childhood education training (CCCF, 1995). Across Canada, the length of training required for staff in child care centres and nursery schools ranges from no training to a community college certificate or a diploma (Friendly & Beach, 2005). According to *You Bet I Care* (2000), 70.8% of teaching staff surveyed across Canada in 1998 were holders of a one-, two- or three-year

early childhood credential. This figure constitutes an increase over the 58.0% reported in the earlier study, *Caring for a Living* (1991).

Research indicates that the most important ingredient of high-quality early childhood education is the relationship between the teacher and the child. With training defined as the most salient variable in the provision of quality child care, the educational background of the field's practicing professionals becomes a worthwhile focus (Howes, Smith, & Galinsky, 1995; Doherty et al., 2000). Increasing standards across the country is a recommendation prevalent in the research.

Citing literature in Canada and the United States in addition to their own research findings, the authors of *You Bet I Care!* (2000) found that:

Research also demonstrates that these desirable teacher behaviours are even more likely when the individual's post-secondary education includes course work related to child development and early childhood education. People with this type and level of educational background know how to plan appropriate educational and caring environments for young children. (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 36)

There is a suggestion in the research literature that the minimal standards for practice should be a 2-year post-secondary credential and that even higher educational backgrounds are desirable (Morris, 2002). Recommendations from *You Bet I Care!* (2000) suggest that all early childhood educators have a university degree by 2010. A white paper prepared by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education calls for every child from birth to 3 years to have a teacher with a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education and every child from 4 to 8 to have a teacher with a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education as well as teaching certification. It goes further by suggesting that "high-quality ECE teachers know both ECE content and pedagogy.

Content and pedagogy should be integrated” (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2004, p. 7).

The highest education requirement for child care teachers in any jurisdiction is Ontario’s regulation that at least one person with each group of children must have a two-year early childhood diploma. In the other six provinces with a regulatory requirement for the educational level of child care teachers, the only requirement is that one person in each group have related training of one year or less (Doherty et al., 2000). Moving toward a degree requirement as well as teaching certification seems a far-reaching goal with the current propensity for untrained, unqualified staff. The likely increment toward increased educational requirements for child care teachers will be that all have a two-year diploma. In Ontario, the government’s promise of an impending regulatory college for early childhood educators comes with the recommendation that all teaching staff be required to have a two-year diploma (Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2005).

Wages.

Wages for early childhood educators in Canada have long been considered inadequate and not comparable to kindergarten teachers and nurses. In *You Bet I Care!* (2000), a parking lot attendant is featured as the occupation most closely resembling the remuneration levels of child care teachers. However, a parking lot attendant is dissimilar in many ways to that of child care teacher. “There are no formal education requirements; the job involves passively watching inanimate objects” (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 81). Nationally, the average annual salary for a parking lot attendant is almost the same as that

of a child care teacher, \$21,038 to take care of cars, \$22,717 for those who take care of children (Doherty et al., 2000).

The findings from the *You Bet I Care!* (2000) constitute a comparative analysis of two sets of data that span a 7-year time frame. The study differentiates between those with early childhood education credentials (referred to as teachers) and those working in child care without qualifications (referred to as assistant teachers). In *Caring for a Living* (1991), the earlier data indicated that the national average for an assistant teacher in a child care centre was \$8.29 per hour. In 1998 it was \$9.59.

All findings from *You Bet I Care!* (2000) related to wages requires a contextual perspective as salaries tend to be lowest in provinces where the average salary is lower across all occupations. Nationally, the mean hourly wage for full-time teaching staff was \$12.21 an hour in non-profit programs and \$8.64 an hour in commercial settings (Doherty et al., 2000). For qualified early childhood educators which the study calls teachers, the national average in 1991 was \$9.71 compared to \$11.62 in 1998.

Another study, *Child Care by Default or Design* (Doherty, Friendly, & Forer, 2002), explored the differences between non-profit and for-profit Canadian child care centres using the *You Bet I Care!* (2000) data. The debate over auspice (who runs the centre) has been ongoing in Canada for many years. Research, using standard observational scales as measurement, has consistently found that commercial child care centres as a group obtain lower ratings for overall program quality than do non-profit centres. *You Bet I Care!* identified salary level as a significant predictor of the quality of programming in a given classroom. Teacher salaries are lower and benefits fewer in commercial centres. Since all centres in a given community have to charge similar fees in

order to remain competitive, it is argued that greater access to resources enables non-profit centres to pay higher salaries; this enables them to recruit and retain staff with higher levels of related education. However, the study found that even when the playing field is leveled in terms of all centres' access to resources, commercial centres as a group continue to pay lower wages and to hire teaching staff with lower levels of education (Doherty et al., 2002).

The sample used by *You Bet I Care!* (2000) included 531 (62.6%) non-profit centres, 293 (34.6%) commercial centres, and 24 (2.8%) centres operated by municipalities. Eligibility to participate in the study was restricted to centres that provide full-time services (at least six consecutive hours a day) for children in the age range of 0 to 6 (and may also serve older children). When the report considered purchasing power or the amount of goods and services assistant teachers' salaries will purchase, across all centres, their wages actually decreased between 1991 and 1998 in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Quebec; wages remained almost the same in every other province except British Columbia and Saskatchewan. The purchasing power of teachers' salaries also decreased in Manitoba as well as in Newfoundland, Labrador and Prince Edward Island. It remained basically the same for teachers in all other provinces, again except in British Columbia and Saskatchewan (Doherty et al., 2000).

The low wages in child care translate to some living close to, or in, poverty. Twenty-six percent of assistant teachers and 28.7% of teachers reported that they rely on their salary to cover 80 – 100% of their total household costs. The 1998 gross annual salaries for assistant teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador was \$12,852 and \$13,639

respectively, and \$14,286 for assistant teachers in New Brunswick; these salaries were all below the poverty line (Doherty et al., 2000).

Early Learning and Care in the City, a joint report from George Brown College and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, presents an illustration of the “wage-brain mismatch,” which demonstrates that compensation does not reflect the critical stage of child development that early childhood teachers influence. Amongst the various sectors within the education spectrum, wages increase proportionately with the age of the learner but brain plasticity lessens. At the bottom salary scale is the early childhood educator who teaches at the time of the highest brain plasticity (Cooke et al., 2004, p.17). Research evidence from developmental science and neuroscience consistently emphasize that a child’s earliest experiences set the stage for lifelong learning, behaviour and health (Cooke et al., 2004). With recognition of the importance of the early years on later school success now recognized and supported by research (Leithwood, Fullan, & Watson, 2003), it is clear that compensation is not commensurate with brain plasticity. In fact, “inequities in salaries and benefits as well as professional and public recognition drain early childhood educators from child care environments” (Cooke et al., 2004, p.17).

Without additional funding, child care remains the responsibility of parents, making it distinct from health care or education. Only one province, Quebec, publicly funds the major costs of the service offering child care to parents at a nominal daily fee. In other provinces there is a patchwork of subsidies and tax deductions for child care, with some funding of the regulated sector through small operating grants. “This hodgepodge of subsidies across Canada means the wages and working conditions of

those employed in child care are essentially constrained by what families can or will pay” (Ferguson, 2002, p. 1).

While many teachers and directors of child care programs recognize the need for improvement, few are actively involved in advocacy efforts to work with governing bodies to direct more funding to the sector (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2004). Increased professionalism and professionalization of the field cannot take place without concurrent government support. The field cannot tolerate increased parent fees and so without public funding, wages and subsequently quality of the programs offered, will continue to be low. The question becomes, does the educator wait or advocate?

Working conditions.

Staff working in child care centres are expected to include children with special needs in their daily program, work with children with challenging behaviours, assist immigrant children from different cultures to learn English or French and adapt to new ways of doing things, provide information and support for immigrant and other families and support employed parents struggling to balance work and family responsibility. (Doherty & Forer, 2005, p. 7)

Studies such as *Who Cares?* (Whitebrook, Howes, & Philips, 1990), and *You Bet I Care!* (Doherty et al., 2000), show that early childhood educators stay in the field longest when they have appropriate training, wages commensurate with their training, and good working conditions. Early childhood educators choose to leave the field when their needs are not being met. “By failing to meet the needs of the adults who work in child care, we are threatening not only their well-being, but that of the children in their care” (Whitebrook et al., 1990, p. 3).

In *Improving the Quality of Work Life*, Jorde Bloom (1997) identifies a number of factors affecting the quality of the work environment and, ultimately, the quality of care.

These factors include: the amount of support received from the director, opportunities for professional development, clarity of job expectations, an equitable reward system, and the work environment. Benefits contribute positively to the work environment. In 1998, two-thirds of the teaching staff questioned by the authors of *You Bet I Care!* received paid coffee breaks, but only about a third received paid lunch breaks. Over half the teaching staff did not get paid preparation time (Doherty et al., 2000). In a sector that requires immense emotional investment, failure to address working conditions has led to high levels of burnout and frustration amongst staff (Doherty & Forer, 2005).

Burnout is characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion, lack of a sense of personal accomplishment in one's work and, eventually, the development of negative feelings towards and alienation from the people being served (Goelman & Guo, 1998). Indicators of burnout predict an individual's intent to leave the centre, the proportion of staff in a centre intending to leave, and an individual who intends to leave the field altogether. Indicators of burnout in the centre's director strongly predict a setting with staff retention problems, actual turnover rate, and difficulties recruiting new staff.

The strongest other predictors of one or more of the outcomes noted include low wages and poor compensation-related benefits, the lack of benefits that improve working conditions (coffee breaks or paid preparation time), staff dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions, staff perception that their occupation is not respected by others, the average level of training of the staff and the lack of opportunities for promotion. Other factors include the lack of attention paid to staff needs, the length of time the staff body as a whole has been working at the centre lack of clarity around staff responsibilities and centre requirements, and little social support in the workplace, e.g. from a supervisor

and/or co-workers (Doherty & Forer, 2005). This complex dynamic interaction of several contributing burnout factors leads to stressful working conditions for an occupation requiring high level skills.

Although the variety of situations and constant social interactions are what attract and motivate many to work with young children, these same characteristics can be overwhelming (Gestwicki & Bertrand, 1999). The data collected in the recent study, *By a Thread: How Child Care Centres Hold On To Teachers, How Teachers Build Lasting Careers*, suggest that while many see reward and satisfaction in working with young children, relationships with colleagues provoked a mixed response. Teachers often attributed effective teamwork to a shared teaching philosophy and an intimate knowledge of one another's professional strengths and weaknesses. However, in other centres the lack of collegiality that resulted from staffing shortages, poor program administration, or differences in teaching philosophy caused low satisfaction, which fueled turnover (Whitebrook & Saki, 2004).

Recruitment and retention.

Child care is surely one of the most demanding occupations an individual can enter. The physical stamina alone required for the daily functions of preparing activities, providing instruction, supervising projects, setting limits, handling collisions, arbitrating disputes and maintaining the learning environment is immense. What makes the role so potentially stressful, however, is that this physical outpouring is coupled with a tremendous emotional giving. Teachers must comfort, console, and nurture children and still find a reservoir of emotional energy to meet their own needs. Most can handle this challenge only if the environment in which they work supports their needs. (Jorde-Bloom, 1989, p. 26)

Given the enormous obstacles facing the field, recruitment and retention are recognized difficulties. On a Canada-wide basis, 21.7% of teaching staff had left their jobs in the previous 12 months (28.2% of assistant teachers, and 21.9% of teachers). An

American study found over half of child care centre teaching staff interviewed in 1996 left their centres by 2000. It concluded that turnover in child care centres far exceeded other teaching settings (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003). The inequities in salaries and benefits, as well as the lack of public recognition, drain early childhood teachers from child care into other early learning and care environments (Cooke et al., 2004). Job turnover discourages the development and maintenance of consistent relationships between children and their caregivers. The rate of turnover among teaching staff influences the quality of care affecting children's social-emotional and language development (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2004). Research has found that the potential stressors that are an integral part of working in child care, such as competing demands occurring at the same time and the emotional stress of meeting children's needs all day, can be moderated by improved social support in the workplace, job clarity where policies, procedures and responsibilities are explicitly defined, communication patterns that are clear and consistent, opportunities for staff to have real input into centre decision-making, particularly in regard to their own jobs and training related to child development and the provision of child care (Doherty & Forer, 2005).

Centres across Canada have been continually struggling with staff recruitment and retention (Beach, Bertrand, & Cleveland, 1998; Doherty et al., 2000). In the study, *By a Thread: How Child Care Centres Hold On to Teachers, How Teachers Build Lasting Careers*, job turnover refers to staff members who cease their employment (Whitebrook & Saki, 2004). It demonstrates through a review of the relevant literature that there is a link between turnover and the quality of care and education provided. High levels of turnover also place the continued operation of a child care in jeopardy, which is further

exacerbated by the findings that suggest turnover itself breeds further turnover (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2004). If there is a commitment to improving quality, then solving retention issues becomes as important as improved recruitment. Attracting new staff to centres faced with these issues becomes a daunting task. According to Doherty and Forer (2005), solving recruitment and retention issues requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that includes the need to modify job stressors, increase compensation (wages, benefits, and working conditions), improve accessibility to training, and address the “current low level of public respect for the job” (p. 5).

Image.

The way the public views the occupation contributes to a child care teacher’s self-image. Public image can affect self-image. When images are positive, a person may be confident in his or her thoughts and actions. When images are negative, a person may be doubtful of his or her capabilities and ideas. According to Whitebrook and Saki (2004) even when child care teachers feel confident about their professional knowledge and skills in the work setting, they often felt that these competencies, and the intellectual and emotional challenges, and rewards of working with young children, were “invisible” to family, friends and associates, and sometimes “even to the parents of the children in their program” (p. 93). The image of child care work is in drastic need of improvement.

The negative image of child care teachers has at least two major consequences. First, it perpetuates the view that young children are best cared for by their mothers in their own homes. Secondly, it may serve to discourage early childhood graduates to seek employment in the sector (Ferguson, 2002). The barrier to a reframed image that would improve status rests in an ideological time warp that keeps the field from progressing. A

key belief within a conservative family-values perspective is that caring for children is women's work without the need for remuneration and child care is an extension of this unpaid, mothering role; a natural instinct and a labour of love (Ferguson, 2002). With this prevailing perception, it is not surprising that staff with early childhood education credentials receive low wages, have poor working conditions and feel their occupation is not respected (Doherty et al., 2000). If caring for children is a natural instinct, it follows that training and education aren't necessary. In fact, most children in paid child care are in the unregulated sector, where parents are the only ones assessing quality and qualifications (Ferguson, 2002).

When the education and care of young children is dismissed as “mindless, custodial work” the contributions of early childhood educators in North America are devalued (Kagan & Cohen, 1997, p. 2). The negative impact on self-image seems a natural consequence. The findings from *You Bet I Care!* indicate that the proportion of staff saying that they believed professionals in other fields respect their work dropped sharply from 42.0% in 1991 to 19.9% in 1998. The proportion believing that the public in general respect child care providers dropped from 16.0% in 1991 to 8.2% in 1998 (Doherty et al., 2000). In the study by Doherty and Forer (2005), the less the centre staff as a group felt that their jobs were respected by others, the higher the proportion of staff who intend to leave the field.

The perception is that society's lack of respect for child care as an occupation contributes to low wages and poor benefits, fuels recruitment issues faced by both centres and training institutions and contributes to staff leaving child care for positions that are given more public respect such as working in the school system as teaching assistants. In

Québec a public education campaign to improve image is credited with the increased enrolment in early childhood education and care training programs. This campaign was accompanied by government funds specifically allocated to increase staff wages (Tougas, 2002).

Centre practices and working conditions can also convey messages regarding the extent to which staff are respected. Doherty and Forer (2005) found that the extent to which staff feel they have opportunities for input into centre decisions predicts the proportion of staff in a centre who intend to leave within 12 months and is significantly correlated with turnover rates. Decisions regarding curriculum could be one area that could allow for staff input. Access to professional development opportunities focused on curriculum could support feelings of respect and improved self and public image.

Professional development.

Beach (1999) describes professional development in early childhood education as any course of study or activity that has been established or developed for the purpose of enhancing an individual's skills and knowledge specific to the field, and undertaken by individuals already working in the sector. Professional development is an identified strategy to enhance the field's capacity to provide quality early development learning and care services. Professional development can serve to address issues of job isolation, professionalism, career mobility, and professionalization (Doherty, 2003a).

In Canada, most professional development and in-service training is delivered by organizations and professional development associations (Beach, 1999). These include local, provincial and national advocacy and professional associations as well as unions, child care agencies and committees. There is a lack of research in this area which has

contributed to insufficient analysis, and the result is that knowledge of professional development delivery is limited (Beach, 1999).

Successful professional development means providing individualized training opportunities for each person's different needs and interests. Often professional development opportunities are only a workshop where a group of people share ideas and learn new ones (Chandler, 2006). The findings from *You Bet I Care!* (2000) indicate that 48% reported having attended a workshop or course on "interventions with challenging behaviours." The next most frequently mentioned topics were "anti-bias curriculum or cultural diversity" (42.5%) and "interventions for speech and language problems" (25.6%). Other topics included "child abuse prevention/identification" (24.1%) and "early identification of learning disabilities" (21.9%). These were the five topics identified on the questionnaire; 17% of teaching staff indicated having participated in workshops or courses on topics other than these (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 44).

Many occupational groups recommend or require ongoing professional development for members engaged in professional practice. The purpose of such development is to move the individual to the next stage of professional competence and to ensure awareness of relevant new knowledge. Practitioners keep up-to-date with current research and pedagogical developments when they attend workshops and conferences, are members of professional organizations, and participate in in-service education programs (Chandler, 2006). Currently there are only two provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, which require staff to have regular professional development (Friendly & Beach, 2005).

You Bet I Care! (2000) examined the professional development activities of 42,000 child care centre staff that care for approximately 300,000 children across Canada. Although over 76% had participated in some form of professional development in the preceding 12 months, most had participated in “one shot” (short training experiences considered as a quick fix) workshops or conferences (Doherty et al., 2000, p. xvii). The percentage of teaching staff Canada-wide who did not participate in any professional development activities rose from 13.0% in 1991 to 23.8% in 1998. Less than 7% had participated in a credit course that could lead to a more advanced credential. With the majority of the professional development activities considered as one time only sessions, it is questionable whether teachers are prepared for substantial curriculum change (Doherty et al., 2000).

Most college training programs for early childhood education and care are intended to ensure at least a minimal level of competency in entry level staff. The nature of child care work, however, demands that professionals continue to develop skills and knowledge beyond what is taught in these introductory programs. Life-long participation in professional development is necessary to expand skills and knowledge, to develop fresh ideas, and to refine practice. As a result, it appears that the minimal standards or lack of pre-service training among child care staff is not being remedied by substantive in-service training (Doherty et al., 2000).

The obstacles inhibiting access to professional development opportunities are varied. St. Aubin (2003) identified these as including a lack of time and infrastructure. In *You Bet I Care!* (2000) the most frequently cited barriers were the cost of participation (47.7%), lack of information about professional development opportunities (41.1%), and

inability to obtain release time (30.5%). Another study examined the beliefs and practices of 10 exemplary early childhood educators. The common themes identified included the irrelevancy of current staff development sessions and the lack of support shown to teachers in implementing new strategies (Adcock & Patton, 2001).

Blenkin and Yue (1994) claim that continuing professional development should be seen as a strategic tool through which practitioners can gain confidence in their own professionalism and in making educational decisions. According to Morris (2002) there is a tendency today to think of professional development as opportunities to “fill in the gaps” or “fill up what is lacking.” Such a deficit model of professional development is seldom healthy or desired because it is based on what is lacking. As with children, opportunities for learning and development are more effective when they build upon the capabilities, interests and previous learning that have occurred through a wide variety of experiences (p. 17). According to Katz (1972), professional development relevancy depends on the practitioner’s current stage of development and the concerns of that stage.

Stages of teacher development.

Katz (1972) described teacher development in terms of their predominant concerns, categorizing four stages of development. Development generally refers to the phenomenon of change over time. A stage is a period of time in a process of development (Burden, 1990). In identifying what the teacher’s concerns are at each stage, Katz suggests strategies for meeting training needs.

The first stage of development according to this model is survival. At this stage, novice teachers come to terms with the discrepancy between the anticipation of teaching and the realities of the classroom. This is a stage filled with feelings of being unprepared

coupled with feelings of inadequacy (Katz, 1972). Teachers at this stage often find themselves conforming to their preconceived images of “teacher” (Burden, 1990, p. 315). The needs of the beginning teacher at the survival stage include direct help with specific skills as well as encouragement, reassurance, comfort, support, and understanding (Katz, 1972).

Katz (1972) suggests that this initial stage may last at least 1 year after which teachers believe they will survive and stay in the profession, thus allowing them to reach the consolidation stage. They are now ready to consolidate their overall achievements and to concentrate on learning specific skills. At this second stage, teachers benefit from discussing, with more experienced colleagues, possible alternatives for action and resources. Then after several years of teaching they tire of doing the same activities for successive groups of children. Teachers become interested in learning about new developments in the field. It is helpful for these educators to meet with colleagues from other programs, attend conferences, and read more widely as they set professional learning goals. This third stage is referred to as a time of renewal (Katz, 1972). The final and fourth stage occurs when a comfortable level of confidence in their own abilities has been reached. In this maturity stage, questions reflect a deeper level of thinking, are more abstract and philosophical. Teachers at this stage search for insight, perspective and realism (Katz, 1972).

To formulate this model, Katz (1972) relied on adult development theory. Stages of adulthood or life-cycle theory view an individual’s development as a continuous process that occurs in sequential stages. Stages are characterized by degrees of equilibrium, disequilibrium, and resolution. The progression, stagnation, or regression

experienced through each stage impacts a teacher's life both personally and professionally (Berl, 2004).

In Fleet and Patterson's (2001) analysis there is recognition of teachers as owners of personal professional knowledge, with intellectual and emotional investment in their own development. The Vygotskian conceptualization is of professional empowerment through spirals of engagement. It is understood that just as "self-initiated activity is critical to the child's development, so are reflection, self-evaluation, and self-direction critical to the process of professional development" (Duff, Brown, & Van Scoy, 1995, p. 83). For Fleet and Patterson (2001) individuals do not expand their thinking or change their practice in linear or evenly-paced stages. The spirals of engagement include relationships of shared power with children.

Fleet and Patterson (2001) proposed this model of professional development as an alternative to the linear perspective of Katz's (1972) stages of teacher development. Rodd (1997) suggests that Katz's (1972) model appears to "take a Piagetian perspective, arguing that early childhood professionals need to develop in order to learn" (p. 1). For Fleet and Patterson (2001), Piagetian conceptions suggest individuals move in isolation, assuming a logical sequence of steps, requiring the transmission of skills to develop. The spiral conceptualization prioritizes socially constructed knowledge. A suggestion is made that rather than single unrelated in-service sessions on different ideas or topics, networking and dialogue would provide more opportunities to consolidate new challenges.

Teacher development does not take place in isolation; apart from children, parents or the community. Teacher development is a process with both a personal and social

dimension as “it takes place in relation to the particular field in which the individual is acting professionally” (Kronqvist & Estola, 1999, p. 221). The process takes place at three levels. At the micro level, a teacher’s growth is in relation to a particular group of children. At the meso level, teacher development takes place in relation to the child care as an organization. Finally, at the macro level, the individual teacher develops in relation to society at large (Kronqvist & Estola, 1999).

The work of Kronqvist and Estola (1999) suggests that professional development can be seen as a tension between being and becoming. Is the early childhood teacher a “static product of an assembly-line socialization process” or “continuously shaped by the dynamics of social practice, social structure, and history”? The former approach posits a repressive model of identity and pedagogy. The latter, recognizes identity and pedagogy as discursively produced, incomplete and subject to change. This dialectic orientation to professional development begins with the recognition that “multiple realities, voices and discourses conjoin and clash in the process of coming to know something” (p. 222).

In examining early childhood educators in Finland at the beginner phase of professional development, Kronqvist and Estola (1999) make the assumption that models of professional development are learned and constructed socially. The respondents in the study found the transition from pre-service education to life as a teacher was associated with an attitude of survival. Contradictions between theory and practice, lack of resources, and insecurities in working with parents were often cited as issues in the first phase of their careers. The study concluded with a recommendation that lifelong learning be a fundamental aspect of a teacher’s development and that support be given by more experienced educators. A sufficient number of experiences should be made available to

enable teachers to process through their own development to “acquire a view of learning that emphasizes its situational and contextual nature” (p. 229).

Kronqvist and Estola (1999) concluded in their study that early childhood teachers who have entered the work force are capable of reflecting on their practice but continuous development requires an understanding of situation and context. Beginning teachers need to be supported by their more experienced colleagues to help the adjustment to the “demanding, ever-developing field of early childhood education” (p. 229). Group and private discussions and tutoring can support development and anchor experiences in a social context supporting a model based on a view of learning that is Vygotskian in nature. Accordingly, teacher development in early childhood education can be seen as developmental; moving from a linear perspective to a more complex, contextual view that has a more spiraling feature as in the paths of a labyrinth.

Career advancement.

The contextual nature of teacher development when seen at the meso level of the organization contains barriers to advancement. A perceived lack of promotion opportunities found in the Doherty and Forer study (2005) was considered a predictor of intentions to leave the field. The lack of opportunities for promotion in child care has been identified as contributing to turnover problems (Beach et al., 1998). Inevitably, there are relatively few supervisor and director positions available for experienced frontline staff who want to move to a higher position.

A limited career track coupled with long hours and relatively low pay may result in those who are competent leaving the field to seek advancement elsewhere; this suggests that those who are not competent remain in the field (Cooke et al., 2004). Two

thirds of assistant teachers and teachers in child care report that in order to make more money or achieve a higher-status position they would have to leave the field (Doherty & Forer, 2005). Most child care organizations have a limited hierarchical structure of assistant teachers, teachers and supervisors. Doherty and Forer (2005) found that just under a third of the personnel surveyed felt that they had a chance of being promoted.

An important strategy suggested for achieving improved compensation and retention of qualified individuals is the establishment of a system of professional development and advancement (Doherty, 2003a). With increased mobility and recognition for achievement, those who are competent may choose to stay in the field. Opportunities for horizontal moves to a different job without jeopardy to salary and status level afford another way to recognize and reward experience; this provides new and meaningful roles for people who have been in the field for a number of years (Doherty & Forer, 2005). An American study found that involvement as a mentor in a formal mentoring program reduced the incidence of experienced child care staff leaving the field by almost a third (Bellm, Hnatuik, & Whitebrook, 1996). Other possible horizontal moves for experienced staff include acting as a practicum supervisor for early childhood education students, teaching in a college early childhood training program, providing program consultation to other child care programs, or participating in child care research studies (Doherty & Forer, 2005).

Rather than using the common term of career ladder, career lattice has been recommended as more aptly conveying the reality of early childhood education services which are as diverse as the responsibilities required (Johnson & McCracken, 1994). Bredekamp and Willer (1992) observed that enhanced upward mobility with improved

compensation and increased opportunity for horizontal movement from one sector to another was not a reality. Over a decade later, the lattice conceptualization still seems unreal considering the findings from Doherty and Forer (2005) and the effectiveness of the lattice perspective has not been clearly identified in the literature.

Occupational standards.

The field of early childhood education is, as Fromberg (1997) describes, “a public relations nightmare.” The public often finds it difficult to locate the specialized body of knowledge in the practice of early childhood education, “first, because the most exemplary practice needs to look playful, and second, because most early childhood workers have not received specialized professional preparation” (p. 188). The field is facing a multitude of issues related to human resources. While there is no single response that can address the recruiting and retention problems facing the development and maintenance of a quality workforce, a number of strategies have been cited as supporting this initiative.

Having a nationally accepted set of occupational standards has been identified as a key factor in the professionalization of the field (Doherty, 2003a). The development of occupational standards by the people doing the job enables them, rather than outsiders, to define acceptable professional behaviour and knowledge, skills, and abilities required for competent practice, enabling them to take ownership of their occupation (Doherty, 2003b). The CCCF has drafted a set of standards that articulate the skills, abilities and knowledge required for competent practice.

Nine general standards have been developed that include specific required core knowledge, skills and abilities extending from the basic protection and promotion of

psychological and physical safety, health and well being of each child to the more complex standard involving the ability to reflect on one's own knowledge, attitudes and skills, and take appropriate action. In this final standard, the required skills include the ability to:

- a) describe how their interactions with children are developmentally-appropriate and respectful of the children's culture;
- b) describe how their interactions with families convey respect for different cultures, values and child-rearing practices;
- c) describe how the environments and experiences they provide for children are consistent with developmentally-appropriate, inclusive practice which is respectful of the children's culture, and how they promote children's development;
- d) identify their areas of strength and areas where they need to obtain additional knowledge or skills or changes their approach;
- e) use feedback provided by others to reflect upon their knowledge, skills and attitudes and to clarify their values and biases; and
- f) identify and use relevant sources of information and professional development to continuously enhance their work and to obtain additional knowledge or skills. (Doherty, 2003b)

The required core knowledge needed in order to meet this standard includes knowing:

1. that one's own experience, family, culture, and religion shape child-rearing beliefs and values;

2. how to provide child care within an ethical framework, for example, the importance of maintaining confidentiality about a personal family matter shared by a child;
3. the stages, sequences and milestones of physical, emotional, social, communication, cognitive and ethical development between birth and age 12, and the range of development that is considered within typical limits at each stage;
4. where and how to find and access information about children and the skills needed to provide child care;
5. where and how to find professional development opportunities to increase one's knowledge of children and one's child care skills, and
6. where and how to find and access copies of relevant employment standards, labour legislation, and human rights legislation. (Doherty, 2003b)

With this final example, it is evident that the acceptance of occupational standards helps to identify the “requisite skills and abilities” that “leads to the specification of the required knowledge” (Doherty, 2003b, p. 7). The field's public relations nightmare that connected to the inability of others to locate the specialized body of knowledge related to the practice of early childhood education can be alleviated with accepted standards of practice. The means to determine whether a person meets the standards include observation of the person while doing the job, as well as verbal and written examination (Doherty, 2003). In addition to occupational standards, Doherty (2003a) suggests six other strategies to enhance the field's capacity to provide quality early development learning and care services. These include national training guidelines, accreditation of training programs, prior learning assessment and recognition, professional development, distance education, and certification.

Certification.

Certification is a system for recognizing an individual's level of education, experience, or competence to practice, and is conferred with the confidence of the occupation and the public. Certification status signifies that the individual meets established occupational standards of knowledge, skills and abilities. Certification may or may not be voluntary. For many occupations, the law requires that only those individuals who are certified may offer themselves to the public as practitioners of an occupation (Ogston, 1999).

The certification of practitioners of an occupation is the most direct application of occupational standards and falls under the purview of provinces and territories. There are a number of models of certification adopted by other occupations (Ogston, 1999). These vary from those commonly used by government agencies to the licensing of trades to a typical professional certification approach as used by the teaching profession (non-ECE). The occupation is defined in legislation, but authority for it is delegated to its societies or associations. Education, experience, and continuing development are prescribed (Ogston, 1999).

Currently the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) offers a voluntary certification process for practitioners and has been advocating for legislation recognition for over a decade. The establishment of a College of Early Childhood Educators is now a provincial government promise. As a regulatory body it would set standards for accrediting training institutions, reviewing occupational standards, determining necessary ongoing professional development, and deciding who can refer to themselves as being a member (certified or otherwise) of the occupation. A regulatory college would oversee professional practice by receiving and investigating

complaints against members, dealing with issues of discipline and professional misconduct, and creating a forum for setting professional and ethical standards (Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2005).

At this point in time, the certification process within the proposed College of ECE for Ontario is unclear. However, with membership limited to those with training, a certification system based on education is possible. Ogston (1999) views this system as attractive in its simplicity but suggests that “some measure of competencies would seem necessary if certification is to signify practitioner competence to the public” (p. 58).

The role of the community college.

Accreditation of training programs such as those found in community colleges across Canada provides a demonstration to an authorized, external agency of professional peers that “its program of study, and the learning environment which is provided, is able to produce graduates who have the competencies required to provide quality services in a particular occupation” (Doherty, 2003a, p. 8). Accreditation recognizes programs that are consistent and will most likely produce practitioners who meet the occupational standards (Ogston, 1999).

Across Canada, there are about 135 post-secondary institutions offering training in early childhood education and care (Ogston, 2003). The CCCF has developed training guidelines for post-secondary institutions in an effort to promote consistency. Guidelines are distinct from standards. Standards are legislated minimum criteria requiring compliance. “Guidelines are general statements that are neither quantitative nor binding, but rather suggest direction for action” (CCCF, 1995, p. 2). The guidelines reflect shared beliefs developed after an extensive process to provide a vision for training institutions to

aspire to (CCCCF, 1995). The beliefs include integration of theory and practice as the foundation of quality training and education. As well, diversity is considered an important contribution to the training. Respect and trust forms the cornerstone of positive relationships amongst the partners involved in early childhood education training. Innovation and creativity are each seen as an impetus to advancement of quality training. Finally, an educational continuum which recognizes personal and professional development provides a coordinated approach to training and education (Espey & Company, 2003).

Currently, adherence to the guidelines is strictly voluntary. The role of the community college in enhancing the capacity of the field to provide quality education and care has not been fully researched or realized (Doherty, 2003a). There are few formal means of accessing comparability between programs, aside from periodic evaluations in some provinces. Accreditation as one of the seven strategies suggested by Doherty (2003a) would address the role of the community college in promoting quality in the field.

Ogston (2003) argues that the Canadian early childhood education community is not ready for the accreditation of its training programs. Membership in professional associations is low for practitioners compared to other accredited professions. Training programs can also acquire membership in professional associations but the number of those who do is also relatively low. In addition, there are significant differences across the country in the education required of practitioners. Ogston (2003) suggests that the “introduction of an accreditation system will have to be incremental” (p. 18). The Ontario government is situated to take the lead in establishing an accreditation requirement for

institutions offering early childhood education and care training as the proposed College of ECE would have an accreditation function.

Currently in the consultation stage, the Ministry of Child and Youth Services in Ontario is suggesting that in addition to accrediting training institutions that legislation be amended to increase the educational levels of all staff working with children in early childhood settings to the diploma level. The timeframe suggested gives individuals up to five years to complete additional training. Community colleges, especially in Ontario, will need to respond to this initiative to increase access for these untrained individuals (Tallentine & Diamond, 2005).

Prior learning assessment recognition (PLAR) is an identified strategy to increase accessibility and one of seven strategies suggested by Doherty to enhance the capacity of the field to improve quality. PLAR is the process by which individuals have an opportunity to obtain college credit for knowledge and skills gained outside the classroom (Morrice, 1999). PLAR has the potential to build a workforce with a defined set of knowledge and skills while, at the same time, including those with a broad experiential base but little formal education. To date, the use of PLAR for early childhood credits has not been extensive enough to make a noticeable difference in addressing recognition, recruitment or retention issues (Bertrand, 2003).

Financing, quality assurance, and mobility are the issues identified that continue to challenge the widespread introduction and use of PLAR (Bertrand, 2003). For individuals without formal post-secondary early childhood education training, PLAR can be seen as a viable way to train the untrained as practitioners. PLAR could also serve as a means to demonstrate informal learning as related to the occupational standards.

According to Bertrand (2003), colleges have been reluctant to embrace the practice. “The lack of clarity and agreement about remunerations for conducting assessments has a negative effect on faculty support for PLAR and is a disincentive to its active and enthusiastic support” (p. 157). Institutional infrastructure support for PLAR requires additional expenditure which may not be recovered through PLAR fees (Bertrand, 2003).

The quality of PLAR practices depends upon the skills and abilities of the assessors and the infrastructure support to the PLAR candidate. “Many institutions have reduced the resources available for PLAR development” (Bertrand, 2003, p. 157). The inherent delivery structure of the college requires a holistic approach to PLAR credit. Bertrand also found that “[p]rogram curricula are typically organized into courses that cover a number of overlapping learning outcomes, making it difficult to grant PLAR credits based on an assessment of those outcomes.” How credits are recorded on a transcript may affect the mobility of learner to transfer to other postsecondary program. Bertrand also states “If PLAR credits cannot be used to access further education or training opportunities, their value as bridging informal and formal learning is compromised.”

Another strategy suggested by Doherty (2003a) involves distance education as a means to increase access to training. Distance education is the delivery of instruction where the faculty and the students are separated by distance. It permits learners who are geographically distant from the training site or who have situational barriers such as work and family commitments to access pre-service training and professional development (Doherty, 2003a). College finances and infrastructure are also issues that impact the availability of distance early childhood education training.

Web-based courses and print-based modules for distance education and training tend to have a heavy emphasis on reading and comprehension (Bertrand, 2003). For some students this can be very challenging (Morris, 2003). Tutors, mentors, and multi-media approaches including audio and video modules could address this issue. Other issues are more difficult to deal with. Cost, affordability, accountability, and intellectual property issues need to be addressed by the training institution when implementing a program of distance education. Language, culture, and access to technology are issues facing the learner (Bertrand, 2003). If distance education is going to be a viable strategy to improve the quality of early childhood education services in Canada, further research is required.

Unionization.

Unionization, while not included in the seven strategies suggested by Doherty (2003a), has been posited as a means to improving the field and the status of the sector (Kass & Costigliola, 2003). According to Doherty and Forer (2002), unionization is most prevalent in Quebec (19.2% of centres), Ontario (18.0%), Saskatchewan (15.5%), Manitoba (10.3%), and British Columbia (8.9%). There is currently a drive in Prince Edward Island and Manitoba to encourage all child care staff to unionize (Friendly & Beach, 2005).

In 1998, teaching staff in unionized centres earned an average of \$3.32 an hour more than their colleagues in non-unionized programs (the mean hourly wages were \$14.42 and \$10.92, respectively). *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood Settings* (Doherty & Forer, 2002) shows that unionized centres pay 8.3% higher wages for early childhood educators. Turnover rates are lower in unionized centres with resultant less

difficulty with recruitment and retention issues. Overall, unionized centres tend to provide better working conditions, with paid preparation time and benefits.

As the sector ages, retirement income becomes an issue since most early childhood educators are without a pension plan (Friendly & Beach, 2005). Unions have made some inroads in this area. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), for example, has developed a multi-sector pension plan for negotiation by small workplaces such as child care centres. Quebec unions representing child care workers recently negotiated a pension plan for all centre-based employees (Kass & Costigliola, 2003).

In spite of the research that indicates the benefits of unionization further study regarding the impact of unionization is required before the individual teacher accepts this contentious route. “Mention unions and child care in the same breath and many people in the sector will say that the two don’t mix” (Kass & Costigliola, 2003, p. 1). The concern is that unions could jeopardize collegial relationships between workers, management, and parents. Unions are viewed as inappropriate vehicles for determining workplace relationships. However, unionization “provides child care workers with a vehicle to have a voice and some power to influence what happens at work” (Kass & Costigliola, 2003, p. 2).

A practitioner who has “a manageable workload and health and safety protection is working in an environment that supports her to do a good job.” Individuals in non-unionized settings “cannot affect their working lives to such an extent” (Kass & Costigliola, 2003, p. 3). Unionization can provide a vehicle for voice and power. Unionized status gives practitioners the right to demand to be heard and recognized. This sense of empowerment can serve as a strategy to improve the economic status and

general recognition of those working in the field. Unionization can be viewed as a means to assure self-direction through the paths of professionalization. However, if there is a causal relationship between emergent curriculum and self-direction it may prove to be a less threatening strategy than unionization. Early childhood educators continue to view unions with skepticism and fear (Kass & Costigliola, 2003). The next chapter will examine the role emergent curriculum could have in promoting the value and recognition of early childhood educators to see if it is a viable alternative for the practitioner.

Conclusion

It appears with a conservative agenda at the federal level, Canada will have to wait to join the other countries who believe child care is a public service; an entitlement for children and women. The OECD (2004) has demonstrated that in other countries providing this service has had a favourable impact on the sector's status. Moving forward in a period of flux is possible and emergent curriculum can serve as the empowering thrust. Rather than waiting for contextual changes, empowered practitioners can take action with implementation of a curriculum that naturally shares power.

What would the impact be on the image of an early childhood educator who accepts the implementation of emergent curriculum to guide practice? If it elevates self-image, perhaps the early childhood educator would be more confident to advocate for increased public recognition. As a likely consequence, increased public recognition could positively affect the image of the early childhood educator.

The field of early childhood education is rapidly changing and 25 years from now, the prevailing backdrop that provides the current contextual frame will have evolved. How this evolution takes place depends on those who consider themselves early

childhood educators. Perhaps a vehicle for moving forward towards professionalization could be emergent curriculum. The process approach that emphasizes shared contexts of power is evident and salient in the research on professional development as it is in the literature focusing on emergent curriculum. If the future of early childhood education rests as Morrison (2004) predicts in a social cultural framework than emergent curriculum seems an appropriate fit.

Chapter Three:
The Journey's Vehicle:
Early Childhood Education Curriculum
(Literature Review II)

It wasn't so long ago that the idea of using a written curriculum to guide the care and education of children under five was not widely accepted. It was unheard of in programs serving infants and toddlers and still controversial for programs serving preschool children. Even defining curriculum for this age group has been challenging.

(Dodge, 2004, p. 71)

Introduction

Defining early childhood education curriculum is as Dodge (2004) suggests a challenge. Given the contextual factors that shape early childhood curriculum, there are inherent complexities within the ecological spheres that surround the field. Like the path of a labyrinth, contextual factors impact curriculum direction. Curriculum, as demonstrated in the district of Reggio Emilia, Italy, can impact context. This chapter will focus on curriculum in early childhood education to demonstrate the impact of emergent on the practice and self-image of early childhood educators.

Curriculum is the approach to education that is employed in the classroom. Specifically, it is the theoretical orientation and goals of the program in which domains of development are emphasized, such as the degree of structure in the program, the kinds of materials used, and the roles of the teacher and the learner (Howe, Jacobs, & Fiorentino, 2000). In a more traditional sense, curriculum is the plan of activities carried out by the

teaching staff in order to help children acquire pre-defined developmental or subject skills (Bennett, 2000). However, contemporary views such as those held by the educators of Reggio Emilia see curriculum in a broader sense, as process-related and co-constructive (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Examining the relevant literature related to curriculum in early childhood education, this chapter will focus on the approaches, the theories, and the implications of particular curriculum choices. It will survey the literature pertaining to change including the strong resistance that prevents the adaptation of innovative curriculum practices.

Having established the contextual frame that permeates the practice of the teachers in the four case studies what choices did they have for curriculum? With the globalization of early childhood curriculum, worldwide examples are accessible. Three of these will be presented in this chapter. Particular attention will be paid to the emergent curriculum of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The educators in Italy use projects as part of an emerging curriculum. The project method is not exclusive to Italy. Many early childhood educators worldwide use projects as way to organize content within an emergent curriculum. This method will contrasted with the common North America practice of themes. The final component of this chapter will be a thorough review of the Reggio Emilia approach with its broader implications on practice and image.

The basis of early childhood education curriculum.

There is a growing consensus, supported by research, that curriculum in the early years must be purposeful and relevant to what the children will be learning when they enter school (Dodge, 2004). While recent curriculum incarnations have included the developmental focus of appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1997), there has also been a

resurgence of academic approaches reminiscent of later school years (Katz, 1999). A curriculum based on the principles of developmental appropriateness is play-based. A school model of early childhood education curriculum will have a numeracy and literacy focus. Katz (1999) cites the work of Dorothy Gardner (1942) in an attempt to put to rest controversy about curriculum and teaching methods by conducting a comparative study of two nursery schools:

School A was characterized by what would be called today “developmentally appropriate practice,” emphasizing creativity and spontaneous play. School B was characterized by formal teacher-directed activities, now commonly referred to as “academic” in focus. (p. 2)

Katz (1999) relates that despite Gardner’s findings that favoured “School A,” disputes between curriculum approaches heavy with teacher instruction and those with a constructivist nature continue to occur. There is also a tendency to need to proclaim one curriculum model as being more effective and superior to another (Goffin & Wilson, 2001). These curriculum disputes dominate early childhood education in North America.

Early childhood education curriculum in North America has been influenced by many factors. Of significance was the Head Start movement of the 1960s that provided compensatory education for disadvantaged children. The intent was to prepare these children for later school success. Early childhood curriculum models varied around a cognitive focus. “The belief that developing school readiness was primarily a cognitive undertaking was an implicit assumption” during this time (Goffin & Wilson, 2001, p. 23). However, an early follow-up study of children enrolled in Head Start programs found that initial gains in children’s school achievement began fading after the children entered public school (Goffin & Wilson, 2001).

The disappointing findings helped to shift the debate in the 1970s from a question of which type of program was more effective to a question of whether early childhood education programs were beneficial for economically disadvantaged children. This coupled with dramatic increases in maternal employment during this time saw the re-emergence of programs with a custodial function. The accompanying research did not continue the trend to determine educative value but focused on whether child care was harmful to children's development (Goffin & Wilson, 2001).

The findings regarding the long-term effects of preschool intervention programs from research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s were positive (Goffin & Wilson, 2001). For researchers, the focus is now moving beyond global questions of effectiveness to "questioning effectiveness for whom and under what conditions" (Goffin & Wilson, p. 27). The debate as to which approach is best continues at the practitioner level. At the practitioner level, teachers still look for a beacon to guide their practice. Early childhood education programs based on the work of Froebel and Montessori as well as the cognitive development theories of Jean Piaget have become the main choices for teachers when seeking employment in child care and nursery school programs.

The case study teachers would find a very few early childhood education programs in their neighbourhoods articulating a Froebelian focus. Froebel's ideas dominated kindergarten education in North America until they were challenged by progressive educators in the early 1900s. The Montessori Method entered the scene at just this time and has become an enduring feature for early childhood education. The case study teachers could find a multitude of programs based on the philosophy and practice of Maria Montessori. Montessori programs which focus heavily on numeracy and literacy

represent the trend towards school readiness. A review of the programs listed as academic preschools in a city on-line directory has 75 listings. Only, one program listed has the term Froebelian within its name. Twenty-two of these listings bear the name Montessori in their title (Toronto Yellow Pages, 2006). While Jean Piaget's name has not found its way to child care and nursery school program names, his theories have endured and his ideas support a less academic, more play-based focus. More recently the social constructivist theories of Lev Vygotsky have become influential in shaping early childhood education practice (Yelland & Grieshaber, 2000).

The choices are therefore plentiful. In part, this is due to the absence of standardized curriculum. In North America there is a lack of legislation to mandate specific curriculum outcomes and methodology (Dodge, 2004). In the province of Ontario, *The Day Nurseries Act* (1990) oversees the licensing of child care programs. It pays sparse attention to curriculum, calling for a visible plan of activities but little else. Without a mandated curriculum there are numerous alternatives, producing inconsistency for early childhood education in the province. There are early childhood settings that produce a written curriculum in a matrix of activities connected to an overarching theme of the week, such as community helpers. There are others that are inspired by innovative curriculum approaches found in other parts of the world which includes programs in Italy, Norway and France.

Global examples of early childhood curriculum.

Curriculum can either be a matter of minimal focus or it can be a transformational experience. In a global comparison, Bennett (2000) identified two fundamental types of curriculum, the integral, consultive curriculum and the expert, competency-orientated

curriculum. The former rather than the latter would create transformational possibilities such as those that are inherent in the Reggio Emilia preschools. The latter requires a mandated curriculum developed by an expert culture.

The integral and consultive curriculum, originally developed in Norway, stands in direct contrast to a view of education as imparting a specific body of knowledge (Bennett, 2000). The curriculum is considered integral to the child, as it stresses multiple aspects of the child's development and follows the interest of the child to naturally integrate reading, writing, counting and scientific theory. The Nordic curriculum is considered consultative as it is based on broad national consultations about children and their place in society. Consultation does not end on the national level as it also extends to the municipalities and preschools (Bennett, 2000). The OECD team that visited the Nordic child care programs were "impressed by the involvement and contentment of the children," including "their spontaneity, their concentration and the quality of their work" (p. 4).

In France, the curriculum is characterized as expert and competency driven, derived from its preschool rather than its Froebel kindergarten tradition. Every child should master basic competencies which are a directive of the Ministry of Education. While common standards may be cost effective and produce pedagogical continuity, the disadvantage to this non-consultative framework is the risk that the values and practices of school authorities will not be supported by parents and teachers. Another strong disadvantage of the expert-based curricula of France is the tendency for teachers to employ a didactic approach (Bennett, 2000).

In Italy, policy, funding, and responsibility for early childhood education and care services vary across regions and municipalities. Nationally, a significant proportion of children in the age-group of 1 to 3 years are looked after outside the home by relatives and informal *child minders*. According to a 1991 census, regulated services are only reaching 6% of these children. However, there are programs in Italy for children under 3 which are recognized as outstanding, in particular the integrated, municipal services found in Reggio Emilia. “Typically, these services combine care and education, and although they may remain institutionally divided, they are considered essentially as educational services for children 1-6” (OECD, 2001, p. 166). For the purposes of this literature review, the global comparison will be limited to the North American perspective and the example from Reggio Emilia (Reggio).

Emergent curriculum.

Reggio centres seek to foster children’s cognitive and social development through a systematic focus on symbolic representation and expression. Within mixed age groups, children are invited to choose, negotiate, and participate in long-term pedagogical projects that are often extremely challenging (Bennett, 2000). This typifies an emergent curriculum approach where the teacher starts with careful observation of children’s interests and questions and then develops them into concrete learning experiences. “Through documentation, reflection, repetition, and revision, children are guided into deeper experiences” (Lee Keenan & Nimmo, 1994, p. 253).

Emergent curriculum is the umbrella term that incorporates project-based learning. Emergent curriculum does not have to involve project work, but it does by definition evolve from children’s interests. The curriculum is called emergent because it

evolves, diverging along new paths as choices and connections are made, and it is always open to new possibilities that were not thought of during the initial planning process (Jones & Reynolds, 1992). Teachers express general goals and make hypotheses about what direction activities and projects might take; consequently, they make appropriate preparations while, at the same time, being open to new possibilities. Then, after observing children in action, the teachers come together to compare, discuss, and interpret their observations. They then make choices that they share with the children about what to offer and how to sustain exploration and learning (Gandini, 2004).

In Reggio Emilia the term used to describe the emerging curriculum is *progettazione* which calls for the making of flexible plans for the further investigation of ideas and devising the means for carrying them out in collaboration with the children, parents, and, at times, the larger community (Fraser, 2000). The search for *progettazione* is more than just following the children's lead (Fu et al., 2002). The teacher's role is fundamental to the process. Jones and Nimmo (1994) caution educators not to wrongly assume that everything in an emergent curriculum simply emerges from the children. For the educators at Reggio, teaching and learning becomes an art that is expressed through the use of *progettazione*, project curriculum constructed with documentation (Rinaldi, 1998).

Project-based curriculum.

The use of projects to engage children is part of the 80-year progressive tradition of education (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). First inspired by the ideas of John Dewey and advocated by William H. Kilpatrick, the term used to describe the approach was *project method*. Under the assumption that children learn best when their interest is fully engaged

and centred, the project method was used in Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago at the beginning of the 20th century (Tanner, 1997).

In more recent times, project work was a central part of infant and primary education during the so-called Plowden Years in England of the 1960s and 1970s, and in the corresponding North American *open education* years of the same era (Katz & Chard, 2000). A highly creative variation of the project method exists in the pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 1994). A North American example, *The Project Approach*, "refers to a way of teaching and learning as well as to the content of what is taught and learned" (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 3). It is a set of teaching strategies which enable teachers to guide children through in-depth studies of real world topics (Katz & Chard, 2000).

Children are instrumental in deciding on topics, becoming the experts, and sharing accountability of learning with adults (Katz & Chard, 2000). The investigation is undertaken by a small group of children within a class, sometimes by a whole class, and occasionally by an individual child (Katz, 1994). The Project Approach can be seen in preschool and primary classes in many parts of North America and, in recent years, is being widely adopted in many other countries across Europe and Asia (Katz & Chard, 2000).

According to Katz and Chard (2000), the practice of project work is referred to as an approach rather than method or model; this suggests that investigative projects constitute only one element of an early childhood curriculum. As part of the curriculum for children ages of about 3 to 8 years, project work functions in relationship to other aspects of the curriculum. Since it is not a total teaching method or model, it does not

require the abandonment of a wide variety of other pedagogical practices that support children's development and learning. As suggested by Katz and Chard, projects are intended to be emergent as they develop from the ongoing interests of the children. Projects therefore are an example of emergent curriculum. In contrast, themes are usually not considered emergent.

Theme-based curriculum.

In the traditional theme approach, the teacher could use the children's interests as the source for selecting a theme around which to build the curriculum or, according to Hendrick (2004), the teacher "may dredge something out of a box she has saved from last year and the year before that" (p. 43). Having selected a theme, the teacher plans ahead for activities to present information that provides some interesting facts about the theme and, possibly, opportunities to practice specific mental ability skills, such as simple classification or letter recognition. Examples of themes that I used as a preschool teacher includes fall, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas (Stavros & Peters, 1987). According to Lee Keenan and Nimmo (1994), themes can be merely an external "decorating" of the classroom where materials and props are superimposed on children and the environment "to help give some structure and order to the curriculum, such as a fall theme with leaves, pumpkins and apples" (pp. 252 – 253). The length of the theme is preset by the calendar or the teacher. It implies a planned or crafted progression, as in the notion of developing a theme. It suggests an overarching, general concept that connects several ideas (Katz, 1994). It is based on the assumption that "all children will benefit and be interested" (Crowther, 2003, p. 40). It does not acknowledge each child's

uniqueness and “it does not empower children to become part of the planning process” (Crowther, 2003, p. 40).

Thematic units are a way to organize learning around a key concept or idea that should be relevant and interesting to children. Thematic units can enable children to link their learning from different subject areas, generalize knowledge and skills from one experience to another, and connect what they are learning to real life (Caine & Caine, 1997; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999). According to Jalongo and Isenberg (2000) the difference between projects and themes is not so profound especially when considering the thematic approach supports that “curriculum allows for focus on a particular topic or content while allowing for integration across traditional subject-matter divisions by planning around themes and/or learning experiences that provide opportunities for rich conceptual development” (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 16).

The common issues and concerns about teaching children using themes involve planning themes in advance and choosing themes with questionable meaningfulness. Often teachers use seasons and holidays as the guide to curriculum planning with themes. Holiday themes run the risk of being little more than a convenient backdrop for classroom decorations and craft displays. Young children usually come away from such experiences without having expanded their concepts or increased their skills across the curriculum (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000). It is suggested that the key to early childhood education curriculum should be an emphasis on “meaning making.” A meaningful curriculum is relevant to children (Wortham, 1992). When themes are chosen without consideration of children’s interests and development they run the risk of being meaningless. Children need to be involved in the process and there needs to be

consideration of how children learn. Since themes are often short lived (one week in duration), there is also potential for a lack of depth.

The message being communicating through the use of themes is that there is a great deal of information to be consumed by children through a transmission model of learning. Themes related to the alphabet, numbers and geometric shapes are accepted as important concepts for children. The difference between a theme method and a curriculum with an emerging focus is that that what children actually know about the subject or topic is as relevant as their interest in that content. Tarr (2004) questions that common practice of decorating the classroom based on these accepted important concepts. The displays read as a standardized-and unquestioned-assortment of materials that ought to be in the room (Tarr, 2004). The image of the learner embedded in these materials is that of a consumer of information who needs to be entertained, rather than a child who is curious and capable of creating and contributing to the culture within this environment (Dahlberg et. al., 1999; Rinaldi, 2001; Tarr, 2004).

The approach involves a mimetic focus with the children imitating an adult's conception and understanding of the theme. According to the theory of constructivism, knowledge is acquired through active involvement with content instead of imitation or memorization of it (Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996). Theme-based curriculum is inconsistent with a constructivist stance as it ignores the research that suggests that knowledge is actively acquired. Fleet (2002) suggests that the teachers of young children are often distracted by their obligations to follow the theme of the week and the strict timetable that corresponds with the implementation of a theme-based curriculum. Time frames and transitions that accompany the day and the theme often ignore the possibilities of

challenge and active engagement. Taking the colour red as an example of a narrow theme, Fleet (2002) asks “why focus on a primary colour and does it matter?” (p. 21). When themes are tightly scripted and dependent on teacher direction they provide a predictable sequence for the teacher. However, children’s curricular needs are not so clear cut or predictable.

The fundamental difference between projects and themes rests within the image of the child held by those who educate the child. The young child, when seen as an empty vessel or *tabula rasa* by its educational institutions, is viewed as needing to reproduce pre-determined knowledge. When adults and children engage together, the child is seen as a citizen and co-constructor of knowledge (Moss, 2000). Pence (1999) suggests when educators see the child and the child’s work as a miniature and possibly passive culture producer their view is that the child is an empty vessel. Early childhood educators inspired by Reggio see the child as having surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities in their co-constructing role rather than a reproducer of the teacher’s knowledge.

When children and teachers co-construct the curriculum, reciprocity is established and transparency embedded as children represent their thinking with materials and activities. When teachers alone construct the curriculum, the work produced by children is uniform and commonplace. The curriculum lacks authenticity; there may be a disconnection between what materials are provided to the children and who the children are. Themes limit potential, projects provide unlimited possibilities. Themes may involve patronizing practices that assume the child is without his or her own theories. Projects

may involve recognition of children's prior knowledge and right to co-construction of the curriculum.

Academics in early childhood education.

In the education context, theme work often suggests didactic intent on the part of the teacher (Katz & Chard, 2000). Themes may be used in a misguided attempt to address academic achievement. Concepts involving colour, numbers, geometric shapes, and letters support children's numeracy and literacy development. If however, numeracy and literacy are restricted to a week long theme, these important concepts may not reach the depths of meaningful learning necessary to be retained. Children are not passive learners. The use of academic themes such as the alphabet, numbers, and shapes accepts a view of the teacher as the purveyor of knowledge and the learner as the receiver.

This view of a passive learner does not correspond with the theories of Dewey, Piaget, or Vygotsky. It does however have wide support. The young child is seen as dependent on adults' instruction in order to acquire the academic knowledge and skills necessary for later school achievement (Katz, 1999). The increasing demand and widening expectation that preschool and kindergarten programs ensure children's readiness for the next grade may account for the increasing pressure to introduce children to academic themes very early in life.

Academic tasks are typically carefully structured, sequenced, and decontextualized small bits of information that often require some small group or individual instruction by a knowledgeable adult. They include exercises designed to help achieve mastery of tasks (Howe et al., 2000). The academic tasks in the early childhood curriculum usually address facts and skills that the majority of children are unlikely to

learn spontaneously or by discovery, although under favourable conditions many children do so. These tasks frequently involve memorizing lists or symbols, responding to questions that have correct answers, and practicing routine tasks that can be assessed as right or wrong (Howe et al., 2000).

An example of an academically-designed preschool curriculum is *DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading)*. It employs a didactic or teacher-directed approach with behaviour modification techniques to encourage correct responses (Howe et al., 2000). The *Core Knowledge Preschool*, another example, asserts that a solid, specific, shared core curriculum is needed in order to help children establish strong foundations of knowledge. It suggests that children learn to memorize the core curriculum even at this age level (Hirsch, 1988). While children do seem to respond to these academic techniques at first, longitudinal studies comparing academic based or instructivist programs with constructivist approaches suggest that the early gains of children in the instructivist preschool curricula do not last more than a year or two (Katz, 1999).

Bennett (2000) contends that standardized, measurable skills, and outcomes reflect an instrumental view of early childhood. He criticizes the tendency toward academic goals and outcomes as reductionist and an invasion of childhood. Techniques employed can be too narrowly focused on assessment procedures. Katz (1999) has identified risks involved with early academic instruction. The amount of drill and practice required for success at an early age can undermine children's disposition to be readers. It is not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost. Another risk of introducing young children to formal academic work

prematurely is that those who cannot relate to the tasks required are likely to feel incompetent.

Early childhood educators who have adopted an academic approach to curriculum may do so without question or critical reflection. Wein (1995) conducted a study of five early childhood educators and found that in practice, teachers adapt scripts for action that become routine in the classroom. Without reflection, this becomes the practical knowledge that defines the teacher's role without necessarily meeting the developmental or educational needs of the child. For four of the five teachers in Wien's study, theme planning provided the construction of the scripts that became the dominion of the teacher, omitting the possibility of child participation (Wien, 1995).

The roots of early childhood education curriculum.

While early childhood education has been a part of the educational system only since the twentieth century, the roots of contemporary ideas regarding early childhood curriculum can be found in the nineteenth century. The work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) and Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852) has been credited as influencing the curriculum structure and materials found in the modern preschool (Howe et al., 2000).

Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, developed and implemented a radical new child-centred approach to education in response to the very rigid, authoritarian, and teacher-centred methods of the time. His curriculum emphasized intellectual, moral, and physical education, implemented through hands-on activities. Pestalozzi felt that activities should be developmentally appropriate for the particular age and ability of each child, and only introduced when the child was ready (Howe et al., 2000).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a current approach that incorporates these ideas. DAP has been widely and enthusiastically embraced by many educators but disputed by others. DAP represented a reform effort in the field of early childhood education when it came to prominence in the 1980s. The phrase has found its way into the vernacular of the field. Raines (1997) notes that at national early childhood education conference “nearly every booth” at the trade show used the slogan liberally. During presentations DAP is often referred to. Again Raines (1997) recalls that “whether describing a new book, instructional programs, or playground equipment, the phrase is invoked by an abundance of written advertisements, podium speakers, and workshop leaders” (p. 75).

For Bredekamp (1987) the concept of developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age appropriateness which uses human development research to guide practice according to predictable sequences of growth and change and individual appropriateness which encourages an inclusive curriculum. “Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background” (p. 3). In addition to emulating the early theories of Pestalozzi DAP, curriculum is also influenced by the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget.

DAP values child-centred, experience-centred, and process-oriented practices. For proponents of DAP, learning occurs in developmental stages, with children able to understand, process, and construct knowledge at different levels and in different ways in successive stages (Raines, 1997). In spite of enthusiastic acceptance of DAP in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been criticism (Mallory & New, 1994; Woodhead,

1996). Some of the criticism suggests that with adherence to developmental stages, the complexities of development are reduced to simplified and quantifiable representations (Dahlberg et al., 1999). The objective is seen to override the subjective, which assumes that developmental theory is value-free (Dahlberg et al., 1999). As well, it focuses on the individual child, rather than the child in a social, cultural, political, and economic context (Kessen, 1993).

Pestalozzi also influenced the work of Friedrich Froebel, a German innovator who visited Pestalozzi's schools. Froebel saw young children as little plants requiring nurturing and protection before starting more formal schooling (Evans, 1975). He emphasized harmonious relationships between teachers and children. His curriculum was child-centred and focused on play, included attention to spiritual feelings, and had self-directed activities (Howe et al., 1997). Froebel believed that children learned best by playing with his carefully designed material, but he had a very detailed and prescriptive approach to the way children should handle the material in order to derive the desired outcomes. Froebel's writings and school received much attention, and his ideas were implemented across Europe and North America during the early expansion of kindergarten (Howe et al., 2000). He has become known as the founder of the kindergarten movement (Weber, 1984).

In Canada, Ontario was the leader in introducing Froebel-influenced kindergarten programs and by 1887 programs for 4- and 5-year olds were in many public schools (Corbett, 1989). By the turn of the century, Froebelian ideas had become distorted, implemented in a rigid, formalized way by poorly-trained teachers (Weber, 1984). A

reform movement began, influenced by a number of educators including Maria Montessori and John Dewey (Howe et al., 2000).

Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) was an Italian physician who gleaned much of her ideas about early childhood education from her careful observations of infants and their caregivers (Nourot, 2000). She believed that the child was capable of independent and self-directed learning and should be an active explorer of the environment. The teacher's role was to guide and prepare the environment for learning. To meet that end, Montessori developed child-sized and functional furniture, neat and orderly classrooms, activities and didactic materials that promoted development and were easily accessible. Children could make choices from activities broken down into small, sequential steps involving hands-on learning. There was little emphasis on group or teacher-led activities (Howe et al., 2000).

Most early childhood educators working in child care centres do not follow the philosophy of Montessori as it has a heavy emphasis on structured, didactic materials (with one right answer) and lack of attention to creative development (art and music). However, because Montessori preschools offer an alternative to the modern child care facility, they are currently popular with the middle class (Howe et al., 2000). In the modern child care centre, although the philosophy of Montessori is not followed, the physical environment bears the most resemblance to Montessori's ideas with its child-sized furniture and accessibility of materials (Howe et al., 2000).

Many child care programs throughout the United States and other countries use the *High/Scope* curriculum to guide their classroom practices. Based on the child development theories of Piaget, High/Scope views children as active learners, who learn

best from activities they themselves plan, carry out, and reflect on (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2000). The teacher's role within the High/Scope program is to support the child's learning by focusing on the child's strengths and problem-solving skills. Materials are placed on low shelves and the child can direct his or her own play, reflecting influence from both Montessori and Dewey.

The High/Scope curriculum began in 1962 at the *Perry Preschool Program* in Ypsilanti, Michigan; its original intent was compensatory, to counter the negative effects of poverty. A consistent daily routine was stressed that focused on a plan-do-review sequence. The teacher and child engage in a planning dialogue, the child then engages in work focusing on problem-solving activities. Cleanup time is naturally integrated following a recall time where the children reflect on what they have accomplished (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2000).

Critics of the program object to its emphasis on cognitive development over social-emotional development and cite it as being developmentally inappropriate in its expectations of children. Teachers in High/Scope programs have been criticized for not being accepting of children's incorrect answers and for interfering too frequently in play (Howe et al., 2000). Arguably the most significant contribution of the High/Scope program has been *The Perry Preschool Project*, a longitudinal study illustrating the multiple benefits of preschool education. A second longitudinal study compared three approaches, DISTAR, High/Scope and the traditional nursery school. The study followed the lives of 68 young children born in poverty and randomly assigned children at ages 3 and 4 to one of three groups, each experiencing a different curriculum model (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2000).

According to the study, the traditional nursery school model employs a child-centred approach in which children initiate activities and the teachers respond. The teachers create classroom themes from everyday events, encouraging children to actively engage in play. The research findings suggest that the direct instruction method did not fare well in comparison to child-initiated activities which helped children develop social responsibility. The High/Scope curriculum and nursery school curriculum groups did not differ significantly on any outcome variable. The researchers suggest that because of the extensive documentation of actual practice, validated teacher training, and a well developed program, that the High/Scope approach is a better alternative to the nursery school approach since it was a unique product of the teachers, although not necessarily applicable to other settings (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2000).

In Quebec, the first and only Canadian province to date to institute universal early childhood education at a nominal charge for parents, High/Scope has been recommended as the official curriculum. However, there are concerns expressed about transferring an American-made curriculum to a French-Canadian setting. Without extensive teacher training the fear is that it may be implemented in a haphazard way (Howe et al., 2000). Mesher and Amoriggi (2001) recommend the adapting of the Reggio Emilia approach in Quebec:

Pedagogical documentation, as carried out in Reggio Emilia schools, supports the social-constructivist philosophy advocated by the Quebec reform. Through reflection on and dialogue about this documentation, educators can develop a deeper understanding of how children learn. The image of the child as being competent must be the first step. We believe preschool is the place to start and the Reggio Emilia approach can help to chart the path. (p. 248)

The Reggio Emilia Approach

The city of Reggio Emilia has the distinction of being a city in which their municipally-funded program for young children is more than just an approach to curriculum. In its broadest scope, it is a system of pedagogical services associated with the city's name that represents an attitude incorporating political, cultural, and epistemological positions regarding children's rights, learning and development, and the meaning of community and civil participation (New, 2000a).

Characterized by a number of provocative interpretations known outside of Italy as *The Reggio Emilia Approach*, the system is complex. The interpretations speak to the conditions and aims of high quality care and education of young children. At the same time, they also include positions regarding the professional roles and responsibilities of the teachers, and the rights of children's families and neighbours to participate in the educational enterprise. Such a convergence of forces is not easily described (New, 2000a).

History.

Reggio Emilia is one of several small wealthy cities in Emilia Romagna, a region in northern Italy with a history of collaboration and political activism (New, 2000a). Shortly after the Second World War, during a time that also bore witness to the end of the Fascist dictatorship in Italy, the first preschool was established. It was inspired by the women of the community who had a shared desire to bring about change, creating a new, more just world, free from oppression that would begin in preschool (Gandini, 2004).

These women knew that in order to rebuild the war-ravaged economy they would need to return to work, requiring care for their children. They wanted schools where

children could acquire the skills of critical thinking and collaboration, essential to rebuilding and ensuring a democratic society (Gandini, 2002). This strong sense of purpose inspired the late Loris Malaguzzi to join in this collaborative effort (New, 2000a). Malaguzzi was a young teacher influenced by Dewey and is credited with being the guiding force behind the unique philosophy that emerged. For Malaguzzi, it is the legacy of those concerned parents that started the first preschools that inspired his efforts. In one of his interviews, speaking of the first school, Villa Cella, he said:

They asked for nothing less than that these schools which they had built with their own hands be different kinds of schools, preschools that could educate their children in a way different from before. . . . These were parents' thoughts, expressing a universal aspiration, a declaration against the betrayal of children's potentials, and a warning that children first of all had to be taken seriously and believed in. (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 58)

Guiding principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.

While the educators in Reggio Emilia acknowledge the influence of Dewey, as well as Piaget and Vygotsky, their emphasis on educational experience that focuses on continuous research and analysis of practice has caused them to formulate new theoretical interpretations, hypotheses, ideas, and strategies of their own about teaching and learning (Stremmel, 2002a). There are distinct guiding principles or fundamental ideas emanating from the research and analysis that provide the foundation of the Reggio Emilia program. While presented separately for clarity and condensed for brevity they “must be considered as a tightly connected, coherent philosophy in which each point influences, and is influenced by all the others” (Gandini, 2002, p. 16). The six principles are:

1. the image of the child
2. the three subjects of education: children, parents and teachers
3. the image of the teacher

4. documentation: teachers and children as partners.
5. environment as the third teacher
6. organization as fundamental

The image of the child.

Of the number of guiding principles intrinsic to the approach, the image of the child stands first and foremost. For Malaguzzi and the parents, the realization that “things about children and for children are only learned from children” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 51) was the liberating thought that led to the conceptualization of the child as having certain fundamental rights. All children, each one in a unique way, have preparedness, potential curiosity, and interest in engaging in social interaction, in establishing relationships and in constructing their learning while negotiating with everything the environment brings to them. It is the teacher’s role to be aware of children’s potentials, and to construct their work and the environment to reflect the children’s growing experience (Gandini, 2004).

The child has rights rather than simply needs. The child has a right to be a collaborator and a communicator. The child is seen as possessing strength, competence, and potential. This informs a view of the child as a protagonist, occupying a primary role in his or her education and learning (Hewett, 2001). The child as protagonist has the right to be a collaborator within a community of learners (Cadwell, 2003; Gandini, 2004).

The child’s right to communicate within the community is demonstrated through a systematic focus on symbolic representation, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music. It is through these media that the intellect is developed (Rinaldi, 1998). Children have the right to use many materials in order to discover and communicate what they know,

understand, wonder about, question, feel, and imagine. In this way, they make their learning visible through many languages (Cadwell, 2003).

The three subjects of education: Children, parents and teachers.

In order for children to learn, their well-being has to be guaranteed. Such well-being is connected to the well-being of parents and teachers. It is recognized that as an extension of the child's right to high quality care and education, parents have a right to be involved in the life of the school. Parents are a competent and active part of their children's learning experience (Gandini, 2002).

The ideas and skills that the families bring to the school and, even more important, the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favour the development of a new way of educating. This helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat, but as an intrinsic element of collegiality as well as the integration of different wisdoms (Spaggiari, 1998).

The image of the teacher.

Teachers serve in the role of partner, nurturer, and guide. To know how to plan and proceed with their work, teachers listen and observe children closely. Teachers ask questions, discover children's ideas, hypotheses and theories; and provide occasions for discovery and learning (Gandini, 2004). When educators in Reggio Emilia speak about education as self- and social construction, they refer to adults as well as children.

Malaguzzi (1998) stressed the importance of teachers being open to change and reconstruction of themselves as teachers. Rinaldi (1998) affirms that when discussing the transcripts of children's work, teachers subsequently begin to question themselves and each other. This disposition on the part of Reggio teachers to question themselves and to

change their interactions based on their reflections is behaviour that is valued and encouraged (Rankin, 2004). This role has resulted in the adoption of an image of the teacher as researcher (Hewett, 2001). So important is this image, that Malaguzzi (1998) suggested education without research “is education without interest” (p. 73). Continual internal dialogues and discussions with others provide ongoing training and theoretical enrichment. Teachers see themselves as researchers, preparing documentation of their work with children (Fu, 2002).

Documentation: Teachers and children as partners.

To be respectful of children’s and teacher’s ideas and processes of learning, the curriculum in a Reggio Emilia school cannot be planned in advance. Curriculum emerges from the children’s interest and is fluid, generative, and dynamic (Hendrick, 2004). Curriculum is co-constructed in the process of each activity or project. During this process, teachers are learning how to “make learning visible”—their own and that of the children (New, 2003, p. 37). Careful consideration and attention is given to presenting the children’s learning. The teacher’s commentary on the purposes of the study and the children’s learning process, transcriptions of children’s verbal language, photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking in many media are composed in carefully designed panels or books (Cadwell, 2003).

These documentation panels and books offer possibilities for children to see themselves from another point of view while they are learning. Documentation also helps the teachers understand how children learn. Teachers can develop their own hypotheses on teaching, creating new contexts, problems and instruments, which can be offered to the children’s own knowledge-building processes. When teachers support children’s

construction of knowledge with documentation, they recognize the potential of learning how to teach (Rinaldi, 2002). Documentation also makes parents aware of their children's experience and maintains their involvement (Bersani & Jarjoura, 2002). It shows how the children's work is valued, it creates an archive that traces the history of the school, and the pleasure in the process of learning experienced by the children and their teachers (Gandini, 1998).

As a visitor to the schools of Reggio Emilia, it is the documentation of the children's learning that reinforces the conviction, for me, that the possibilities for educators outside this small community in Italy are immeasurable. Having met some of the children, I can attest that these are not "super-human prodigies." Given the opportunities to make learning visible, they are constructors of their own learning, and the beauty that emerges should be available to all children.

Pedagogical documentation.

One thing that has become clearer with the writing of this dissertation is that the concept of documentation extends beyond a mere display of learning. Giving voice to children's interests and wonder is demonstrated in Reggio Emilia through the process of pedagogical documentation. These visual, artistic representations often referred to as "panels" reveal children's thinking and theory building, and allow for a hundred languages to be spoken, often without an audible word.

Documentation provides an extraordinary opportunity for parents, as it gives them the possibility to know not only what their child is doing but also how and why, to see not only the products but also the processes. Therefore, parents become aware of the meaning that the child gives to what he or she does, and the shared meanings that children have with other children. It is an opportunity for parents to see that part of the life of their child that is often invisible. (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 122)

Documentation in this form is not just the display of a project's topic-related materials but is pedagogical. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) suggest that pedagogical documentation is a "vital tool for the creation of a reflective and democratic pedagogical practice" (p. 145). Documentation as described by Gandini and Goldhaber (2001) is a way of democratizing early childhood education through the collaborative and collective voices of children, teachers and families.

Pedagogical documentation actually refers to two related subjects: a *process* and an important *content* in that process (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Pedagogical documentation as content refers to the material which records what the children are saying and doing, the work of the children, "for example, hand-written notes of what is said and done, audio recordings and video camera recordings, still photographs, computer graphics, the children's work itself." Together with the children's work, this material makes the pedagogical work concrete and visible (or audible), and as such it is an important ingredient for the process" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 148).

The emergent curriculum in the schools in Reggio Emilia stands in stark contrast to those in North America which use a theme approach. At the same time, an emerging curriculum can be quite different than a curriculum focused on projects. In Reggio, the focus is on a *projected curriculum* and not necessarily a *project curriculum*. In Reggio, the term used to describe curriculum is *progettazione* which means to project to the next steps. As illustrated in the panels of the *Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit*, documentation is not only concerned with project topics but with constructing *progettazione* in the process of each activity or project. Throughout the process of documentation, the curriculum is adjusted accordingly through a continuous dialogue

among the teachers and with the children (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). It encourages the voices of children, parents and teachers. It is a curriculum that is accountable for learning in an authentic, emergent way.

Environment as the third teacher.

In the Reggio Emilia preschools, the use of space encourages encounters, communication, and relationships (Gandini, 2004). Such care is taken in the preparation of the environment that according to the educators, it acts as a third teacher (Fraser, 2000). There is an underlying order and beauty in the design and organization (Lewin, 1995). Every corner of every room has an identity and purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate, and is valued and cared for by children and adults (Cadwell, 2003).

The attention to detail is everywhere, from the colour of the walls, the shape of the furniture, and the arrangements of simple objects on shelves and tables. Lights, plants, and mirrors are used to help provide a pleasurable atmosphere while offering possibilities for reflection and exploration. The environment is not just beautiful, it is also highly personal. It is filled with the essence of the children. Everywhere there are paintings, drawings, sculpture, wire construction, transparent collages colouring the light, and gently-moving overhead mobiles. The work and reflections of the children, their photographs, and the documentation of the experiences fill all remaining spaces (Gandini, 2002).

When visiting the Reggio Emilia schools, photographs are forbidden not only to protect children, but to reinforce the concept of an approach rather than a model. Visitors should not try to replicate everything they see but should allow the images to inspire their

own evolving authentic curriculum as it connects to their particular geography and demographics.

Organization as fundamental.

Intricate and complex organization appears within every context—from the collections, arrangements and care of collage materials on the shelf, to the daily preparation and serving of a nutritious meal for children and teachers, to the thoughtful selection of small groups of children by a group of adults to consider multiple perspectives, to the layered agenda and inclusive dialogue of an evening meeting of parents and teachers (Cadwell, 2003). The organization is organic instead of rigid. It serves a larger purpose. It is not neat and tidy; rather it reflects the complexity and order of the universe. It evolves; it is flexible. It has a flow and movement, growing from a group working closely together (Wheatley & Kellmen-Rogers, 1996). The complexity of organization almost defies description. Howard Gardner (2001) explains the challenge of articulating the Reggio Emilia experience:

I have found it challenging to make sense of the Reggio experience, one I thought I understood moderately well when we began this collaboration but one where I now have as many doubts as certitudes. Like many other smoothly operative but deeply introspective entities...it has a 'feel' to it that is self-evident to residents but not easily caught by others...such communities are best captured by art and metaphor. (p. 339)

Amelia Gambetti, liaison for the Reggio approach, warned us on our first day of the study tour that we would not be leaving Reggio Emilia with the answers; we would leave Italy with more questions than answers. We were told by Gambetti that you can't create Reggio schools outside Reggio. Reggio schools are only in Reggio Emilia. Employing a metaphor of a bridge, Gambetti suggests that to connect with Reggio in

other contexts, a deeper understanding of the theoretical foundation of the teaching and learning process is required.

The theoretical foundation of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The Reggio Emilia approach is built upon a solid foundation of both philosophical principles and extensive experience. It provides an illustration of theory implicating practice. Like the developers of the project approach, educators from Reggio Emilia avoid the term model. Educators in Reggio Emilia have no intention of suggesting that their program should be looked at as a model to be copied in other countries; rather, their work should be considered as an educational experience that consists of reflection, practice, and further careful reflection in a program that is continuously renewed and re-adjusted. Their hope is that the knowledge of the Reggio Emilia experience will inspire others to stimulate reflections, exchange ideas, and develop innovative initiatives that benefit children, families and teachers (Gandini, 2004). The foundation from which to begin the dialogue is within the theories of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky.

John Dewey, (1859–1952), supported the use of projects in education and is known for his work on teaching philosophy and theories of education. Dewey viewed learning as “a continuing reconstruction of experience” (1959, p. 27). Distinct from traditional education in which teaching is conceived as a “pouring in” of knowledge (1966, p.38) and learning as “passive absorption” (1966, p. 38), Dewey saw education as being active and constructive; a “joint activity” (1966, p. 39). The educator’s role is to take hold of the child’s activities and give them direction. Curriculum grows out of the children’s interests and activities. The role of the teacher is to take these activities and

lead “into an expanding world of subject matter, a subject matter of facts or information and ideas” (1969, p. 87).

Piaget, like Dewey, believed in education as construction, with two fundamental elements being the genuine activity of the students and the individual experience (Piaget, 1973). Piaget emphasized the use of “active methods which give broad scope to the spontaneous research of the child or adolescent” (1973, p. 15). Reggio educators believe as Piaget and Dewey did that children construct ideas for themselves (Rankin, 2004). However, Piaget’s attention to cognitive development focused on internal, invariant, sequential, and hierarchal stages of intellectual development. While Piaget recognized the importance of the social setting, his focus remained on the internal development of cognition (Rankin, 2004). Reggio educators disagree with Piaget’s view of invariant, sequential stages; however, they do find that all children go through the same stages of cognitive development (Malaguzzi, 1998).

The Reggio Emilia approach according to Malaguzzi (1993) “has gone beyond Piagetian views of the child as constructing knowledge from within, almost in isolation” (p. 10). It places a strong emphasis on children’s social construction of knowledge through their relationships within the context of collaboration, dialogue, conflict, negotiation, and cooperation with peers and adults (Malaguzzi, 1998).

Inspiring the development of the Reggio Emilia approach have been the writings of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that cognition is always socially mediated or influenced by others. Higher mental functions, such as memory, attention, and self-regulation, occur in the context of shared tasks between individuals. Thinking begins on the interpersonal or social plane before it is internalized as intrapersonal knowledge

(Samaras, 2000). While the value of Dewey's and Piaget's work has been widely acknowledged for some time, the contributions of Vygotsky are only now coming into prominence in North America. Vygotsky died with his work largely repudiated and ignored. It wasn't until the political situation began to shift in Russia in the 1950s that his influence began to be felt (Rankin, 2004).

Vygotsky recognized the active and creative role of individuals. He saw the child as part of a social construct, actively experiencing and internalizing the environment, making meaning of it, and in turn, influencing the environment, just as the social situation influences the child. Vygotsky's view of the way social and individual growth is intertwined gave rise to his idea of a creative area where learning happens most easily, terming it the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Rankin, 2004). The term *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) has been used to describe the transition from interpersonal to intrapersonal knowledge. Through *scaffolding*, learners are able to cross the zone of proximal development. "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

While Reggio educators value Vygotsky's approach, the acceptance of Vygotsky's ideas appears with a cautionary caveat. According to Malaguzzi (1998) it "is in tune with the way we see the dilemma of teaching and learning with the ecological way one can reach knowledge" (p. 84), yet when working within the ZPD teachers could give "competency to someone who does not have it" (p. 83) and easily encourage traditional teaching. For work within the ZPD to be effective, according to Malaguzzi, the

gap between what “the child is about to see and what the adult already sees” should be small, when “the child’s expectations and dispositions create an expectation and readiness to make the jump” (p. 84).

Under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, the Reggio educators have established a working environment that mirrors the theories embodied by these theorists. In addition, Reggio educators create classrooms that allow children and teachers to create their own theories. Malaguzzi worked interdependently with many people and was able to build a strong core of teachers and educational leaders who learned from him and with whom he could engage and argue. He worked with other progressive educators in Italy, traveled to other countries to study, and brought new ideas back to Reggio. He challenged teachers to try out these unfamiliar ideas to see what did and did not work. He promoted strong dialogue among teachers about these ideas as he participated in their explorations (Rankin, 2004).

Emphasis on professional development.

Professional development for Reggio educators takes place on the job. Teachers come directly from preparatory secondary schools and in-service training becomes the only choice. Malaguzzi (1998) felt that competence becomes stronger through direct application. Reflection is stressed but in addition to individual effort, discussion with colleagues, parents, and experts is encouraged. Teachers are given preparatory time for to engage in reflection.

Teachers – like children and everyone else – feel the need to grow in their competences; they want to transform experiences into thoughts, thoughts into reflections, and reflections into new thoughts and new actions. They also feel a need to make predications, to try things out, and then interpret them. The act of interpretation is most important. Teachers must learn to interpret ongoing processes rather than wait to evaluate results. (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 72)

Malaguzzi's emphasis was on how theory and new ideas could be generative and useful in the teachers' work with children, as well as how their work could influence and shape theory in order to develop more new ideas. This dynamic, interactive view of theory and practice is similar to Vygotsky's dynamic theories. With the educational experience accepted as a dynamic between individuals, and a social process for adults and children, the term *self- and social constructivism* has been used to express the practices of Reggio (Rankin, 2004).

Criticism of the Reggio Emilia approach.

While widely heralded, the Reggio approach is not without its critics. Johnson (1999) fears the U.S. colonization of the approach. Once the Reggio Approach becomes Americanized will it still be Reggio? If it becomes associated with a marketing mentality such as the way that developmentally appropriate practice has, will it still be true to the Reggio principles? Wright (2000) in response to Johnson (1999) agrees that Reggio Emilia stands in danger of being absorbed, "Disneyfied" and colonized by Americans as it is sometimes difficult to disentangle infatuation with Italian culture with interest in Reggio educational practices (Wright, 2000, p. 225).

In addition to the approach becoming objectified as a marketable commodity, Johnson (1999) is concerned with issues of power and elitism. Traveling to Italy to view the programs as the only true embodiments of the approach exist in Reggio Emilia is expensive. According to Wright (2000), "The elites are able to travel to Italy (sometimes several times), and a clear distinction is created between those who have been to Reggio and those who have not" (p. 234). While in Reggio, I heard others in the study tour talk of having visited multiple times. Being able to state that this is the tenth or eleventh time

to visit the programs appeared to be seen as badge of honour, a validation that is not available to the front-line practitioner.

Without a doubt, adapting a Reggio-inspired curriculum in a meaningful way cannot come without expense. Teacher training and parent education are essential to shift perspectives from current images to the three subjects of education; children, parents and teachers. If this fundamental shift does not occur, a misguided adoption of the philosophy could be detrimental with teachers and parents confused and classroom practices misunderstood. Finding staff with an articulated understanding of the approach is difficult. This was a concern expressed by many during the study tour in which I participated. When teachers are hired without a background in the approach and the in-service training is not provided, it is unlikely that they will be able to communicate effectively to parents.

Parents may be concerned with the practice of documentation. According to Johnson (1999) documentation runs the risk of being seen as extensive surveillance of children. Wright (2000) in a response to the criticism expressed by Johnson (1999) counters that “documentation only becomes surveillance within a paradigm that sees children as objects that generate data” (p. 224). There is still much work to be done on images so that there is a paradigm shift that sees the power of documentation as tool for social construction. Outside of Italy this shift may not be possible. The resistance to accepting a new perspective may be grounded in the lack of quantitative data that measure the achievement of the children in Reggio programs.

The literature on Reggio is about the expression of 40 years of practices imbedded with philosophical underpinnings. There is an undeniable lack of quantitative data that

measures pupil achievement. The accountability of the approach becomes questioned. In contrast, there is an abundance of qualitative research that is reflected in the data collected through tape recorders, cameras, videotapes, and computers from both long-term projects and ordinary moments of learning. The resistance to quantitative research may be in keeping with the philosophy; it seems inappropriate for the educators who pride themselves on asking questions, and encouraging multiple voices and languages, to seek definitive and finite answers.

Reggio represents a worldview that is grounded in a postmodern perspective. “Postmodernists consider that there are many different kinds of voices, many kinds of styles, and take care not to value or privilege one set of values over another” (Penn, 2005, p. 28). A postmodern perspective in early childhood education is based on the assumption that teaching enacts power relations making multiple voices necessary to prevent privilege (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Reggio may be postmodern, but Reggio educators resist the term because *isms* are too risky as they simplify and lock rather than inspire (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Inspiration is the image of the child as having rights rather than needs; a postmodern perspective evolves and is different from the modern romantic view of the child as espoused by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762), the French philosopher who claimed that children are born weak and helpless and need strength, aid and reason.

Implications of Emergent Curriculum

In addition to changing the image of the child, the Reggio Emilia approach and the theories of Vygotsky have the potential to radically change the image of the early childhood educator. The impact of this approach is still not fully understood due to the

lack of research and its limited implementation outside of Reggio. At the same time, the literature does provide some examples that illustrate implications.

I will begin this section by reviewing the literature related to the impact of teacher as researcher. Given the inherent nature of an emergent curriculum with the emphasis on documentation involving data collection and analysis, the emergent curriculum teacher is a researcher. Following the discussion of teacher as researcher I will examine the literature related to communities of practice and their implication on the field. With the emphasis on collaboration, Reggio Emilia educators are encouraged to establish communities of practice. Inherent in communities of practice are teachers acting as reflective practitioners; research on this practice is also included in this chapter.

Research on early childhood education and professional development has revealed support for an emergent curriculum; this will be covered in the literature review. From those who have adapted an emergent curriculum, a survey of testimonials is also included. Finally, I will review the literature connected to change and the resistance to change, as this implicates the future possibilities of emergent curriculum as common practice.

Teacher as researcher.

Teacher research in educational literature often refers to action research. Undertaken by practitioners, action research involves looking at one's own practice, or a situation involving children's development, behavior, social interactions, learning difficulties, family involvement, or learning environments, and then reflecting and seeking support and feedback from colleagues. It is an approach to professional development in which teachers systematically reflect on their work and make changes in

their practice (Borgia & Schuler, 1996). An example, cited in an article by Borgia and Schuler (1996), refers to early childhood educators using ineffective traditional rituals and practices, such as daily rote exercises involving calendar and weather, holiday curricula, learning "a letter a week," and isolated skill-and-drill, in lieu of methods that result in meaningful learning. "While it might be difficult to stop such practices from the outside, a teacher is likely to discover their futility upon closer investigation made possible through action research" (p. 1).

With the example mentioned above, a teacher who begins to question practice would follow three basic steps (Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). The first step would be a willingness to investigate a "problem" that needs to be investigated. The second step involves investigation of the problem with the teacher collecting related data which could include recording of instances of children's inattention to the daily rituals of the calendar. It could also involve journaling experiences or exchanging stories of practice. The final step is to take action. In this case, it would involve abandoning this daily rote exercise. The teacher engaged in action research would then go back to the first step and should begin the cycle again. Action research has been referred to as opportunity to change.

According to Borgia and Schuler (1996):

Educators who have used action research say that it becomes a way of life in their work. Classroom practice and children's experiences are changed, and in the process, there is improvement in learning. Professional development becomes an ongoing process in which educators and children are concurrent learners and teachers. Action research is a positive, supportive, proactive resource for change. (p. 3)

In the Reggio Emilia approach, however, the meaning of teacher as researcher is different than the process of action research. In Reggio it is a routine and expected function of teachers' lives in the classroom (Hill et al., 2005). In a Reggio-inspired

classroom, teachers learn and relearn with children through observation, reflection, speculation, questioning, and theorizing. The teacher learns alongside of the children. The teacher is a teacher researcher, a resource and guide to lend expertise (Malaguzzi, 1998). Within such a teacher researcher role, educators listen, observe, and document children's work and the growth of community in their classroom. They provoke, co-construct, and stimulate thinking based on a process of reflection about their own teaching and learning (OECD, 2004).

To move to a position of teacher as researcher, the act of research needs to be redefined as something teachers do as part of their teaching (Hill et al., 2005). It requires a broad view of research that expands beyond the testing of a hypothesis. The growing acceptance of qualitative research methods has helped expand the education community's understanding and acceptance of less empirical methods. Action research suggests working through a problem and defining it in a question. When emergent curriculum teachers "make the problem the project" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 47) they are becoming a teacher researcher as the documentation cycle involves the process of action research.

Taking a teacher researcher stance can have implications. Evidence suggests that teachers who have been involved in research may become more reflective, more critical, and more open and committed to professional development (Oja & Pine, 1989; Hensen, 1997; Keyes, 2000). Wood and Bennett (1999) describe a research study which examined early childhood teachers' theories of play and their relationship to practice. An unintended outcome of involvement in the research process was that all of the teachers changed their theories, practice, or both. Stremmel (2002b) suggests that participating in

teacher research helps teachers become more deliberate in their decision-making and actions in the classroom.

The real value of engaging in teacher research at any level is that it may lead to rethinking and reconstructing what it means to be a teacher or teacher educator and, consequently, the way teachers relate to children and students. Distinct from conventional research on teaching, teacher research is transformative, enabling the teachers to develop a better understanding of themselves, their classrooms, and their practice through the act of reflective inquiry. (Stremmel, 2002b, p. 64)

Early childhood educator as reflective practitioner.

In 1987, Donald Schön introduced the concept of reflective practice as a critical process in refining one's artistry or craft in a specific discipline. Schön recommended reflective practice as a way to recognize consonance between individual practices and those of successful practitioners. As defined by Schön, reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (Schön, 1996). Research on effective teaching has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris, 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. It is suggested by Ferraro (2000) that by gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

Evident in the literature on early childhood education is a strong awareness of the use and importance of reflective practices in the preparation of staff for early childhood settings (Tertell, Klein, & Jewett, 1998). Critical reflection is regarded as an expedient way to enhance the quality of professional development. In a field plagued with financial

issues, a self-directed orientation towards professional development seems a prudent response. Tools for reflective practice can include portfolio development, action research, journal writing, and mentoring relationships (Ferraro, 2000).

The ability of early childhood educators to reflect on their own practices can provide them with feedback that nurtures their self-esteem and professional growth (Yelland & Cartmel, 2000). Swick, Da Ros, and Pavia (1998) strongly suggest that the process of inquiry needs to become the basis of pre-service teacher training in early childhood education so that it can become common in practice. The greatest challenge to accepting an inquiry paradigm is transforming the image early childhood educators have of themselves. If we see ourselves as already knowing, we are rigid rather than dynamic thinkers. Rigid thinkers are unlikely to see themselves as learners whose primary task is to grow. Without teachers who are committed to growth, children are destined to have static and rather boring learning experiences.

Through a process of deliberation and critical reflection of particular curricular choices change is possible. Deliberation and critical reflection are tools suggested by Schwab (1978) and Brookfield (1995) respectively. Schwab's theory focuses on the deliberation concept, the main strategy for planning and solving curricular problems. Deliberation is a systematic and dynamic process in which there is a search for the best alternative depending on the situation. During this process, the teacher has to weigh advantages and disadvantages of each alternative and decide which choice is the most appropriate given the situation (Zoran, 2002).

Brookfield's work on critical theory emphasizes the most important factor in a teacher's decision-making—teacher awareness. In applying this theory, teachers must

“distinguish between their own voices and those of authorities and decide which voice to listen to in a given situation” (Zoran, 2002, p. 92). Zoran (2002) illustrates deliberation and critical reflection in her account of a group of early childhood education teachers who met weekly to discuss beliefs, assumptions, values, emotions, and knowledge about education, in general, and about curriculum especially. The stories told were prompts for others to reflect. She suggests this strategy is an effective tool for professional development.

The implications of early childhood educators deliberating and sharing stories of practice within a critical reflection atmosphere could be image altering. Thurber and Zimmerman (1997) suggest that continuing a voice-to-voice dialogue may help “teachers feel confident to use their personal and professional voices to effect educational change in their schools, school districts, communities and beyond” (p. 186).

Communities of practice.

The concept of communities of practice arises from the work of Wenger (1998) where mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire “hold the key to real transformation” (p. 85). Miller and Shoptaugh (2004) developed a Reggio-inspired professional development program aimed at teacher change. The aim of the program was to build communities of practice where teachers connected through dialogue without judgment and questioned each other with respect in a non-threatening environment. The study documents powerful stories of transformation as a result of the teachers being part of a Reggio-inspired community of practice.

The four public schools selected for Miller and Shoptaugh’s study were from across the state of Ohio and aimed at four year olds. After four years of documenting the

changes within the school as a result of the acceptance of Reggio-inspired philosophy to guide practice, one school's story reflects the change possibilities. In three of the schools, major personnel shifts resulted in a waning of the project's impact. In the fourth school, the teachers that had aligned themselves most closely with the philosophy of Reggio Emilia continued to study together (Miller & Shoptaugh, 2004).

They continue to work to create an environment of support and challenge and use project-based design to attend to curriculum requirements and children's interests. They continue to incorporate media as a tool for thinking and find time to create documentation panels. Most importantly, they find ways to engage with other teachers in discussions of their work either through an informal process within their school or through membership in Ohio's Reggio study group. Now, two years beyond the end of the original project, the membership of teachers within this school continues to grow. (Miller & Shoptaugh, 2004, pp. 254 – 255)

The establishment of communities of practice where teachers engage together in research can empower teachers to improve and avoid top-down models of professional development in which they are viewed as implementers of externally-driven change (Wood & Bennett, 1999). Wood and Bennett's (1999) research study of nine early childhood teachers and their road towards change exemplifies the value of establishing communities of practice in which teachers generate their own professional discourses.

There is an increasingly large amount of research on the building of discourse communities amongst teachers in the school system where "teachers engage in professional dialogue, talk about practice, practice new initiatives, and get moral support as they engage in the uncertainties together" (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997, p. 10). More research is needed on the building of discourse communities within the field of early childhood education.

In the context of early childhood education, there is an increasing emphasis on multi-professional and inter-agency collaboration, and on

liaison with parents and practitioners in different settings. Consequently, there is a need for greater professionalism amongst early childhood teachers to enable them to function as change agents; to articulate the theories that guide their practice; to provide models of skilled, expert practice, and establish discourse and research communities. (Wood & Bennett, 1999, p. 647)

The professional development program developed for the state of Ohio as described by Miller and Shoptaugh (2004) was a long-term initiative conducted across four public school sites. The most effective example of change comes from the school site where the “teachers had aligned themselves most with the philosophy of Reggio Emilia” (p. 254). These teachers continue to work together to create an environment of support and challenge using a project-based design to attend to curriculum requirements and children’s interest.

The Reggio Emilia approach was selected as a framework for this professional development initiative because of its underlying beliefs of collegiality, public demonstration, and sharing of practices (Miller & Shoptaugh, 2004). Others have also found that the role of the Reggio teacher corresponds with the research on teacher collaboration (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Fu et al., 2002). The image of the teacher within the Reggio Emilia schools seems congruent with that of a reflective, professional practitioner.

The conceptualization of the teacher as collaborator and researcher reflects a theoretical shift from a view of learning as primarily individually centred to one that is fundamentally socially and culturally situated (Putnam & Borko, 1997). Moyles (2001) found that working in partnership with researchers, practitioners “have shown themselves able to engage in high level, critical (and passionate) reflection on their own practices, to link associated theory and to challenge political prescription” (p. 81). Expressing stories

of practice within communities changes the role of the teacher and offers new hope for lonely educators. Teachers see themselves as capable of asking good questions, willing to debate with one another, and committed to consultation with children's families (New, 2003).

Community is considered a vital aspect of teaching and learning. It emerges from individuals. "Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships" (Palmer, 1998, p. 90). Within a community "good talk about good teaching" can transform teaching and learning (Palmer, 1998, p. 160). What is required is support from leaders to create a community where dialogue can occur. It requires a shift of power; a shared context for teacher and child development.

Early childhood teacher education.

In spite of substantial support for emergent curriculum approaches, "traditional nursery school practices do remain alive and well in part because many of our colleges and universities continue to reinforce these traditional methods in their teacher education programs" (Dodge, Dulik, & Kulhanek, 2001, p. 1). Carter and Curtis (1994) refer to a critical need for "overhauling the approach to training early childhood educators." They find "most disturbing" that "few teacher training programs, including those promoting Piaget and developmental education, use a pedagogy that parallels what we want teachers to do with young children" (Carter & Curtis, 1994, p. xi).

Ignoring, if not defying the research and implications of constructivist theory, it appears teacher educators believe that all adults are at the stage of formal operations. They teach to one learning style that revolves around lectures, reading, memorization, and imitation. (p. xi)

If pre-service practices do not illustrate the benefits of co-construction and shared ownership of the curriculum, it would appear unlikely that early childhood education students understand these principles. Those who train early childhood educators do not have to add to the oppression of the sector. There are examples of teacher educators from the U.S. and Canada promoting a reconceptualization of practice that aligns with the philosophies of Reggio. Yelland and Cartmel (2000) describe a successful graduate level early childhood teacher education program in Australia with a collaborative structure where “students are able to engage in discourse, debate, risk taking, and critical analyses.” This Reggio-inspired atmosphere promotes “meaningful learning” and empowers students “to become more effective early childhood education professionals” (p. 34).

DeJong (1999) makes a strong substantiated case for learning through projects in early childhood teacher education and has many suggestions for incorporating project work into teacher preparation programs. Drawing parallels between project work with children, DeJong states that “recent research now suggests that it is not only an effective learning strategy for young children,” it is also “an especially useful strategy to foster dispositions, motivations, and professional habits that are as important as knowledge to the success of beginning classroom teachers” (p. 325). Just as the educators from Reggio Emilia suggest that the child should be viewed as a competent theory builder the teacher educator can view the pre-service teacher in the same way. Establishing a congruency between what is taught at the pre-service level and how it is taught in the classroom should impact the broader field; a number of researchers have identified positive

outcomes for programs with a social constructivist orientation (Swick et al., 1998; McNaughton & Krentz, 2000; Novinger et al., 2003; Kaye, 2002; Jacobs, 2000).

Kaye (2002) describes a constructivist approach to an early childhood graduate degree program that featured empowerment for the students. Twenty-nine recent graduates were asked to respond to questions relating to the affect of the program on their personal and professional lives. Consistent with the theory of epistemological development as constructed by Belenky et al. (1986), the graduates stated that they felt empowered and more self-confident as a result of their participation in the program.

Jacobs (2000) suggests ways of engaging teacher-preparation students in worthwhile projects and activities that model what can take place in the preschool classroom. By way of reinforcing the study of Reggio Emilia and the project approach, students can engage in their own projects. Jacobs (2000) chronicles such a project and concludes with a statement of the importance of this type of meaningful learning. Students experience firsthand a constructivist approach to learning where they took ownership and responsibility for co-constructing their own learning with their peers and instructors. Through these experiences, “they will be better equipped to set up an environment that fosters this kind of learning for their own students in the future” (p. 346).

Testimonies of practice.

Early childhood education students who experience a constructivist teacher education training program may be more likely to employ these practices in their own classrooms. Their stories can be added to the growing body of literature illustrating

testimonies of practice. These testimonies document the empowering aspects of using an emergent curriculum and demonstrate changing perspectives.

Wien, Stacey, Hubley Keating, Rowlings, and Cameron (2002) describe a project that began when teachers noticed that the two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half year old children in their classrooms “were charmed with babies and frequently took out classroom dolls for washing, feeding, combing, carrying about and putting to sleep” (p. 33). What followed was an investigation into eyes, hair, noses, and mouths. The teachers involved went from trepidation to transformation. From the perspective of those outside the classroom, as the doll project progressed month by month the teachers’ decision-making became more assured, creative, and inspired. The teachers’ images of themselves as teachers were altered during the project (Wien et al.).

There is growing documentation supporting the evolution of early childhood education programs from teacher-directed, traditionally structured, and academically-oriented to those that are emergent. The story of one centre is described in *Clouds Come from New Hampshire: Confronting the Challenge of Philosophical Change in Early Childhood Programs* (Dodge et al., 2001):

Few things in life have such a power to immobilize, energize, divide, or unite, as the process of change. The ease and content that can come from doing something because ‘that’s how it has always been done’ is undeniable. However, for a growing number of early childhood educators, this perceived comfort is being replaced with a sense of boredom, obsolescence, and feebleness. No longer are the traditional teaching practices involving academics, units, and themes seen as the best ways to reach and empower the children with whom we work. Instead, an approach that values emergent ideas, cultures and creativity of young children is being embraced by a growing number of teachers as the best practice in the early childhood classroom. (p. 1)

This program began in 1975 and historically functioned in a traditional, teacher-led philosophical environment. There had been no serious thought given to changing the approach. Twenty years later with the appointment of a new director, the centre began its slow progression towards change. Working collaboratively with administration, parents and staff the program shifted towards one inspired by Reggio Emilia (Dodge et al., 2001).

In chronicling this time of change, the role of parents is emphasized. Expectations of parents place a burden on teachers to provide a program that will shape a child capable of reciting facts and constructing *refrigerator art*, but often unable to negotiate the day-to-day challenges of solving problems consistent with independent, critical, and creative thinking. After a series of meetings focused on educating parents to the many benefits of an emergent curriculum, the centre received parental support. At the same time, there was recognition that guiding parents through change takes time (Dodge et al., 2001).

The focus of this case is the parents, children, and the administration; there is little discussion on how the transformation impacted the teachers' self-image and practice. The connection between a teacher's real experience and the real context of his or her professional life is fundamental to understanding how curriculum innovation shapes image. What happens to early childhood educators who are implementing innovative curriculum approaches?

Wien (2004) chronicles the transformation that took place at three different child care centres. Teachers went from continuous policing and correction of young children to a pedagogy in which there is co-construction. The teachers in the study were offered workshops in which they explored their images of children and were encouraged to reflect on the view of the learner as put forward by the Reggio Emilia approach.

The documented change in practice illustrated that these teachers were no longer keepers of the routine (Wien, 1995), programming their teaching according to a production schedule rather than in partnership with the children.

If teachers take control of their own practice, and of assessing the match between their values and their pedagogy, then teaching becomes not performing a job to someone else's criteria, but instead living in responsiveness to children and families and sharing a broad sense of possibilities about all the ways to participate together. Something about the change is profoundly democratic, if democracy is conceived as full creative participation of all members of the community. (Wien, 2004, p. 7)

In examining these three child care centres that changed practice from policing to participation, Wien (2004) found that the emotional tone of the centres changed from “surveillance in order to enforce the rules and schedule to one of positive, even joyful participation” (p. 7). The practice of these teachers changed through an implementation of an emergent curriculum that shared power, illustrating a correlation between emergent curriculum and teacher development.

Jones (1993) recognized a positive connection between developing teachers and emergent curriculum. An implication of this view would suggest that a teacher implementing an emergent curriculum would possess the disposition necessary to self-initiate professional growth and development:

Growing teachers is different from training them. Like emergent curriculum, emergent teacher development is open ended, where philosophy and practice are defined but outcomes are teacher directed, where teachers participate actively in the construction of knowledge about their work, making choices for their personal growth. (p. xi)

Tertell (1998) have chronicled stories of reflective early childhood educators. One example of a teacher who began to examine questions of curriculum ownership in her classroom illustrates the progression from the use of themes to projects. Through

reflective practice involving journaling and mentoring the teacher was able to see that “dictating, step by step, what children will do and how they will do it was unnecessary and undesirable” (p. 38). Her story of emergent curriculum illustrates her own development and personal growth.

Williams and Kantor (2004) tell the story of one teacher’s experience upon her return from visiting the schools of Reggio Emilia. A simple water experiment with children ages three to five was the entry point for a long-term water project. Children explored pouring, making bubbles, evaporation, waves, and boats. Children were encouraged to build their own theories about water. With project documentation and children’s representations, the teacher reflects on her “joy in sharing the children’s new experiences” and the sadness of not “having given other children the rights of their own potential” (p. 163). The water project had felt comfortable for the teacher was able to give the children a language to communicate what they had found out about water.

Inspired by the support for learning that teachers in Reggio Emilia offer children, early childhood educators can reach “farther down the path” of negotiated curriculum (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002, p. 197). Negotiated curriculum gives voice to children’s intent. “The more adept children are at declaring intent, the more they can help us understand what they are thinking, the more we understand, the better we can support the children’s work and learning (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002, p. 202). Teachers can ask questions in order to help children become more conscious of intent. Teachers can also invite children to reflect on their thinking process. Eventually, children declare increasingly specific intent and learning is truly negotiated. It is, according to Oken-Wright and Gravett, similar to a walking labyrinth.

A labyrinth differs from a maze in that the maze is designed to fool the walker. If the path of the labyrinth is followed with deliberation, starting at the outer edge, the walker will find the centre (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002):

We may not be able to see the center when we begin, but we know it is there, and so we are patient as we follow the winding path, negotiating the turns and the twists, not always being able to predict where we'll be next. Walking a contemplative labyrinth is meditative, and as with any meditation, there is a potential for new revelations along the way. All this comes with negotiated learning . . . the winding path, revelations along the way, and a Big Idea, or perhaps a bigger idea waiting in the center. (pp. 219 – 220)

Voice.

Helping children give voice to their intent is fundamental within the Reggio Emilia approach to education. When children trust that the adults in their lives will help them make their ideas visible, it frees children to set their sights as high as their imagination can reach (Oken-Wright & Garret, 2002). When teaching and learning involve cognitive and symbolic expression, voice comes through in multiple ways - in one hundred languages (Gandini, 2004). The words of Loris Malaguzzi in the poem are instructive “No way. The hundred *is* there” asks that teachers attend “to many voices, languages, and abilities of children, parents, and teachers that are often lost in the teaching and learning process” (Fu, 2002, p. 25).

Tegano (2002) writes of finding the voices of teachers engaged in the study of the Reggio Emilia approach. The teachers voices described come from several qualitative research studies focused on teachers’ perceptions of the approach. The stories of the teachers express a sense of passion about the experience of working with Reggio-inspired ideas. Tegano (2002) found that the “expressions of passion were characterized by two themes: the theme of renewal for experience teachers and the theme of discovery for

beginning teachers.” Interestingly, the voices expressed also “described over and over again” a sense of disequilibrium (p. 167):

teachers chose to engage in an internal struggle with their own sense of disequilibrium. Instead of ignoring a situation or a thought that engendered questions, these questions were recognized and welcome and the struggle with a sense of disequilibrium embraced. (p. 167)

The passion expressed in the voices of teachers engaged in a Reggio-inspired practice appeared according to Tegano (2002) from those who “experience the depth of true collaboration” and “reflective dialogue” (p. 170). Establishing collaborative teaching and learning environments counters the issues of power dynamics in the field of early childhood education. According to Wright (2000) the issues of power inequities have rarely been examined. Power dynamics in early childhood education settings can be addressed with a conscious effort to allow for voice.

It is the voices of the teachers that need to be heard alongside those of the parents and the children. Who is heard and who is allowed to speak changes the power structure of the teacher being in control. It can change the dynamic of the teacher feeling without control when curriculum decisions are imposed. When teachers, parents and children share in the learning process with voices heard and heeded, a shift in power occurs. Socially shared cognition, mediated learning and joint activity can lead to improved practice on many levels (Samaras, 2000).

Educators from Reggio Emilia are focused on provoking the voices of children to think more deeply or broadly about a topic (Fraser, 2000). This concept of provocation, on the other hand, could be what inspires teachers to adapt an emergent curriculum approach. As described by Gandini (1998) provocation is something arriving by surprise. Provocation is a means for provoking further action and action (Fraser, 2000). Provoked

by the Reggio conception of the image of the child as competent, inventive, and full of ideas (Fraser, 2000, p. 8) a teacher might be inspired to deliberate on current curriculum choices. Provocation leads to disequilibrium.

Disequilibrium is a familiar idea in the literature on Reggio-inspired thinking (Tegano, 2002). Experienced teachers becoming more aware of the process of their own teaching engendered an emotional response and produce a sense of disequilibrium. Disequilibrium as the intrinsic force behind development becomes the force that motivates the journey through the path of the labyrinth. It provides the impetus to progress, to take the path of a labyrinth that leads upwards to a new level of teaching practice and self-image.

Facing resistance to change.

Disequilibrium can lead to change. “Change implies innovation. Innovation presumes change. The two terms are interdependent. With both, one assumes newness, a difference between what was and what is” (Rust, 1993, p. 14). There is a sense of movement to change and to innovation which is accompanied by a sense of excitement or apprehension. How teachers perceive change depends on their status and affiliations and by their proximity to the change itself (Rust, 1993).

Teachers without power may resist change. Richardson (1990), in a review of educational change literature, found that particular teachers resist complex, conceptual, longitudinal changes. Teachers working in isolation with routine scripts for action may resist change. Richardson (1990) suggests that in order to effect worthwhile and significant change, it is necessary to embed practice with theory (Richardson, 1990).

In the Forward to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Real Life* by Wien (1995), Jones describes the causes of a static curriculum that resists change:

Child-care teachers bring to their work . . . a healthy instinct for survival on the job. Survival always implies, when one is a newcomer in the setting, a conservative response of adapting to things as they are. Once habituated, relatively few teachers initiate significant changes in their practice. (p. vii)

By adapting to things as they are, teachers resist embedding theory in practice and thus resist change. Why is there a resistance to change? Change is fraught with turmoil and uncertainty (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Katz (2004) suggests that to bring about lasting changes, teachers need to accept the uncertainty involved in unfolding a curriculum one step at a time instead of depending on detailed advance planning. In order to advance the professionalization of the field, early childhood educators must change the image they have of themselves. Inspired by the theories of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Malaguzzi, they can build their own.

Change is a journey not a blueprint, and as Rinaldi (1998) points out, a plan is like a compass not a train schedule. Change must come from within each early childhood educator and uncertainty of direction must be accepted. Fullan and Miles (1992) suggest that all real change must be implemented locally. Katz (2004) challenges the early childhood educator as “responsibility for changes” is “right in our own doorsteps” (p. 67). Emergent curriculum is a micro-level opportunity for change. When presented with new information that is difficult to accommodate it may be that in the moment of confusion real opportunities exist to accept new challenges and create new possibilities for ourselves (Swick et al., 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is much to learn from the educators of Reggio Emilia. The literature reflects a body of knowledge that will be for most early childhood educators, new information. From the principles of the approach, to the theoretical underpinnings, the educational accomplishments of this region in north, central Italy is astonishing. When this new information collides with current practices, disequilibrium can result. Teachers can resist the forces of cognitive dissonance or they can embrace the possibilities of change. Early childhood educators need to understand the implications of curriculum, the transformational possibilities inherent in particular choices, and the limitations of others. With the abundant literature and resounding testimonials, an emergent curriculum could empower both the teacher and the learner.

If the literature and testimonies can counter the strong resistance to change that continues to exist in the field as demonstrated by the continued use of the theme approach, teachers may be encouraged to adapt their practice to become more emergent. The stories of teachers and administrators who were inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and emergent curriculum have developed the attributes of a researcher and collaborator. As the word spreads and emergent curriculum becomes more common, this reframed image may elevate current status. Those who continue to be resistant may find their stance as keepers of routine challenged.

Chapter Four:

Methodology

What you see depends on how you look.

(Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 136)

Research Study Overview

This study is premised on the assumption, that the act of research is dependent, to a degree, on the beliefs of the researcher and does, in fact, reflect the values of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The questions I have asked the research participants and the methods I have utilized to observe the phenomena of emergent curriculum in practice have been filtered through my particular lenses of knowledge, language, values, and worldviews (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). In this chapter it is my goal to describe the worldview and specific methodology that have influenced my research. I will describe the rationale for choosing this worldview as well as detail the reasons for the selected strategy of inquiry. I will illustrate how this particular method relates to the phenomenon of interest and the purpose of the dissertation.

The paradigm that captures the methods utilized in this research falls within a constructivist framework. This is a qualitative paradigm which stands in contrast to a quantitative framework which presumes a scientific deductive stance. I use qualitative research methods as they are inductive and congruent with the emergent nature of the research content. Qualitative research claims its roots in a naturalistic phenomenological philosophy that contends that multiple realities exist and must be recognized by giving attention to group and individual constructions and perceptions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative research involves an investigation of a particular phenomenon

(Guba & Lincoln, 1998). It is the phenomenon of emergent curriculum in early childhood education that is the focus of my research. The impact of its practice is a question that I seek to illuminate (Moustakas, 1990).

The question of how emergent curriculum impacts practice, “represents a critical interest and area of search” for this dissertation (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). It represents a topic that evokes a passionate response. My relationship to the research question is fundamental. Throughout the process as I am actively involved in learning about the phenomenon I am also learning about myself. The research design was modified as the research unfolded. The data collected is in the form of words rather than statistics as it would be with a quantitative study. Instead of using a research tool or questionnaire designed to elicit numeric responses, as the researcher I am the data-gathering instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research and design connect to a paradigm of constructivism.

Constructivism denotes an epistemological worldview which theorizes the nature of knowledge. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified three paradigms upon which qualitative research is based, constituting the philosophical underpinnings of this type of research. These include critical theory, constructivism, and participatory. I have chosen the constructivist paradigm for its congruence with the phenomenon of emergent curriculum. It seemed a natural direction to take on the research path because of this connecting trajectory.

In addition to epistemology, the basic issues for each paradigm include the nature of reality or ontology and the methodology utilized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Heppner and Heppner (2004) all qualitative paradigms assume relativist ontology

(multiple realities are socially and individually constructed) and transactional epistemology (the knower and the known are inextricably intertwined), as well as dialogic or interpretive methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Of the three paradigms it is the constructivist framework that defines the course of this research.

It is my view that a constructivism paradigm within a qualitative research design is an empowering methodology. Kirby and McKenna (1989) describe the fluidity of the research process within this paradigm as reflecting an emergent quality. They explain that “as you use the method you will contribute to how the method develops...it is continually unfolding” (p. 170). As I develop the case studies of teachers who are continually developing their curriculum, I am constructing the knowledge for this dissertation. Layers of practice are embedded within the research rationale, design and methodology.

Case study is the inquiry strategy utilized as it corresponds to a constructivist paradigm within a philosophical phenomenological orientation. While the methodology of this study is guided by phenomenology, it is, at the same time, a case study with a heuristic construct (Merriam, 1998). Heuristic research as developed by Moustakas (1990) is a process of discovery that leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to their own experiences and lives The self as researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (p. 9).

Visions and images are connecting me to the research quest (Moustakas, 1990). They have guided the process from the beginning and have been instrumental in the selection of constructivism as this study’s paradigm and case study as the method of

inquiry. Constructivism and case study are naturally compatible with my personal values, beliefs, personality, research interest, and the research question at hand (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

The research questions.

According to Moustakas (1990) heuristic research questions should be stated in simple, clear and concrete terms. The central question that guides this research study is simply: How does the implementation of an emergent curriculum impact a teacher's self-image and practice? Reconstructing my journey as an early childhood educator provided the tension that precipitated the discovery of this research question. Hubbard and Power (1993) suggest "often questions for research start with a feeling of tension" (p. 3). Tension can be produced when common practice is questioned. After questioning the practice of themes in my own practice, I felt the tension of cognitive dissonance as I attempted to reconcile past practice with new ideas.

An initial set of sub-questions were created to follow the central question. These topical questions provided the structure for the data collected from the research participants. These questions were designed to discover information from the participants' specific to image and practice in early childhood education. Cresswell (1998) used the phrase "topics to be covered" to describe the focus of questions formulated to cover the need for information (p. 101). These include questions to illuminate participant's background, history, experience and knowledge of emergent curriculum and its impact on their practice and self-image.

A second set of sub-questions addresses the major concerns and perplexities embedded in the implementation of an emergent curriculum. These secondary questions

are issue oriented and are “not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. 17). These questions because of their scope often lead to more questions rather than definitive answers. The second set of sub-questions includes the following:

1. What is the perception of the participants about their past experience with a theme-based curriculum approach?
2. What is the perception of the participants about their current experience with an emergent curriculum?
3. How does the experience of the researcher intersect with the experience of the research participants?
4. What is the perception of the researcher and research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum and reframed images of teachers and children?
5. What is the perception of the research and the research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum, practice and theory?
6. What is the perception of the researcher and the research participants on the relationship between emergent curriculum, power and voice?
7. What are the underlying constructs and context that account for these perceptions?

In discussing research questions Hubbard and Power (1993), highlight the origin of the word *question* of which the root meaning is *quest*. I see my journey as a quest to develop professionally, allowing theory to impact practice. It has been a quest through the circular paths of a labyrinth set within a complex context. It has been a quest for a

meaningful curriculum that would inspire children, parents and teachers. Emergent curriculum is the archetypal reward at the journey's end; the holy grail of the quest.

Exploring this central question along with the subsequent secondary research questions has propelled my journey with this dissertation. It has been a journey of discovery. Qualitative research “is a process of discovery” (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 305). The process of integrating new information and reconciling it with the past has advanced the journeys of the researcher and those being researched. As a qualitative researcher, I “learn by doing” (Dey, 1993, p. 6). As I walk the path of the labyrinth, I engage in a spiraling process of data analysis that leads to discovery. As I make sense of the data, I am engaged in an emergent process that is “largely intuitive” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 142). The process is non-linear, it is aligned to the path of the labyrinth as it spirals horizontally inwards and outwards and vertically upwards.

The interactive results between my knowledge and the participants' knowledge become the “treasure” to discover on the journey (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 305). The depth of the knowledge gained in the process of the research journey is difficult to measure as it unfolds. I have not found the ultimate truth of the phenomenon of emergent curriculum, and therefore I will present the many truths I discovered on the journey (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Research hypothesis.

“A research hypothesis is more specific than a research question” (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 74). A research hypothesis goes one more step and makes predictions about the relationships between the constructs being studied. This dissertation may suggest to early childhood educators that there may be personal and professional

implications to halting the practice of using themes to conceptualize their curriculum which includes reframed images and a theoretical foundation.

The four research participants replaced themes with projects in their practice. They accepted the challenge to change (Hendrick, 2004). They went through a process of change and the similarities and differences between their experiences could provide inspiration for others to change. In telling their stories, the case studies may reveal the transformational experience of emergent curriculum for others. The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that emergent curriculum has broad possibilities that could impact the practitioner and the field of early childhood itself.

Researcher as instrument.

The constructivist nature of case studies provides an opportunity to become knowledgeable about a topic that may be outside one's own experience (Stake, 1995). My practice as an early childhood educator was characterized by a quest for the perfect preschool curriculum. It wasn't until I became a teacher educator that I found the curriculum approach that would end my quest. I now teach emergent curriculum to my students without having had the benefit of practicing it with children. Lacking the opportunity to implement this approach with children, my understandings of the implications are limited.

In order to fully understand the phenomenon in question, I needed to see it from the view of the practitioner; hence a case study methodology provided the means to do this. Case study research is an inductive process as it finds its basis in the theories of constructivism which assumes that knowledge is created and influenced by an individual's values and culture (Philips, 1995). It shares the same theoretical

underpinnings as the Reggio Emilia approach, increasing the synchronicity of the research.

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative case studies can be characterized as being heuristic. “Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study; they can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience or confirm what is known” (p. 30). Heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) also implies that the researcher is an instrument. I use analysis of my own experience as part of the data collected for this dissertation (Merriam, 1998). As my perspective is fundamental in this dissertation, it has a heuristic quality. Heuristic research is part of phenomenological inquiry which tries to see the object of study from different angles or perspectives (Merriam, 1998).

A case study approach.

According to Merriam (1998), case studies are also particularistic and descriptive. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and what it might represent. Descriptive means that the end product of a case is a “thick” or rich description of the phenomenon under study (p. 29).

A case study is a “thing,” a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. The bounded system or case is selected because it is of some concern to the researcher (Merriam, 1998). My interest in the research process is fundamental; the assumption is that the researcher cannot be separated from those being researched. I am engaging in the process of inquiry in order to construct knowledge in conjunction with

my research participants and with a view to ultimately providing readers with the materials for their own constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The challenge in this research study was to provide cases rich in description to enable the reader to experience what the participants have experienced and to be able to relate this to his or her own practices. It is likely that my interpretations will be emphasized more than the interpretations of those I am studying as I bring my own contexts to the process of inquiry. However, the eventual aim will be try to preserve multiple realities (Stake, 1995).

Choosing a case study approach to this research study has been purposeful. Audience has been a critical factor in methodological choice. The audience I am writing for are early childhood educators. It is a sector of the educational field to which I feel passionately aligned. I value the place of early childhood educators as the teachers who help lay the foundation for all learning. I see early childhood education as a marginalized sector compared to others on the educational spectrum. I see early childhood educators bearing the burden of a public image that belittles their worth. In this way my values have impacted this study. In choosing research methodology I looked for one that would be amenable to early childhood educators.

Building case studies from stories of practice should enable accessibility for the practitioner. Walsh, Tobin, and Graue (1993) suggest that classroom teachers, particularly early childhood educators have little use for research literature based on quantitative methods. Stories of practice as told in case studies are accessible not simply because they are written in language understandable to the practitioner, “but also because,

instead of viewing teachers as research subjects, it privileges teacher's interpretations" (p. 465).

In *The Good Preschool Teacher*, Ayers (1989) presents case studies of six teachers. The rationale for his research rested on the voice of the preschool teacher being unheard and unheeded. For the six participants, involvement in the research process led to an awareness of aspects of their own practice that had been obscure or unavailable to them.

This awakening to previously unknown worlds, this seeing anew, gave them and may give other teachers in other places and times clearer access to choice, greater freedom to become the teachers they want to be, more active and vital participants in their own reflective practice. (Ayers, 1989, p. 8)

In the preface to *The Good Preschool Teacher* (1989), Vivian Gussin Paley, a pioneer in creating case studies from the field of early childhood education that focus on children, writes: "We teachers are more curious about the children than about ourselves. Our every action reveals the shadow of our urgent preoccupation, but seldom is there anyone around to question the questioner (Ayers, 1989, p. vii).

Case studies of early childhood were once written primarily by child psychologists and psychiatrists. Freud, Piaget, Erikson, and Bettelheim wrote case studies of young children's emotional and cognitive development that have strongly influenced educators. In the past 20 years there has been a rise of non-clinical case studies, including the work of Paley (Walsh et al., 1993). In *Molly is Three* (1986), Paley created a case study of a young child as a writer and constructor of knowledge. The subject of the study

was the child, not her teacher. In contrast, Paley now advocates turning the focus towards the teacher as the subject.

Creating stories within a case study methodology is applicable to the context of early childhood education. The reader of the case study can gain access to the experience. When reading a good case study, we get a chance to experience the world through the eyes of the author as well as the subject of the study (Donmoyer, 1990). Case study research seeks to understand phenomena via induction (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). My thesis involves an attempt to get inside the working lives of four teachers, to ask the question of how the use of an emergent curriculum implicates self and practice. While each case is unique, their commonality is each participant's attempt to implement a particular approach to curriculum, one that is gaining in popularity but still not widely accepted.

Ethical considerations.

In case study research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As the researcher, I have decided what is important to include or exclude. Everything has been filtered through my particular theoretical position and biases (Merriam, 1998). Knowing that this type of inquiry is never value-free (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I was straightforward with the participants regarding my biases. These participants were aware of the support I have for emergent curriculum, and that it has been the focus of my teaching both at the pre-service and in-service level.

My personal perspective and the fact that I had encountered two of the four participants prior to the study's commencement constituted both a strength and a liability for the research. I believe that by approaching this study with prior knowledge and a

relevant personal perspective, I was able to be sensitive to the perspectives of each of participant. I could relate to them and be empathetic. This was clearly a strength. The liability of researcher as instrument relates to the participant's prior knowledge of me and the effect this may have had on the information they revealed. Throughout the interview process, I was conscious of this liability but with the triangulation of data from interviews, classroom visits, focus group, and project documentation, I feel assured that my influence on the participant's responses was negligible.

Rust (1993) relates similar issues in building her cases of schools trying to build stronger connections between care and education in the establishment of all-day kindergarten programs. I agree with Rust's assertion that prior knowledge of participants must be acknowledged. Her research, however, focused on an audience of policymakers and administrators; this left the perspective of the teacher and its essential importance inadequately and incompletely examined. Rust (1993) in her book, *Changing Teaching, Changing Schools*, focused on bringing early childhood practice into public education. The case studies provided a model for this research but also inspiration for researching the previously unexamined teacher.

For the participants and other teachers who may have access to this research, the opportunity to consider the practice of others through the lens of their own values and philosophy reflects the purpose of this study. Perhaps this will result in an "awareness of the power of individuals" giving "a new lens [through which] to see early childhood educators" (Driscoll, 1995, p. 5). These are stories of power, change and courage that should be accessible to others.

In making the study accessible, it is also important to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants. The research design passed through a level of rigorous ethical approval. Careful consideration was given to protecting the identities of the research participants; this included their names and the locations of their respective work sites. The teachers and the documentation of their project work were the focus of my observations during my visits to their classrooms rather than the children.

Participant selection.

After receiving ethical review approval, I sent out invitations to participate to all the child care centres that I knew were employing an emergent curriculum. This was not a systematic process. It was only through my own practice and contacts that I had become aware of these programs; I cannot say for certain that every program of this nature was contacted. Of the fourteen child care centres who received an invitation, four individuals responded with expressed interest to participate in the research. These were the four participants chosen to participate. The invitation to participate can be found in Appendix A. The informed consent form signed by each participant can be found in Appendix B.

The respondents were chosen, not to represent all early childhood educators as it is difficult in case study research to make generalizations, but to illuminate these particular cases representing four individuals. I was fortunate that four individuals fitting the profile of early childhood educators implementing an emergent curriculum responded positively to my invitation. According to Cresswell (1998) the researcher typically chooses no more than four cases. A larger number was not a consideration as I wasn't trying to achieve generalization, as it is a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Stake (2000) argues that damage

occurs when the commitment to generalize or theorize runs so strong that the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection in case study research involves a multitude of strategies including interviewing and observing participants, conducting a focus group, assigning a metaphor and image exercise, and analyzing documents. As Patton (1990) explains, "multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective" (p. 214). The following sections will describe the methods used in this research study.

Interviews.

Often in case study research not all sources of information are used equally (Merriam, 1998). In addition to emphasizing my own experience, interviews provided the bulk of the data collected, including a pilot interview with two practitioners, initial interviews with the four respondents, and a round of final interviews.

The two pilot interviews were undertaken with experienced teachers currently working in a college laboratory school and with an emergent curriculum. These teachers volunteered to help test the questions. Their involvement resulted in the altering or editing of existing questions and the addition of new questions. Questions that appeared confusing to the volunteers were adjusted in attempt to provide clarity and understanding the research participants.

The first interview questions were categorized in relation to the topics of: background, practice, philosophy, professional development, image, challenges, and future directions. The questions of the last interview emerged from the first, addressing

these categories: current practice, challenges, involvement in research, image, and future direction. The questions in the first interview were designed to illicit contextual responses to frame the situation of each participant. The final interview questions delved deeper into the phenomenon in question in order focus on the impact of emergent curriculum on practice and self-image.

The interviews were semi-structured so as to allow for emerging themes that have not necessarily been previously identified. The interviews were 60 to 90 minutes in length and tape-recorded. Both the initial and the subsequent interviews were transcribed. The interviews took place at the work settings of the participants in order to evoke a comfort level for easy dialogue. The specific questions related to the initial and final interviews can be found in Appendices C and F.

Participant observation.

Between the two interviews, I visited each teacher in his or her classroom. I acted as a participant observer and later shared with the teachers a written narrative of my visit as well as photographs of their project documentation. As a researcher working within the phenomenological framework, context is crucial to the documentation of experience. The setting in which the action takes place is the classroom, a context “rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41).

During the classroom observations, I paid particular attention to the practice of the teachers in the classroom as it related to the stated curriculum. All four participants were implementing emergent curriculum and representing this with a particular project topic. I recorded notes related to the project including dialogue, discussion, and activities

that took place during my visit. I looked for evidence of the project topic in the documents displayed on the walls inside and outside of the classroom.

Observing the participants provided me with the opportunity to become part of each participant's classroom. This is a particularly important form of data collection especially at the beginning stage of the research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). During the morning I spent in each classroom, I was open with my intentions, telling those children who asked that I was writing a story about their class. The key was to participate but not to the extent of becoming totally absorbed in the activity (Merriam, 1998); this provided me with the opportunity to take detailed written field notes of what I was observing.

While striving for descriptive, objective detail of the classroom activities I was observing, I was aware that my presence in the classroom may have affected what was being observed (Merriam, 1998). From the field notes, a narrative was constructed with the purpose of recreating the experience of being in the classroom. I then shared these narratives along with the copies of the photographs with the participants who, accepted my perspective as a participant observer and validated the data I had collected. Excerpts from these narratives appear in Appendix G.

Focus group.

The idea for the focus group emerged from the musing of one of the participants who expressed her desire to meet and dialogue with the others. After agreeing to a time and a place, the four participants and I met for a two-hour session to discuss the impact of using an emergent curriculum on self-image and practice.

A focus group is generally regarded as a group of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given topic or issue. The technique has been

widely used by market researchers and only recently for data collection in educational research (Anderson, 1990). The focus group format was unstructured, but as its facilitator I did have some prompts prepared to initiate dialogue, including sharing narratives with the participants as well as the photographs I'd taken to document their projects. The proceedings of the focus group session were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed as a source of data. The intent of the focus group was to create for a limited time, a community of practice. For the agenda of the focus group meeting, see Appendix E.

Metaphor and image exercise.

Images are one of the ways we make sense of the world (Ryan & Ochsner, 1999). An image is “an idea, mental representation, or conception that has a visual or physical flavor, an experiential meaning, a context or history, and a metaphorical, generative potential” (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 21). A metaphor involves applying a word or phrase to an object or concept, which it does not literally denote, in order to suggest comparison to another object or concept (Hill et al., 2005). Metaphors can be used as a tool for self-reflection. They help teachers to understand their practice when they examine their own metaphors of teaching and learning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

Metaphors and images can be used to capture the essence of teaching in a creative, expressive manner that challenges early childhood educators to be “imaginative, to think, to reflect, and to find deeper meanings and understanding” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 31). In order to encourage openness in the participants to tell their stories, each participant was asked to illustrate and describe his or her image and metaphor of teaching and learning. Becoming conscious of images activated by practice can be a catalyst for professional

growth. Metaphors illustrated in drawing form can assist teachers to conceptualize their images of teaching (Black & Halliwell, 2000).

The participants were given a format for illustrating and articulating image and metaphor during the course of the first interview. During the time between the initial and final interview, the participants completed the exercise and submitted it to the researcher. The prompts used can be found in Appendix D. The metaphor statements varied in length from a brief description to a more detailed account. The illustrations were simple and rudimentary providing a visual for their statements. The individual metaphors of teaching and learning will be described in more detail in Chapter Five.

Black and Halliwell (2000) describe the case of one early childhood educator whose metaphor choice of “teacher as torn down the middle” – happy on one side, sad on the other, provided insight into her feelings of inner conflict associated with the lack of recognition in the field of early childhood education (p. 108). Metaphor and image exercises were chosen as a method of data collection support Eisner’s claim (1991) that alternative forms of data representation have enormous potential for enhancing understanding of complex educational phenomena.

Analyzing documents.

Archaeologists reconstruct life in past times by examining the documents left behind. With modern subjects, documents can corroborate observations and interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). When the participants shared documentation from their project work with children there was a visual representation that supported contextualization of each case. From these visualizations of children focusing on a

particular project topic brought to life the stories shared in the interviews and focus group.

These documents provided both historical and contextual dimensions to observation and interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). They served to enrich and support each of the case studies. While I could not be physically present during every aspect of the implementation of these projects in the classroom, the documents served to illuminate what was being described in the interview process. According to Stake (1995) documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly.

Each participant shared documentation from current and previous projects. These were shared during the focus group and during the classroom visit. The documents were comprised mainly of photographs of children engaged in project related activities, children's art work related to the project topic, webs that illustrated the content and the focus of the project as well as transcriptions of dialogue between teachers and children regarding the topic.

Data Analysis Methods

Data collection and data analysis are activities that take place simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). During each stage of data collection, I engaged in a process of analysis of that data in order to focus and define emerging themes or issues. A simple coding system configured the data using into numbered pages and line numbering. An example of a coded excerpt from the data can be located in Appendix H.

The transcriptions of the data were analyzed throughout the study as well as at the end of the data collection process. Notes were taken in the margins to indicate emerging themes. A system of thematic navigation was incorporated that involved the creation of a

web to define connecting subcategories forming these constructs and salient themes emerged. Merriam (1998) likens this process to an ethnographic analysis model where “cognitive maps” are produced to create a classification system (Merriam, 1998, p. 157). This visual depiction of data is very similar to the webs employed by emergent curriculum teachers as discussed in Chapter Three. Both are akin to the mind maps described by Buzan (1993) which are used to represent words, ideas or tasks arranged around a central key word or idea. The purpose of these classification systems is to lead to hypotheses and explanations (Merriam, 1998). Once the themes were identified the cases were contrasted to illustrate commonalities or individual differences. For instance, each participant had parallel experiences with the adapting of an emergent curriculum but there were differences in their level of satisfaction with the approach.

Narrative analysis.

Seeing the four cases of practice as stories that intertwine with my own narrative of teaching and learning has provided an analytical framework to this dissertation. Carter (1993) argues that “the analysis of story is of central importance to the field of education” (p. 11) especially if educators are going to face issues and make changes.

Stories consist “of events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). Narratives or stories are seen as an especially appropriate form of women’s knowing and expression (Belenky et al., 1986). However, the stories told in this dissertation reflect my values and beliefs as storyteller more than those of my participants since it is my interpretation that shapes the narratives.

“There is no formula or recipe for the best way to analyze the stories we elicit and collect” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 80). Narrative inquiry involves “a process of

collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is the ultimate aim of this research to allow for the voices of the researcher and research participants to be heard.

Case analysis.

Early childhood educators are predominately women who work for relatively little pay in a sector of education held in low regard. This is the context of my research, which is tied to political, social, historical, and economic realities in our society as well as my own personal experience. The questions I have from the experience of being an early childhood educator can be referred to as *etic issues* (Stake, 1995). These are the issues I brought with me into the research process. While these issues evolved and became more defined as the process unfolded they are, nevertheless, issues that belong to me and not my participants.

My current professional position places me in an entirely different context as I am no longer working in a classroom with young children. When I was in a classroom, the issues I struggled with also related to practice and image. By conducting research, I can go beyond these etic issues to focus on the perspective of four others. During the inquiry phase etic issues evolve into *emic issues*. These issues emerge from the people who belong to the case (Stake, 1995). While etic issues come from the outside, emic issues are internal and come from the cases themselves. From the outside I cannot predetermine the issues that will emerge from the participants. The issues that emerged have revealed themselves during the process and are distinct to these particular cases.

The participants who belong to these cases are Layla, Rose, Mary, and Felicia. The names of the teachers are pseudonyms. Each teacher has a story to be told and a

voice to be heard. The cases are presented to depict the experience of emergent curriculum and how it relates to practice and image. I have employed a journey metaphor to the cases for narrative purposes while seeking to understand the experience of moving from one point of practice to another. I have bounded the cases by this criterion to limit the focus, understanding that I could not include an entire depiction of practice.

The Reluctant Traveler: The Road Resisted

I will begin by introducing Layla, an early childhood educator with nearly 20 years of experience. Layla is a college graduate working in a Reggio-inspired child care centre in a midtown public school. Layla was the first to respond to my invitation. I had never met her and had not been to this site since it had developed an emergent curriculum focus. In our first meeting, during the first interview, Layla described her initial reaction to her director's suggestion to adapt an emergent curriculum. She had been adamantly resistant to the idea.

The Spirited Traveler: The Road to Community

My second case study is of Rose, an early childhood educator working with school-age children from 4 to 10. Rose has a college diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree. She has been working at the same child care centre for 8 years. Her responsibilities have increased, as the organization has grown, to include a number of satellite school-age programs, one of which Rose supervises. I first met Rose when I was asked by this centre to present a professional development session on emergent curriculum. Rose's spirit is energizing, and together with her coworkers, a collegial atmosphere of community has emerged.

The Weary Traveler: Roadblock

Following Rose, I will introduce Mary, whose depiction is that of a traveler restricted by the roadblocks of context. She struggled with the implementation of emergent curriculum, finally leaving her position in a Reggio-inspired child care centre in a northwest suburban community. Like Rose, Mary has a college diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. As with Layla, she has been in the field for over 20 years. I did not know Mary prior to extending the invitation to her to participate in this research study.

The Gifted Traveler: The Road to Inspiration

The final case study involves Felicia. Like Rose, Felicia has been in the field for approximately 10 years, less time than the tenure of Layla and Mary. I first met Felicia years earlier in a chance encounter when I invited her to attend a series of workshops I was doing on emergent curriculum. Years later, I had the privilege of seeing Felicia in her classroom implementing an emergent curriculum that was nothing less than inspiring. I invited Felicia to be part of the research.

Cross case analysis.

When these emic issues from the inside are related to the etic issues that come from the outside, they bring forth understanding and the researcher is able to make assertions (Stake, 1995). The issues from the inside are those that belong to the cases. By comparing emic issues as illustrated from each case certain assertions can be made about the impact of emergent curriculum on practice and self-image. The etic issues that I bring to the research constitute the researcher's reality. By comparing etic issues to the emerging emic issues I will be creating narratives of experience for the four participants

and constructing my own story concurrently. By contrasting the four narratives, correlations appear between emergent curriculum and image within the context of my own reality or story. In Chapter Six, the results of the cross case analysis will be illustrated.

Triangulation.

The specific tools used for gathering data within a case study should reinforce validity by means of a variety of techniques, including participant observation, interviewing and, in my research, a focus group. Using multiple sources of data to confirm the emerging findings is called triangulation (Merriam, 1998).

As with the participants who see curriculum as emergent, the process of research has a similar evolving quality. Patterns emerged and intensified in a generative way in the ongoing process of examination of the data. Having had the benefit of multiple data collections and analysis techniques, I triangulated them to strengthen my conclusions. When a pattern from one data type is corroborated by evidence from another, the finding is stronger (Merriam, 1998).

Member checking.

An additional technique that I have employed to further verify findings is “member checking” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Each of research participants examined rough drafts of her case in order to review the material for accuracy and palatability (Stake, 1995). The participants’ suggestions and observations regarding the data have been incorporated into the final depiction of the cases making this process of member checking a further example of triangulation.

Conclusion

In collecting data, I tried to elicit each teacher's story of practice and self-image both prior to engagement in an emergent curriculum and following implementation of one. Throughout this study, in case and cross case analysis, common themes, or recurrent elements have emerge from analysis of the research data.

In the final chapter, a number of the themes that emerged will be illustrated. In the final chapter, themes take on new meaning. They are not the themes of the early childhood educator who plans curriculum based on an artificial premise. They are instead the conceptualized common threads woven throughout these cases which illuminate the phenomenon in question and, rather than limiting potential, will serve to make meaning of early childhood curriculum practice.

Chapter Five:

Case Studies of Four Emerging Teachers

Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning,
observe carefully what children do, and then if you have
understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from
before.

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 82)

Introduction

New (2000b) suggests that inspiration from the success of the citizens of Reggio Emilia to reconceptualize the image of their children can help others to imagine their own potential if “teachers are viewed as capable of both teaching and learning about children” (p. 356). Teaching the “Reggio way” (Hendrick, 2004, p. iii) expands the role of early childhood educators which can extend to their being advocates for more than just a new image of young children—they can be advocates for a new image of teaching and teachers as well. Teachers teaching in this way may find themselves, as Malaguzzi suggests, teaching differently than before. In this new orientation, are the four early childhood educators described in the following cases teaching differently than before? Let’s see.

With descriptive narratives of each individual participant, their setting and situation, the aim is to provide vicarious experience of emergent curriculum practice for other early childhood educators (Merriam, 1998). Donmoyer (1990) suggests that “vicarious experience is less likely to produce defensiveness and resistance to learning” (p. 196). By reading these case studies, other early childhood educators can understand

the experience of teachers who felt the impact of emergent curriculum, giving them the opportunity to reflect upon these stories which may ultimately change their own practice.

Stake (1995) suggests that case studies should be organized to immediately start developing a vicarious experience for the reader; to get the feel of the place and the time. Each of the four case studies presented will begin with an entry vignette developed from my observations in each classroom. Following the entry vignette, each case will proceed with extensive narration to further define the case and the context (Stake, 1995). From the analysis of the data collected, the key issues that developed will be explored in relation to each case. I have used the method of *triangulation* to confirm observations and assertions within each case. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data to verify emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). In this instance, I have used interviewing, a focus group, and participant observation as the foundation of the research protocol. When findings that emerged from the interview process were substantiated during the classroom visit and for the focus group, observations and assertions could be presented with a level of validity. In addition, findings were further validated by each participant through the method of member checking (Stake, 1995).

Stake (1995) recommends member checking as a technique to get the “meanings straight” within a collection of data (p. 56). Member checking is a method utilized to further triangulate the researcher’s observations and interpretations. Stake (1995) suggests that the process of having the case study participant examine rough drafts of writing where their individual actions or words are featured is done when “no further data will be collected” (p. 115). Any suggestions for changes to the writing by the participants

were considered and what appears in this dissertation reflects case studies that had members' approval.

Being immersed in the lives of these four individuals for the period of time covered by the research study provided a connecting, evocative experience that exposed the realities of implementing an emergent curriculum. With Layla, I felt her passion, commitment and energy. At the same time I connected to her calm demeanour reminiscent of someone at ease with her role in life. With Rose, I felt connected to something larger—there was a sense of spirit that permeated our encounters, providing an opportunity to vicariously experience a community of practice. My encounters with Mary were more heartfelt as I could empathize with her frustrations and struggles. My experience with Felicia produced an overwhelming sense of awe, as I felt I was in the presence of an unusually gifted teacher.

My feelings contributed to the cases because I am in fact part of each case. However, the intent of this study is to allow readers to form their own interpretations (Stake, 1995). Under the assumption that no one reality exists and that multiple perspectives are preferable, the intention is to create stories rich in description so that readers can construct their own knowledge from the cases. In this chapter, each case will be presented separately with the subsequent chapter devoted to a cross case discussion.

Case Study Number One: The Reluctant Traveler

When I entered Layla's classroom at 9:35 a.m., the children, ages five and six were on a carpet, their legs crossed, facing Layla and her colleague, Erica. Layla asked whether "anyone has anything they'd like to share." A child said, "I have seventy bucks at home." Layla asked, "How did you get all that money?" The child responded, "four

twenty bucks for Chinese New Year another five for my tooth and five for free.” Layla then said, “Let’s count that.” Aloud she added, “That’s ninety bucks; you better go back and count again.” Another child said, “At Chinese New Year I actually got hundred bucks.”

Still another child added to the dialogue, “I go to gymnastics.” Barely a second passed before Layla turned to Erica, “When you woke up what did you see?” Erica replied, “Fog, it was very, very foggy.” Another child then said, “I have night vision.” Both teachers laughed and Erica asked, “How is fog created?” One child claimed that “fog is created by cloud” and another replied that “maybe by moisture and cloud together.” The first child countered, “That does not create fog.” A third child suggested that “snow makes fog” and another responded, “Maybe because the clouds are gray and it is starting to rain.” Erica then said, “But it is not raining. It looks like the sun is out now. Do you have a thought on that?” A child replied, “It is acting air.”

Layla who had recorded the children’s answers wrote the word “fog” to post on the *Word of the Day* board. Erica referred to a book describing the formation of fog as clouds at the earth’s surface which are created by moisture. Transcriptions of the children’s dialogue recorded on cardboard strips were placed on a table and children began creating signs for the “weather project.”



Figure 1. The weather project.

Context.

At age 40, Layla has had a fairly linear journey as an early childhood educator. On a course chosen early in life she has taken a direct route from college to employment with some time taken to raise her own family. Her ease and self-assuredness point to years of learning to teach. For the past ten of the twenty years since graduating from college, Layla has been working at the same child care centre located within a public school.

Surrounded by low to middle range housing and apartment complexes this is a multi-ethnic community with many recent immigrants from Central Asia. The centre had been established to provide non-profit child care to children from ages 30 months to twelve years. At a time of declining enrolment, a classroom in the local school was converted to accommodate a licensed child care program. In terms of auspice and organizational structure, this centre has always been operated by a volunteer parent board; considered a non-profit, community-based child care program.

The centre now occupies space in two separate areas of the school. The main area, which includes the Director's office, the preschool and junior kindergarten classrooms, is adjacent to the school's kindergarten classroom. Down the hall, Layla and Erica use two small rooms for the senior kindergarten children, a space licensed for the centre's school-age program (ages six and above). Layla considers the space as "really pathetic" with one room only large enough to hold two small tables and a computer station.

Most of the day's events take place in the larger room. At the time of my visit, the visual impact of the vivid project displays defied its dimensions. Incidents of misbehaviour appeared nonexistent as all of the children were involved in weather-related activities. The close quarters did not seem to negatively impact the activities of the room. With the children seemingly content, occupied, and challenged, Layla and Erica confidently moved through the rhythm of the morning, reacting to emerging questions and ideas.

Background.

Layla describes herself as an unmotivated high school student who did not consider university as a future path. Layla opted for a two-year college program for early childhood education. A cousin who preceded her by a year in the program was the motivation for Layla to follow this career path. Since graduating twenty years ago, Layla has learned through experience. Her accounts of her practice reflect additional learning beyond the two-year diploma.

When Layla describes the banter between two children, she explains, "You don't want to discourage that level of discourse." Recalling the experience of working with the former Director, whom she describes as "more evolved," she uses the term "absolute

catharsis.” Layla’s vocabulary seems to indicate insights gained from reflection on experience. They seem indicative of pedagogical understanding of the teaching process.

Experience and dialogue with others appear to be the catalyst for Layla’s development. She claims not to enjoy reading and only occasionally attends professional development sessions. Layla finds most of the professional development offerings not relevant to her needs as “a seasoned” teacher. Her professional knowledge emanates from practice. Further formal education is not a consideration partly due to her need to work full-time and to continue the tenuous balancing act between work and family.

Response to the study.

Layla was the first to respond to the invitation to participate in this research study. Initially, I spoke to the program’s Director, who suggested Layla, describing her as being at point in her career where she wanted to share lessons learned about the Reggio philosophy and its impact on practice. I had not previously met Layla.

My first impressions of Layla were that she had an eagerness and a desire to dialogue with others on similar journeys. She was particularly enthusiastic about sharing her stories. Based on a suggestion from Layla, a focus group session was added to the research protocol to facilitate discussion between the participants. Amid anecdotes of the weather and other projects, Layla offered support and recognition to the stories of others. She prompted others to elaborate their stories, encouraged those who appeared reluctant and responded enthusiastically to their narratives.

Past practices.

When Layla graduated from college and began working in the field she utilized a theme approach and did so without question. “You picked your theme without any regard

for the kid's interests. You usually picked all your themes by September and it was based on what you enjoyed." At the time, according to Layla, she was not aware of an alternative approach to curriculum planning.

Layla was content with this approach. She found pre-planning compatible with a need to be organized. Layla became an ardent "devotee of themes" and their corresponding activities. "I had my cut outs in little envelopes." Resistant to change her practice, she had become aligned with this common framework of using a weekly theme to define curriculum. During the focus group session, Layla reflected on the time when she was asked to discontinue the theme approach to focus on emergent curriculum.

Three years ago I had a hard time knowing that we were going to have Christmas but not make paper bag Santas' with the cut out beard. We were not going to make reindeer hats with the antlers. We were not going to make angels out of toilet paper rolls with doilies. I thought "what is this world coming to?"

Introduction to emergent curriculum.

Six years earlier Layla's director visited a Reggio Emilia inspired child care program attached to a community college. Upon returning, the pronouncement was made that the curriculum, the environment, and the philosophy at the child care centre would change towards the direction taken by the college's program. The process of change was gradual. Beginning with the environment, commercial toys were replaced with loose materials resplendent with child-initiated possibilities. Natural items, such as stones, sticks, shells, and other found materials were made available to the children to use, combine, and create their own inventions.

Initially resistant to the study of the philosophy, Layla slowly became transformed in her teaching practices. Recognizing that adaptation was a condition of her

employment, Layla reluctantly agreed to try emergent curriculum. Gradually preschool icons or objects used with uncritical devotion were removed. First to go were precut theme- related shapes and worksheets with math or language paper and pencil activities such as connecting the dots. When the staff realized that the use of the calendar also represented an attachment to the past, this ritualized practice was also discontinued. The children were memorizing rather than internalizing calendar concepts and when reflected on by staff led to the practice's demise. Through these years of trial and error, Layla absorbed the philosophy of a curriculum that naturally unfolds. With critical reflection, Layla was able to change her practice.

Current practices.

Now no longer a devotee of themes Layla realizes their creative limitations. Recalling her earlier commitment to themes Layla now states, "I cannot comprehend using anything precut." When children are directed in their art, "no, no, no – this has to go there – the glue has to go here," they "learn very little." Project work is now the focus of the curriculum, and is the vehicle that directs the emerging curriculum. To decide on a topic, Layla and Erica consider child and adult interests. Once chosen, Layla and Erica develop a web or schematic map, creating connecting categories and subcategories related to the specific topic. A meeting with the children is called, the topic announced, and a discussion follows to ascertain and document prior knowledge.

The topic of weather emerged as a project from Erica's fascination with seasonal changes and unpredictable forecasts. When the children had returned from winter break to a snow-filled playground, the teachers provoked interest with weather-related resources. Daily newspaper discussions became a morning ritual as the weather page was

analyzed by the group. At the project's onset, Layla and Erica inform parents of the topic as the intended unit of study for subsequent weeks or months. The exact length of the project depends on whether the children's interest can be maintained. In cooperation and collaboration with the other teaching staff and parents, related resources are collected to sustain interest over time.



Figure 2. A child's two-dimensional representation of a barometer.



Figure 3. The classroom barometer.

During meeting time, the teachers initiate topic-related dialogue encouraging participation and documenting responses. With key words and phrases printed for the children and postings made to the *Word of the Day*, connecting pre-planned activities follow. On the day of my visit, the word of the day was “fog.” The activities that followed were not completely child-initiated. Erica had transcribed the children's ideas

about fog on separate strips of paper. Each child was encouraged to create a weather poster which would include their own recorded words.

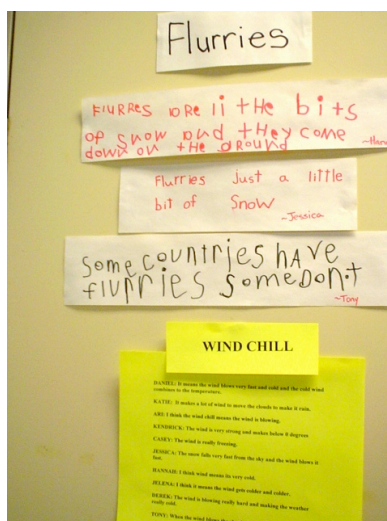


Figure 4. Wind chill and flurries.

In these activities, the teachers provided direction in approach more connected to a Vygotskian perspective of scaffolding rather than a Piagetian environmental focus. Rather than prescribe to a child-directed curriculum, Layla and Erica saw their role as being accountable for children's learning. At every opportunity, the teachers looked for a "teachable moment" to take learning to the next level, crossing the zone of proximal development. Children are asked about their thoughts, ideas and predictions. Their words were validated when made visible in the project displays.



Figure 5. The weather project documentation and display.

When a parent asks the inevitable, “what is my child learning?” Layla explains that she points to the documentation indicating in detail the displayed evidence of learning. The weather project documentation was extensive, reflecting months of investigation. Previous “words of the day” were on display and the children could recall their discussions about hurricanes, tornados, and hailstones. The children had created drawings of the four seasons with their explanations recorded below. Underneath one depiction of a life cycle of a tree, one child states “the seasons change because the earth is tilting and sometimes it is closer to the sun and sometimes it is farther to the sun.” Books, barometers, and thermometers were on display beside children’s three dimensional representations of weather vanes. Interest in this topic was constantly renewed by changing weather conditions. “Every time interest seemed to wane, mother nature intervened.” The resources collected covered every inch of wall space and ranged from diagrams and models to children’s images of various weather conditions.



Figure 6. The seasons change because they have to blow away.

Challenges.

When the Director of the centre first introduced the concepts of emergent curriculum during a staff meeting, she expected Layla to adopt this Reggio-inspired philosophy that included project work. Very reluctant to let go of themes, Layla felt that the approach was forced upon her and she was “brought into it kicking and screaming.” During the focus group she explained the challenge.

We have been slowly implementing emergent curriculum for about six years. It has been slow. I fully admit I was a naysayer. I didn't like it. I didn't see it until I really started doing it and I turned myself around from being almost in tears thinking about it. I used to get a terrible feeling in my gut. I couldn't figure out what I would do if I couldn't plan ahead and write things down.

After reflection, Layla realized that she felt vulnerable when she couldn't plan weeks or months in advance. Layla understands that, for her, it was an issue of control; she wanted control of the curriculum. It appears from Layla's reflections that control continues to be a central issue in her practice. She questions whether to pre-plan the activities that follow the daily meeting time or “take another step towards making the

program more theirs” Subsequently she started to “simply making things available” and make suggestions to the children. Upon further reflection, Layla decided that she needs to maintain a level of control having felt “lazy” and less passionate about what she was doing.

Control extends from the curriculum to children’s behaviour. Layla has high expectations for the children to behave. Children are expected to wait their turns during group time, to sit relatively still, and to share materials. Layla claims that once the rules are established disruptions to the regular classroom routine are not an issue. In addition, Layla maintains that emergent curriculum impacts children’s behaviour. According to Layla, with the children involved in project work there is no reason for the boredom that precedes disruptions.

They can do virtually anything they want to do, up to a certain point. We are very clear about what that point is. We spend time in September setting those limits and once we are done, the sky is the limit for the rest of the year. We do not have to get angry, yell, and nag. It isn’t necessary. They know.

Collaborators.

Layla is not reticent to give credit to her coworkers and supervisor for her success with emergent curriculum. Layla feels that with encouragement from a “supportive director” and a “wonderful partner,” she has been able to evolve into a self-proclaimed “emergent curriculum ambassador.” According to Layla, this collaborative environment is producing “the best curriculum we’ve ever had.” Now, Layla sees her reliance on themes with their corresponding worksheets and precuts as “almost ridiculous.”

With each room in this centre focused on different projects, collaboration is fundamental to success. Teachers support each other in the various investigations being

undertaken. With an absence of competitiveness they show pride in each other's accomplishments. Layla's initial reluctance to change "what was working" is completely dissipated. Initially, she was a verbal opponent of the top-down initiative from the Director to the staff and did not feel a sense of ownership or urgency to change. While she began as a reluctant traveler on the journey, she now strides confidently forward. In retrospect, Layla sees the change as being instrumental in "keeping me in the field." A profound fundamental shift took place for Layla and emergent curriculum became the defining aspect of her practice.

Parents.

"Our parents are no different than other parents; some are more supportive than others." Without academic-focused worksheets, Layla at times has to convince parents that the program is based on learning through play, taking parents "right into the classroom, to show them the incredible things we do."

Sometimes emergent does not seem skills-based and parents want to know that their children are learning certain things. I am in their face about it because they do not understand, as I did not understand in the beginning.

In explaining the benefits of an emergent curriculum, Layla will use the traditional theme approach as a comparison. When Layla shows parents the children's work, she points out the imagination, creativity, learning, and the obvious passion that is documented in the classroom displays. As Layla says, "they don't show this kind of passion when they are doing worksheets or talking about the colour red."

Self-image.

Repeatedly during the interviews, Layla refers to the image others have of the early childhood education teacher. According to Layla, 10% of parents see ECEs as

teachers, the rest see them as babysitters. She “hates” how her job is labelled by others and is embarrassed at times to discuss what she does with those on the “outside” including a number of her friends who are teachers in the school system.

Layla reports that the relationship with the teachers in the adjoining school is cooperative and friendly but there is an underlying perception of being undervalued. When she was creating a display in the school foyer of drawings of sound waves, plastercine brains, and three-dimensional ear sculptures from the previous “music project,” Layla was approached by a teacher from the school. Layla recalls her saying “you guys should be teachers, you are so creative.” Layla countered, “We are teachers.”

Layla is no longer reluctant to take a strong position in support of an emergent curriculum; its impact on her has been profound—it has changed her self-image. She is more confident in articulating professional knowledge and demonstrating the impact of the curriculum on children’s learning. In turn, she has become more secure with her position as an early childhood educator even with her lingering feelings of being undervalued.

Metaphor of teaching.

To Layla, her work with children has the metaphorical qualities of an orchestra. “We come together. We arrange, we rewrite, and we practice. We make beautiful music.” One of the stories that Layla enthusiastically shared was that of the “music project.” Layla began to play the guitar at age 40 and is passionate about her new hobby.

When she brought the guitar to the classroom, she asked the children; “where does the music come from.” The response was “from the hole.” Two weeks later, after investigating the topic with the children, the guitar was brought back. Children were able

to say “the strings vibrate and that makes the air vibrate and then it goes into your eardrum and then it goes into your cochlear and into your brain.” Layla described this moment as memorable, bringing tears to her eyes because she “could see the learning happening.” The children had become “passionate” about the topic and Layla felt that her passion had been their inspiration.

I love my guitar like a child. I can’t play it very well (yet) but I’m getting better. When I play for the children, I share a little bit of music with them, but more so, a little bit of myself. I play for them, and I play for me. Perhaps one child takes what I give, and gives me back a drum roll. Another child adds the violin, and so on. The children all share the music that is in them. Some just noodle along, some are accomplished musicians already.

Emerging directions.

During the focus group session, Layla told the others that, “Sometimes I feel that maintaining control is at the expense of a freer forum.” The issues of power and control are central issues in her teaching, and Layla claims she is “not well versed in philosophy” and “not much of a reader.” She does state, however, that the children are “not empty vessels.”

They come to us with a whole wealth of knowledge that we have to listen to. Some people can quote verses from books that I don’t understand. I wish I could rhyme off quotes from Malaguzzi but I can’t.

Layla is building her own theories, continually asking meaningful questions and evaluating professional competence. Using the emergent curriculum practice of documentation, she collects data as a teacher researcher engaged in a process of research in action. She has grown from a position of feeling “insecure and inferior” where she did not value her own ideas to a new level of confidence. In describing her reaction to being involved in a research study she explained that:

It makes you pumped. Sometimes I am surprised at what I say, and I say to myself, I am good. I am alright. It does inspire you. It is nice to know what other people are doing. I found it really, really valuable.

Although Layla seems hesitant to define herself in terms of a theoretical orientation, she is clearly able to theorize. She candidly proclaims that she will not go back to school to get a degree even though she believes that raising the academic standards of early childhood educators would get the “message out there that we are not babysitters.”

In the future, Layla sees herself as continuing in her present capacity until she has the means to retire. While she would “love to work in the college and teach other ECEs” she is adamant about maintaining a balance between her professional and personal life. “I have no intention of going back to school unless it would be dead easy.”

Layla understands that it is possible to become consumed by an emergent curriculum. With marriage, a family, a home, and a mortgage, a healthy balance is necessary. She describes a time when:

A couple of years ago I was in that balancing act between family and work. I was putting a lot more weight on my work; really wanting to learn more and become more professional. Emergent curriculum was affecting the balance. Now I am putting more time in myself and my family.

Emergent curriculum requires time and commitment. While it is an exciting alternative to the potential boredom of the theme approach, the time needed for documentation and display in an emergent curriculum can be significant. With adequate preparation time and a collaborative environment, Layla has been able to meet the challenge to consistently maintain a classroom of project displays.

Advice to others.

Layla's cautionary message for others is to "take it slow." Based on her experience, she urges others to try the approach and is a willing mentor to novice teachers. She can't imagine ever again using the theme approach again and feels that the inspiring emergent curriculum from Reggio has been instrumental in keeping her in the classroom. "I don't know what I would be doing, if it wasn't for emergent curriculum."

Layla "still in the trenches," has been working directly with children for twenty years. For Layla this approach is responsible for increased feelings of worth. "I would absolutely, unequivocally recommend Reggio Emilia and emergent curriculum for all early childhood educators." For Layla it has produced a high level of job satisfaction and she sees herself happily continuing for the next five years within the same centre working with the same philosophical orientation.

Conclusion

Many months after the time of our first meeting, I had the opportunity to see and speak to Layla again. She continued to implement a Reggio inspired curriculum with her partner, Erica. After originally resisting the road before her, Layla now embraces the change and considers herself a trailblazer.

Now that I have personally seen the schools of Reggio Emilia, Layla represents a true embodiment of the philosophy and a testimony to the positive impact of the approach on practice. As Layla continues forging ahead on the professional road, the vehicle that propels this confident and experienced educator is emergent curriculum. It has come to be the defining aspect of her practice.

Case Study Number Two: The Spirited Traveler

The busy, double classroom in which I entered at the end of the school day represents a different program than observed at Layla's centre. In the classroom to the left, the children of kindergarten age (ages four and five) were at play. In the classroom I entered, older children (six-to-ten-year-olds) gathered having just arrived after a full day of regular school. Both classrooms are part of the before and after school program that Rose supervises. Each room functions as a kindergarten classroom during the day and is similar in layout and design. The children who attend, do so only before the regular school day begins and then again, after the end of normal school hours.

While I was there, the children were loudly engaged in various pursuits. Rose asked a number of children "Did you finish your homework?" Some responded positively to say that they had finished or did not have homework while a few children retrieved their workbooks from their bags. Meanwhile, three boys were sprawled on the carpet playing cards and a few girls were busy creating at a table filled with open-ended art supplies.

Two tables were set aside for project work. At one, a large plastic snake lay beside a multitude of books on the topic. At another, a bin of water was filled with pebbles and small plastic snakes. One boy spun the large snake around in his hand while another turned the pages in the books. The water bin was full of busy hands. As the boys moved the plastic snakes about they engaged in a dialogue of pretend play involving snake hunting; I heard statements like "the snake is slithering away from the great snake hunter!"



Figure 7. All hands on snakes.

Context.

Rose is single, in her mid-thirties, has been in the field for eight years, and has been employed predominately with the same agency. This community-based organization has four before- and after-school satellites in neighbouring schools. When Rose began her journey, early childhood education was not her original destination; she had wanted to be a grade school teacher. While the road had been re-routed, the path ahead has remained straightforward as there has been a consistency to her employment.

The heart of this organization is a child care centre located in a suburban school. There are two classrooms, one with preschool children, age's two-and-a-half to three and the other with children ages four and five. In addition, the centre shares space in the building for a before and after school program of approximately 60 children. The community is established, having been developed over two decades ago. It is characterized as mostly middle class and ethnically diverse.

Like Layla's centre, this is a non-profit organization managed by a board of parents, school personnel, and community members. While there is cohesiveness between

the various levels of the organizational structure, previous board and staff relationships have been tenuous. Conflicts over wages and working conditions led to unionization and increasingly difficult relations between staff and management. Rose and a few other teachers eventually organized a vote to deunionize. Since that time, with a new management team, relations have improved dramatically.

The organization has since expanded its services, focusing on philanthropic work with northern native communities. Bi-annual clothing and toy drives have resulted in media recognition, awards, and grants. Rose believes that these initiatives have contributed to a “community feel” to the organization. This, along with a commitment to an emergent curriculum, has inspired teachers, children and families.

Approximately, four years prior to the time of my visit, the centre’s s recognized Rose’s strengths and need for a challenge. The motivation for expansion of satellite school age programs was due, in part, to the centre’s desire to give Rose additional responsibilities within the organization. The school age program that Rose supervises is housed in a recently constructed school in a growing middle class community of new homes a few kilometres to the north.

While the space utilized for the program is shared by the school’s kindergarten classes during regular school hours, the walls of both rooms represent the kindergarten teacher’s curriculum. This can be construed as a visual message as to whose classroom this is. The front entrance of the double classrooms and the common foyer leading to the outside playground in the rear is where the snake project documentation becomes visible. The walls are covered with brightly coloured representations that are both two-

dimensional and three-dimensional. In addition, portable display boards document representations from previous projects.



Figure 8. Snake project documentation and display.

Background.

After high school, Rose attended university, studying French and Italian. It was her intent to continue her studies at a faculty of education but at the time, acceptance into such a program appeared unlikely. After a few years of working in an unrelated field, Rose felt that obtaining an early childhood education diploma would increase chances of acceptance into a teacher education program.

After graduation, with acceptance still not a reality, Rose found work as an early childhood educator. Rose is still considering completing a teacher credentialing program but at this time Rose has no immediate plans. However, in order to be economically self-sufficient, she maintains a second job, in the evenings and weekends.

Rose finds time to take credit and non-credit courses related to curriculum and children with exceptionalities. She has become certified with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario and is involved in the local branch of the provincial association in the capacity of co-president. In this role, she promotes the field and

volunteers her time to facilitate professional development opportunities for other early childhood educators.

Response to the study.

I became acquainted with Rose when I was the child care coordinator for the local school district. I have watched the organization rise from the depths of discord, and have found it to be an inspiring story to follow as a community spirit has emerged. Emergent curriculum was part of a multi-pronged strategy to rebuild this centre, which has become only one of a dozen programs that I am aware of utilizing the approach in the Greater Toronto Area. It was to these programs that I issued an invitation to participate in the research study.

When Rose was suggested as a research candidate, I was eager for her to join the process having had a positive past relationship with her. Rose was relaxed and forthcoming in sharing her experiences with emergent curriculum. During the focus group session her easygoing attitude and generous spirit helped to create a comfortable atmosphere which encouraged the telling of project stories.

Past practices.

Rose describes past curriculum practices as being theme-oriented. On one hand, the practice provided consistency and on the other, boredom. "It was repetitive; basically every year was the same. You just take last year's plans and you do the same." For Rose, the predictability element was "the easy thing about themes."

As the teacher you have to learn basically the same thing. By the third year, you are just going back on what you have already learned. There is no next step unless the children are pushing to go to the next step but by the end of the week your theme is done even if the children want to know more.

To implement the theme-based curriculum, the centre focused on art activities also known in the field as *crafts*, *creatives*, or *arts and crafts*. The activities that were presented represented a step-by-step teacher-initiated and directed process often involving painting or gluing on a representation of an adult's conception of the theme. In other words, a "cut out" or precut of whatever the week's focus was: a turkey for Thanksgiving, a ghost for Halloween, a tree for Christmas, a shamrock for St. Patrick's Day. With the top-down direction from her supervisors to move to an emergent curriculum, Rose was faced with cognitive dissonance. She had two choices, leave the centre or accommodate the new information and change her practice. As Rose is an amiable colleague, who prides herself on working with others, her resistance slowly dissipated.

During the focus group session, Rose laughed in recalling her earlier reliance on themes. "I miss my cutouts! I had the most beautiful bulletin boards." She recognized the visual uniformity that a board of same-sized butterflies produces and, at the same time, understood the limitations that themes presented to a meaningful curriculum. For Rose when you give children a cutout of a squirrel or a flower you are presenting "only your view of what something looks like."

Introduction to emergent curriculum.

Rose and her colleagues were initially resistant to emergent curriculum. She describes the Director's insistence on change as "a losing battle." Her partner at the time was the strongest resistor, "she loved her worksheets – something to show the parents at the end of the week." While acknowledging that it was "very tough to switch over," Rose felt that the team spirit aided implementation. "You have to have everyone on board be

willing to learn. It is not something that can happen overnight. It didn't happen for us that way."

Guided by the work of Chard and Katz (1989) Rose read some literature, visited other centres, and attended workshops before trying her first project. The "bagel project" emerged from the children's fascination with dough. As the children visited the local bagel bakery, experimented with yeast, baked their own bagels, and created artistic representations, Rose became convinced that emergent curriculum had been the right choice.

It had all started with pizza dough and ended with children knowing what yeast was and how it worked after we visited a bagel bakery. The teachers and the children filled the place and there was no room for anyone else. The children made their own bagels with their favourite toppings. We took them back to the centre and the children got to eat their own bagels.

Current practices.

With school-age children, Rose and her colleagues have established a particular process for project work. A display of resource books is incorporated into the classroom and available daily. Possible topics often emerge from the children's encounters with these books. A meeting is held to discuss possible topics. Once a decision is made with the children, activities related to the project are available daily. With the time constraints of a before- and after-school program, the intrusion of homework, and the real need of these children just to play and socialize, maintaining interest is a challenge. For Rose, the limitless potential for learning makes it worth the extra effort.

With emergent curriculum, you never know everything. You are continuously learning with the children. If they are interested in a topic and you don't know all the information there is you need to be willing to do the research with them. You get to learn along with the children.

Rose was excited during the focus group to share the documentation binder created from a previous project on the Olympics. As the others scanned the pages filled with photos, schematic curriculum webs, charts, and artistic representations, Rose appeared proud as they expressed their admiration for the comprehensive documentation. Rose described the experience of the “Olympic project” to the others:

We had opening ceremonies, we lit the torch and we had a parade. Everyone carried their flags and wore their colours. The children worked on medals that we gave out after they played the games. They decided which games to play. We played music and put the torch out. After four months it came to an end only because it was the end of the year.

In the case of the Olympic project, the teachers selected the topic beforehand based on the needs of that particular group of children; the teachers had specific outcomes in mind.

Our main goal was to have the children enjoy playing sports. It started when we were playing sports and the children would cry when they would lose. There was a lot of anger, a lot of hostility. By the end of the project the children were able to say “you played a good game.” There were no more tears, there was no more anger.



Figure 9. The Olympic project display board.

When Rose speaks of challenges she refers mostly to those which are not program related, but field related. “The government needs to understand that they need to keep giving money to child care.” Rose feels that early childhood educators should be paid a wage worthy of the jobs they do, one that would establish them as professionals in the eyes of others. Rose is cautiously optimistic about the pending federal and provincial initiatives that would provide an increased level of funding for the field.

Collaborators.

Compared to her peers at other centres, Rose considers herself unique. “We do have it easy here. There are a lot of centres that don’t have preparation time. They don’t have the freedom to work on documentation.” The Directors here hire extra teaching staff “so that documentation can be done.” In addition there is a weekly programming meeting. “Without those things, you would have to do this on your own time. It affects how you feel about your job because you are bringing too much work home.”

Emergent curriculum works within this organization because of the high level of collaboration. There is a commitment to support the teachers’ work with emergent curriculum. Rose acknowledges and appreciates this support as management has set the stage for collaboration, having an open door policy that invites parents, children, and staff to dialogue. For Rose, this is an unusual situation. She feels most other programs do not operate in such a collaborative way.

Parents.

When Rose and her colleagues switched from a traditional thematic approach to emergent curriculum they were anxious about the reactions of parents. Some parents have had difficulty with the change. Considering that most parents were raised in a traditional

educational model, the opposition was not surprising. Parents verbalized their fear that that their children would not succeed academically because they were not being taught in a familiar and traditional manner. It is Rose's experience that parents see a connection between the traditional theme approach and an academic orientation.

To counter the opposition, the teachers have become well versed in the philosophical foundation of the curriculum. They are encouraged by the Directors to be open and to engage in conversations with parents. In addition, each parent receives a package that discusses emergent curriculum in detail. Upon registration, parents are given a tour of the centre, where they see the documentation displays used as evidence of the children's learning and knowledge acquisition.

Parent opposition is not unexpected and the centre has instituted a curriculum night at the beginning of each school year. After the first curriculum presentation, Rose feels that "a lot of the parents are much more comfortable." They see the value in the curriculum and are supportive of the teachers. Others though seem disinterested and dismissive. "They consider us as babysitters. They come in they drop off their kids, they pick them up. They seem miserable. They don't want to talk to you."

Self-Image.

Rose is "very satisfied with emergent curriculum" suggesting that it counters the boredom that comes with themes. "I would wake up every morning and say today is another day; what is the theme this week." Rose has become a teacher with a solid self-image. Before emergent curriculum, Rose was a lackadaisical teacher bored with the daily repetition of themes. Now she credits emergent curriculum with impacting a transformation to an enthusiastic teacher proud of her program and herself.

However, she is concerned by the image others have. “People don’t understand that children are beginning their education with us. We should be valued but unfortunately we are not valued. We are not paid enough.” Compared to the kindergarten teachers with whom she shares space, Rose does not feel herself as lesser than them. “I can see the handouts, you know follow the lines. The teachers will tell the children that they are colouring outside the lines and that Mommy is not going to like it.” Rose feels that the practice of the kindergarten teachers is regimented. “This is what we have to get done and the children follow.” In comparison “we are a lot more open. We allow them to learn at their own pace. We allow them to learn what they are interested in.” Instead of taking an inferior posture, Rose presents herself as an equal partner and feels that the kindergarten teachers “respect us.”

Metaphor of teaching.

Rose sees the teacher as “being like the sun with the ground as the community and the flower as the child. Without the sun, the flower would not bloom. Without the soil, the flower would not grow. The metaphor states an ecological perspective that acknowledges relationships. The teacher’s role in this representation is essential as the sun which permeates the warmth that generates growth and development.

At Rose’s centre, efforts are made to ensure positive relationships with all the community partners, including school personnel and parents. The recognition of community goes beyond the neighbourhood to a broader context. The children are active partners in the clothing and toy drives for communities in need of support which has generated the attention of the local media, native Canadian leaders and politicians.

Emerging directions.

Rose has no immediate plans to leave the centre as she sees continued potential for advancement. She continues to consider attending a faculty of education but at this time Rose claims, “I am happy where I am. I enjoy the people I work with. I enjoy the children and the curriculum.”

Rose sees emergent curriculum as being instrumental in her growth as an early childhood educator. However, when asked to share her theories of curriculum she has difficulty articulating them. She is unable to explain how theory implicates her practice, expressing herself most often in practical terms. With her commitment to professional development, Rose may eventually see praxis as her scaffold’s next rung. Professional development could lead to an articulated praxis.

Advice to others.

While an advocate for emergent curriculum and project-based learning, Rose would caution others to take it slowly when transitioning away from a theme-based approach. Rose feels that it would be preferable if themes were never used but with their predominance this would be unlikely. According to Rose, to move away from the theme approach, early childhood educators need to make a commitment to change.

If Rose’s story is considered as testimony to the impact of emergent curriculum, then this change can be considered worthwhile. The change in Rose and in the other teachers in the centre has brought them into a collaborative community. The children have responded and according to Rose, the projects have been effective for learning—both children and adults learn with an emergent curriculum. Knowledge is acquired by all as project topics are investigated and discoveries are made. It is this learning that

motivates teachers and contributes to their elevated feelings of self-worth. When the learning has become visible for the children and for Rose, when “you can see the learning,” she has a corresponding feeling of confidence.

Conclusion

Since the completion of the research portion of this dissertation, I have on occasion had the opportunity to see Rose. She is still implementing an emergent curriculum within a collaborative environment. She continues to take a leadership role within the organization, the field, and community. Her aspirations to attend a faculty of education are not forgotten but are still on hold. She is contemplating pursuing a part-time job teaching early childhood education at the local community college.

As a traveler on a journey, the road Rose has taken was re-routed from its original course but she seems comfortable with the direction she has followed. Being in the company of other like-minded travelers appears to have been a propelling force for Rose. Rose’s high energy, enthusiasm, and spirit for the journey indicate a continued commitment to moving down the path of emergent curriculum. She makes a point to lend support to others to venture forward. This collaborative force counters the prevailing images that undervalue the work. This is not a group of glorified babysitters but a community committed to collaboration.

Case Study Number Three: The Weary Traveler

In Mary’s classroom at 9:30 in the morning, I struggled to record observations because so much appeared to be happening simultaneously. There was a beautiful ambience created with fabric, colour, and natural materials. The use of ceramic tile and carpet, in soft colours, provided an atmosphere not usually associated with child care.

There was a discernable absence of primary coloured, plastic, and commercial furnishings and equipment. Even with the softness of the décor the classroom did not suggest tranquility.

The children moved around the room constantly, engaged in conversation with each other and the teachers with ease and frequency. They were in constant motion; crawling, rolling, flopping, walking, standing up, and sitting down. At 9:40 a.m. Mary called the children to the carpet for a meeting. After some confusion, the children gathered and Mary announced, “Let’s get started. I see a lot of my friends brought things to share with us.” Various children presented objects and were encouraged to “tell us about it.” When one child hands Mary a book to read many of the children had difficulty sitting still. Mary reminded the children that “we are listening now” and to “stay on your bottom.”

A couple of children leave the carpet and appear to be searching. Two return with pieces of paper and one says “this is my picture, I drew it here.” Another brings a small scrap, calling it a snake. Mary acknowledges the children then shifts attention to Franca, the other teacher in the room. Giving prompts and asking questions, Franca begins a discussion about “words that start with E.” After a few more restless minutes the children are given options of activities in which to participate, reflecting the current project topic of animals.

There is a Reggio-inspired light table with animal forms for the children to trace. There is a table with animal cookie cutters and modeling clay, another with animal math activities. A number of children gather at the carpet to play with large plastic animals. One child sorts the animals into categories of farm animals and those found in Africa.

Another child insists on having all the animals resembling those found in the movie *The Lion King*. The children are in conflict, struggling over possession of the plastic animals, with those from the movie being a sought-after commodity. Mary is in constant demand, redirecting behaviour and responding to the children in an effort to promote learning.



Figure 11. Animals of the jungle.

Context.

Mary, who is in her early forties, has been in the field for nineteen years. Since becoming an early childhood educator she has had a spiralling journey of starts and stops. She has held various positions, worked in a variety of settings and has taken time to have her own children. For the first time in her career, Mary finds herself challenged by an unfamiliar philosophy.

There are four other classrooms in this privately owned centre which is housed in a strip mall in a suburban community, dense with every conceivable retail and restaurant chain. The area, which is northwest of the city, is growing, teeming with constructions sites. In one of the four classrooms, there are six infants. In another classroom, 15 toddlers (ages 18 months to 2 1/2 years) spend their days. There are two rooms with

preschool age children (2 1/2 to 3 1/2 years) and in the fifth classroom Mary supervises the four and five year old children.

In design and promotional literature used for marketing, the centre acknowledges the work of the children, teachers, and community of Reggio Emilia. The influence of Reggio is very apparent in the physical space. The most obvious homage to the schools of Reggio Emilia is the centre's "piazza" area which is in the centre of the classrooms. While the environment does emulate the schools of Reggio Emilia, on close examination, adherence to the other principles of Reggio are questionable.

Background.

Mary has a four year degree in psychology from a local university. In her second year she applied to a joint program which would combine her psychology degree with a diploma in early childhood education from a community college. After four years she graduated with a Bachelor's degree and an early childhood education diploma. After a number of years, Mary found work as a special needs educational assistant with the school district and while enjoying the experience, she longed once again to have her "own classroom."

Her next position at a private nursery school had a "real nice atmosphere" and the "kids were really sweet," it was "just a good feeling centre." After taking time off following the birth of her first child, Mary's took a position as assistant Director at a child care centre. Here she was able to combine working in the classroom with administrative work. "I liked being in the classroom with the kids; I think that is my favourite part. But it was nice at the end of the morning to be in the office."

Following the birth of her second child, Mary returned to work on a part-time basis. Mary's daughter had "some special needs" and finding the time to take care of her child's medical situation proved "stressful."

That is when I got into supply teaching with the separate school district. It allows you flexibility with other priorities. It put me in the classroom. Then my daughter didn't need me quite as much, her appointments slowed down and this opportunity came up.

Response to the study.

I was aware that Mary's centre was Reggio-inspired and sent an invitation to the Director to participate in the study. I received a call from one of the Directors who recommended Mary as a candidate. I had met Mary during a previous visit to the centre and felt her involvement would lend an interesting perspective to the case studies, as she had no prior experience with the Reggio approach.

During the interviews and focus group, Mary's lack of experience was evident as she seemed reserved and unsure in her responses. Articulating conflicting feelings associated with the merging of old and new ideas, Mary was at a critical juncture in her journey. She had reached a pivotal point on her journey, but the road ahead for Mary was strewn with obstacles that would impede progress.

Past practices.

Mary describes her past practice as formatted weekly and "theme-based" with "a lot more structure." The teacher directed the curriculum and children were passive recipients of the weekly theme. This is what we are doing today, this is what we are doing tomorrow, and this is what we are doing next week." Mary's practice included the use of worksheets for the children's cognitive learning and often used shapes cut into a representation of the weekly theme as the foundation of her art curriculum.

Mary was satisfied with this theme-based practice and implemented themes without question. Themes dominated the curriculum in all her various past work settings including the nursery school, the child care centre and the kindergarten class. For Mary themes worked, giving sense and structure to her day and were consistent with parent expectations for school readiness.

Introduction to emergent curriculum.

Mary was introduced to emergent curriculum during her initial job interview. This curriculum was “all new” to Mary having not having heard of Reggio Emilia before the interview. She had not seen other forms of curriculum practiced other than theme-based planning. According to Mary, if she had not been hired she would probably be working somewhere else doing themes. “I came in not very familiar with the Reggio approach. I told them at the interview that I did not have that background.” Mary’s experience was considered an asset and she was immediately hired.

Feeling energized by the new approach, Mary accepted the position replacing a teacher who had resigned. “I found the classroom chaotic. I found the children not listening. They were all over the place. I didn’t see a lot of self-discipline. I didn’t realize what a challenge it would be.” Dealing with the children’s behaviour that was socially inappropriate while trying to learn and absorb a new philosophy herself proved to be “a little overwhelming.”

With her energy focused on behavioural issues, Mary spent less time on the curriculum. Mary concentrated on reinforcing appropriate behaviour and redirecting the inappropriate, “hitting, spitting and using foul language.” Over time, when the room began to settle, Mary was told by the two Directors to incorporate more project-based

curriculum. At the same time, parents were voicing concern. They “wanted something more structured and academic.” Mary responded by adding stricter time frames to the day and less choice for the children. The day became more organized. Children were encouraged to finish academic tasks before engaging in free play. “When they go into grade one they are not going to be able to do what they want when they want. They need to have the opportunity to do things at the appropriate time. We have to try to find a balance. As we continue we will be able to incorporate more Reggio.”

In the interviews and focus group session, Mary exhibited concern about the Reggio approach and working with projects. She did not know “how far to go” not knowing exactly what it means to “do Reggio.”

I am not comfortable with everything I am hearing about Reggio. I haven't seen it in action. I haven't seen a Reggio teacher teach. I haven't been in a Reggio classroom. Obviously, we are not close to where we should be. But we just had ten parent interviews last week and every one was positive. But am I doing more of what I believe should be done or what the centre believes?

Mary was not sure about the expectations for “doing Reggio.” In practice, she seemed to be questioning whether her own ideas were shaping the curriculum and were perhaps incongruent with a Reggio approach. Mary still felt it was necessary to be in control; to provide direction to the children during all aspects of the day including curriculum.

Current practices.

Mary has gained a working knowledge of emergent curriculum while on the job. “We really have become more alert to what the kids are talking about and what they are showing interest in.” She realizes the limitations of arbitrary themes chosen by adults. “Let's not talk about community helpers, because they do not have a clue about what a

community helper is.” Community helpers are a common theme found in many early childhood classrooms. Often the week involves crafts, stories and discussions about firefighters and police officers. Mary now recognizes the difficulty children have connecting to this abstract concept.

At the time of my visit, the children had been exhibiting an interest in animals evident by their fascination with characters from the movie, *The Lion King*. In the classroom there was documentation displayed that related to animals but adult depictions seemed to dominate. Outside the classroom was a record of a discussion held with the children regarding the characteristics of a tiger. Displayed around that document were worksheets connected to the letter “T” with a tiger illustration as well as collages made from various strips of paper to which the children have added their own colourful lines.



Figure 12. Representatives of a tiger’s stripes.

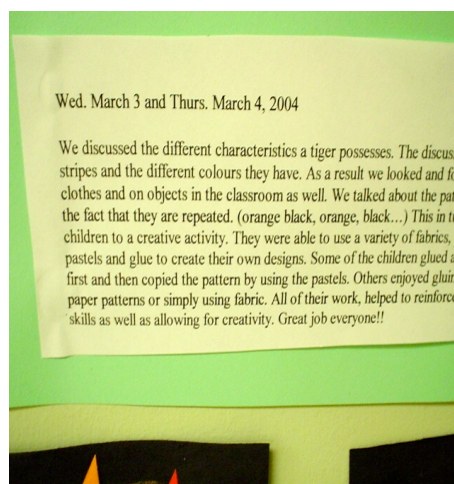


Figure 13. Characteristics of a tiger.

During the last interview, Mary described the children's interest as moving away from the animal project. "Animals have sort of waned for now but we are not going to put it away completely because the children still love the topic, especially role playing." Mary had identified that the children's interest was moving towards plant life. "We talked about animals and where they live. We had a lot of pictures. We did a lot of creative work where we made trees, branches and leaves. So we started talking about plants because of the animal's relationship to plants."

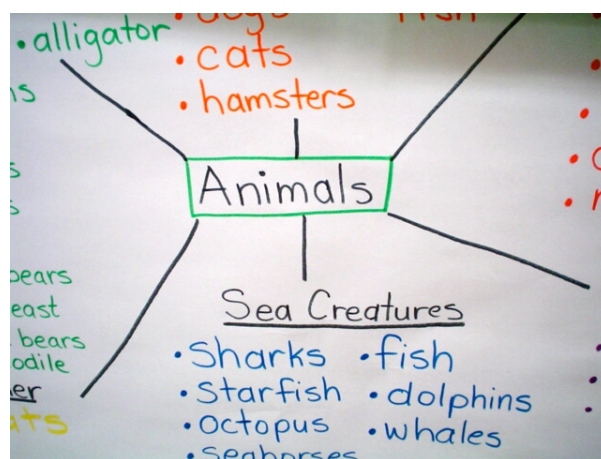


Figure 14. The animal project.

Recognizing the children's interests and planning curriculum in accordance with it is characteristic of a Reggio-inspired teacher approach. However, worksheets are not normally associated with a Reggio classroom. Mary believes in the importance of worksheets for letter recognition and math concepts. She believes the children are accomplishing tasks that will prepare them for the type of activities encountered in grade school. She knows from her own experience as a mother that worksheets are an accepted component of curriculum in the later grades.

I am still very attached to my worksheets. It reinforces what we are talking about. For parents they can see what the children are working on. For some parents, learning doesn't have to be validated by a piece of paper but for others it does. I guess I am still not there yet. I am not at that level. I'd like to be one day, but I still feel worksheets serve a purpose. They are going to get them in grade one and grade two.

Challenges.

Behaviour and control seem to be the primary concerns and Mary's greatest challenge. In the focus group, she sought advice from the others and asked whether she should be requiring the children to sit during meeting time and "put up their hands" when they had a question. Mary isn't sure whether she is "allowed to tell the children just to sit." Mary knows that "some kids can sit for a length of time and then they have their turn to show whatever they want to share and they don't want to listen to anyone else" and this is frustrating to her. If they can't listen to others she asks the children "to please just leave. I get them to go look at a book or whatever. I don't know. I guess I don't know where the boundaries are with Reggio."

Mary has had little time for active reflection or documentation. As the only one of the four research participants who doesn't have preparation time, she finds it particularly difficult to create project displays. After viewing the documentation brought by the other

focus group members, Mary was reluctant to share her own documentation of the animal project, declaring that she was “no where near this level.” Mary is encouraged by the Directors to attend professional development sessions but is not supported financially to do so. She is not given time off during the day and is expected to use her own money to pay for workshops and conferences offered in the evenings and weekends. Aside from a couple of training sessions offered by the Directors themselves, Mary has not attended a workshop or a conference.

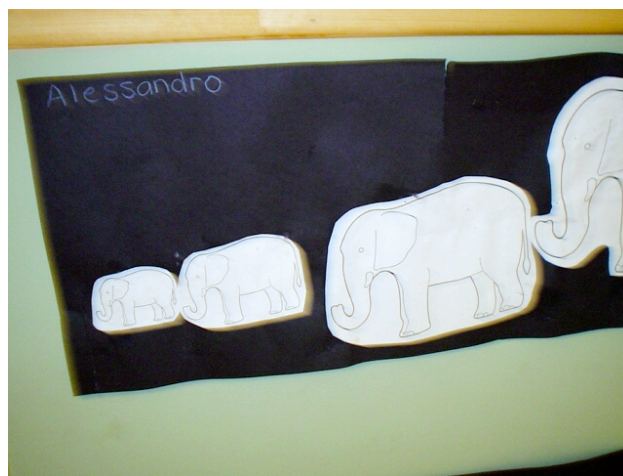


Figure 15. Elephants from little to big.

Parents.

Mary claims that she is “from the old school” and it has been challenging to reconcile past practice with new ideas. Mary finds it particularly difficult to share the Reggio philosophy with the parents. “What is my child learning” is a common refrain that Mary hears on a daily basis. Parents have expectations and Mary is sensitive to their needs. She understands that parents wish to have their children “stimulated” in addition to being “well looked after.”

Mary believes that child care has to go beyond just looking after children. This for Mary is “babysitting.” She would like parents to consider her as a professional, “a good teacher for their children.” Mary’s image of a good teacher involves being approachable and respectful of parents as partners. Responding to their demands, Mary has increased the children’s exposure to “academics” through the use of worksheets. Incorporating “academics” is consistent with her past practice, and Mary is comfortable with the continued use of worksheets. Parents have responded positively, and Mary looks to the future as being even more academically inclined, focusing more on reading, writing and mathematical skills so that children are ready for the next grade level.

Collaborators.

Mary’s co-worker in the classroom is not trained in early childhood education but has a visual arts degree. The children have many opportunities for artistic representation and Mary is grateful for Franca’s support and artistic knowledge. “If it wasn’t for Franca I wouldn’t still be here.” As a team, “we compliment each other.”

The open concept of the centre’s design seems to lend itself to a social atmosphere. The Directors and teachers are friendly and approachable. Mary has become a mentor to the many younger and newer staff members. Mary understands that these new teachers may feel “overwhelmed” with implementing the centre’s philosophy. The young teachers at her centre turn to her for advice and her insights on working with parents, children, and other staff are often sought. What Mary feels she is missing is an opportunity to be at the receiving end of a mentoring relationship.

Self-Image.

Initially, Mary was confident when challenged by this new approach but soon realized she was unprepared. With little opportunity to absorb and learn about the Reggio approach before being placed in a classroom filled with behavioural issues, Mary now has doubts about her abilities. When asked about her self-image Mary qualifies her answers – “somewhat satisfied” or “pretty satisfied.” While satisfied with establishing classroom control and confident of providing curriculum that covers “all developmental areas,” she has not fully incorporated the emergent quality of a Reggio-inspired curriculum. When she compares herself to the other focus group members, she is less satisfied with her level of expertise and practice. Mary admitted to a conflicted inner dialogue in which she questioned whether she could completely accept this alternative approach to her practice.

Part of me didn't feel very good about myself after some of the conversations. These people were all here and I was way down there. I don't think I am ever going to get there. I don't know whether I believe in all of this.

Mary was concerned about whether she was “doing Reggio” in the right way. She participated less when the discussion turned to curriculum. Her focus was with classroom control. Mary’s goal was to create a space for the children “to learn and to grow” and before she could do that she needed to continue to improve the social atmosphere of the classroom.

Metaphor of teaching.

In describing her teaching, Mary employs two separate metaphors. In the first, Mary sees teaching as a garden where children have a place to grow.

The children are the seeds. They require a good base to establish their roots. They require a balance of light and water. Teachers provide the materials for exploring and experimenting during their process of growth. Learning naturally flourishes.

Mary's second metaphor demonstrates the need to balance "a place to grow" with the need to maintain control. According to Mary, teaching is like a scale as the teacher needs to find the "balance between structure and free rein." In order to equalize the two the teacher must be able to "give and take." Issues of control continue to dominate Mary's thinking. She realizes the empowering possibilities of "always allowing for choice" but does not know how much choice to give.

Emerging directions.

In the Reggio philosophy, teachers and children share power, control, and ownership of the curriculum. Mary is unsure of what it means to "do Reggio." She has difficulty articulating the philosophy and is limited in her ability to theorize as she deliberates on practice. She is reflecting on beliefs and assumptions and seems ready to absorb new ideas. "I can't say that I am a type of person that follows any particular philosophy. There are certain things that I do believe that reflect the way that I teach."

Mary expresses her beliefs easily. She believes that every child deserves to be treated with respect. She believes that parents have a right to be involved and interested. She promotes collaboration and encourages support amongst her peers. She is encouraged and excited about the children's learning. It is her desire to create a classroom where children are cared for, accepted, and stimulated. She believes in a child-centred philosophy but "can't imagine following one philosophy all the time." If she went to another centre she would be content to return to a theme approach with an emphasis on worksheets as "the kids love it."

Mary is evolving and this experience helped to reveal the other side of the scale. During the focus group Mary appeared less confident than the other participants in recalling project stories. When I was informed that Mary had resigned from her position, seven months after first entering the classroom, I was concerned. Did the focus group impact her decision to leave? When I spoke to Mary she stated that her issues were solely connected to her daughter. She had felt successful in following through with this group of children to the end of the school year. While recognizing that the focus group was difficult, it prompted self-reflection. She recognized that her issues in the classroom were connected to control and power. It is difficult to predict where Mary would be in her practice if she had stayed in her position. She was wrestling with control of the curriculum and was ready to attempt change in the classroom when she was faced with a life decision.

There was an opportunity for Mary's daughter to attend a specialized program located an hour from her home. Her daughter's needs were placed above her own and Mary left her position. One day she will have to return to work to finance her daughter's future educational needs. She is confident that she could work in almost any setting in the early childhood education field and could adapt to any program philosophy. Given a choice of curriculum approaches she is unsure of what she would do.

Advice for others.

Mary understands now that change takes time and support is needed to implement new ideas. Her particular situation was frustrating and stressful. Mary would caution others before taking on the challenges of this curriculum. Establishing a peaceful classroom is far more important to Mary than project work.

Mary would advise others to establish control at the beginning of the year to allow for the later opportunities for curriculum. Much of her advice is directed towards managers of child care settings. Any top-down directive concerning a particular curriculum that comes from administration and is handed to the teaching staff to implement needs to come with support, encouragement, and preparation time.

Conclusion

With an uneven road taken, and as a weary traveler, Mary's journey has been difficult. Along the way her confidence has grown with experience, but contextual factors have limited her development. The starts and stops that characterize the road taken represent the precarious balance of family and work that Mary faced on her journey.

Mary has never questioned taking the journey as her heart is with children. It has guided her path and has strengthened her abilities to manage a classroom. While the journey is halted, Mary contemplates the future and knows that further progress will always be determined by the needs of her own family.

Case Study Number Four: The Gifted Traveler

When I entered Felicia's classroom, a child immediately asked "who are you?" I responded that "I am here to see all the wonderful things you are doing in your classroom." The child then asked "Like the pirate ship but that will be taken down today?" I then asked if they were starting something new in the classroom and she responded "Yes, great artists."



Figure 16. Great artists collage.

Thus began an eventful morning that was so full of visible learning that it is difficult to document all that there was to see. As I looked around from my position in the middle of the room, I could see a sink and float activity in the water table, and a pirate ship representation in the dramatic play centre taking up the entire north end. The science centre was filled with artefacts about tea and the children beside me were painting with ice cubes. The displays on the walls showed evidence of the emerging project, and I am drawn to the mural splattered with paint in the style of Jackson Pollack.



Figure 17. Splat, splat like Jackson Pollack.

At the water table Felicia asks a child “what is your thinking?” as he connects funnels and tubes. She moves throughout the classroom encouraging the children to critically reflect on their play and work. When snack is provided the children serve themselves, taking the portions they require, and pouring their own juice. After snack and time on the carpet for a meeting, one child notices paper being taped to the bottom of the table. “Oh my gosh!” she exclaims. “We are going to paint on the ceiling” substantiating the child’s prior knowledge of the works of Michelangelo.

Felicia reminds the children that she “wants to see everyone’s eyes.” She suggests to a one child that “I don’t think that is a great spot, what should you do?” Instead of becoming the enforcer of form and structure, legs crossed, arms folded, she is empowering the children to find their own positions. Felicia displays a framed print and asks the children if they can tell her who the artist is. As a prompt Felicia states, “the sunflowers in this artist’s work are in this same colour.” A child responds, “Vincent Van Gogh” and Felicia suggests that the child to “give yourself a pat on the back.” Felicia

then displays a framed print and tells the children that this artist usually depicts ballet dancers. A child calls out “Degas” and goes on to say “I went to a place that had all his pictures.”

To conclude, Felicia announces that “this week what I am finding is that there are many artists. Here is our dilemma: When we were talking about animals, which was a big project we decided on only a few animals. Now we can focus on a smaller group of artists.” The children voted on their favourite artists and the names were recorded. Felicia introduced the children to the painting on the underside of the table with a print of Michelangelo’s work from the Sistine Chapel. A child said, “It is kind of cracking” and another replied “It’s not the paper it is the actual church.”

Context.

Like Rose, Felicia is in her early thirties and has been in the field for ten years. She does not have the same family commitments as Layla or Mary, but her journey has had a very nonlinear trajectory. Felicia’s journey has had the same spiralling quality as Mary’s, having taken a few altering routes before settling on a path which she hopes will lead to new and challenging directions.

Now settled, Felicia works while attending university part-time studying for a degree in early childhood education. Her current place of employment is a child care program within a community centre in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the city. This centre is a non-profit organization operated by a community Board of Directors of parents and community members and has higher-than-usual tuition fees and a waiting list. In total there are approximately one hundred children in the program ranging from toddlers (18 months to 2 1/2 years) to the senior kindergarten children (ages five and six).

As a result of fees and capacity, the teachers at this centre enjoy many benefits including access to a supply budget as well as planning and preparation time. In comparison to others in the child care field, Felicia recognizes the difference. “You know child care, you know how hard people work, it is not necessary here.” Felicia even has the luxury of a “purchasing day” and she includes the children in the decisions of what material is needed to support the current project topic. “When we have a project talk scheduled it will be on a Monday because we have purchasing on Tuesday. What do we need because we are going shopping tomorrow?” The discussion is followed by a vote or in some cases the children will work on “reaching consensus.”

Background.

Felicia originally intended to follow a path to social work when she attended the post secondary “CEGEP” program in Montreal. CEGEP is an acronym for “collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel” and is required for students proceeding to university. A three-year program is available for students who opt to take a career or technical program to earn a diploma. This is a post secondary educational program usually done immediately after high school.

The first of her family to graduate from CEGEP, Felicia was accepted to university when her journey was redirected by a lack of finances. Felicia found employment in the field of geriatrics before realizing she preferred working with a younger demographic. After working in a halfway house, Felicia realized social work was not “her niche.” Reaching a plateau on the journey, Felicia sought inspiration from the message that everything negative has a positive experience from *The Road Less*

Traveled by Dr. Scott Peck (1978). Felicia was firm in her resolve to keep searching for her journey's direction. Felicia returned to CEGEP, taking part-time psychology courses.

During this time she found work as a nanny and cared for a young boy who was also enrolled in a child care program. As part of her duties, Felicia was required to drop off and pick up the child from child care. The teachers at the centre were impressed with Felicia and the care she demonstrated towards the child in her charge. She was eventually offered a position. According to Felicia, it was like “trying on gloves that fit perfectly.” She switched her night courses to early childhood education and after a few years of combining work in the field with coursework, she enrolled in the full-time program to finish her diploma and subsequently moved to Toronto.

Response to the study.

My first encounter with Felicia pre-dates her employment at this centre. It took place during a visit to her previous place of employment, a workplace child care program in a hospital that was incorporating a more emergent focus to their curriculum. Felicia describes her classroom in that centre, at the time as being theme-based, but at the same time she was trying to incorporate an approach to children's behaviour that focused on conflict resolution. Children were encouraged to resolve conflicts when “dilemmas” arose. If arguments over possessions occurred, Felicia would approach to ask “what is happening?” The children became adept at responding “we have a dilemma” and articulating the conflict “he has the toy and I want it.” The children were encouraged to make suggestions for resolution.

Felicia was very content and remembers the first few projects fondly. Word had spread not only about her conflict resolution strategies but also of her successful project

work. Felicia was solicited by her current place of employment and she accepted the new position. I had my first opportunity to view one of Felicia's projects in action when I visited a student doing a field placement at this centre. With the "construction project" underway, the classroom was a hubbub of activity incorporating construction structures from blocks, wood and cardboard. Children in hard hats wore tool belts and used actual tools including hammers, saws, and nails. I approached Felicia directly and suggested she participate in the study. After she agreed, I sent the invitation package to the centre's Director who supported Felicia's decision.

Past practices.

When Felicia began in the field her approach to curriculum involved themes. She describes the practice as "filling in the boxes." This matrix that contained the boxes represented the theme and was referred to as the "program plan." Descriptors of theme-related activities filled the boxes. Most often the themes chosen related to the seasons, holidays and preschool concepts such as numbers and letters. Felicia found the practice limiting as "the boxes couldn't hold everything." If the children were interested in something else, "the boxes would get in the way."

When the theme of the week represents the dominant culture, Felicia expresses trepidation about its use. When "we are cutting out Easter bunny ears and sticking cotton balls on tails we are acknowledging one holiday but what about the others?" Felicia was becoming uncomfortable with the lack of diversity inherent in these common themes. She was encouraged when her former Director decided to explore emergent curriculum because she felt it would reveal a path of reflection and deliberation on her previous

curriculum choice. Felicia felt it was an opportunity to more fully understand her discomfort with themes and hoped it would lead to greater satisfaction with her practice.

Introduction to emergent curriculum.

Felicia began the foray into emergent curriculum with self-initiated research. An early attempt is fondly remembered by Felicia as the “missing cookies project.” Felicia had read a story to the children about a thief from another country and how he paid for his crime. The children were fascinated so Felicia found out “what they know, what they wanted to know and what they needed to buy.”

I went out and bought handcuffs, we made a jail, a 911 phone, a home to burglarize, a police car and wrote to the local police department. The children wanted to find out how a judge knows whether a criminal is lying. We composed a letter to a father in our class who happens to be a criminal defence lawyer. So the criminal defence lawyer contacted another parent who was a judge. Together they agreed to have a mock trial.

In collaboration with these parents, a plan was concocted. Accordingly to the plan, Felicia and the children baked cookies. The children were told that a judge and a lawyer would be visiting the class. “We put the cookies in the oven. We brought the cookies to the classroom to cool and we left the cookies on the table while we got ready to go outside. I told the children that I was going back into the classroom to get my coat.”

While inside the classroom, Felicia took the cookies and smudged them “all over my face.” When she rejoined the children they asked “what is on your face.” Felicia evaded a truthful response. Once they returned to the classroom the cookies were gone. One of the children said, “Well it is a good thing that the judge and the lawyer are coming because now we have a real mystery.” The lawyer and the judge entered the classroom. The judge had brought a sash and she told the children “when I am wearing this sash I am the judge, when I take it off, I am the crown.”

Felicia's co-worker was the first to be called to the stand. It was established that Felicia had gone into the classroom to retrieve her coat. The co-worker was asked, "When she came back what was different about Felicia?" The response was, "she had cookie crumbs on her face." "What kind of cookie crumbs?" She said, "The same as ours, chocolate chip." The attorney then suggested that the co-worker was, "Not a cookie expert." The proceedings went on with children acting as the jury. When Felicia was questioned she adamantly claimed her innocence.

Felicia was asked, "What did you have for snack today?" She replied, "I didn't bring a snack today." The lawyer then countered, "Oh, you must have been hungry?" Then the judge said:

Based on circumstantial evidence, I have decided that in fact, Felicia is guilty. Sometimes good people do bad things and sometimes they lie because they are afraid of getting in trouble which I think is what Felicia has done. So I will sentence her to bake cookies for you every Friday for six weeks.

For Felicia, this story reflects the pivotal point in her journey where she became convinced that curriculum that involves the support of children and parents in a meaningful and authentic way was the direction she needed to take. It was a transformational experience. Felicia loves to tell this story and I have heard it many times. I am continually amused and inspired each time it is told. It was this project that had most impact on Felicia's decision to become an emergent curriculum teacher. From this point forward, Felicia would never return to the use of themes.

Current practices.

When Felicia moved from the hospital-based child care program committed to the exploration of emergent curriculum to a new centre in an affluent and established neighbourhood, it was to pilot emergent curriculum in the senior kindergarten room. When she was solicited to work at this centre, it was the understanding that her role was to serve as the demonstration classroom for emergent curriculum at the centre. It was not a curriculum that parents had previous experience with. The interest in emergent curriculum had come from a particular teacher and was supported by the Director.

The centre was moving towards emergent curriculum before Felicia was hired. The other teacher had agreed to pilot an emergent curriculum classroom. With parents informed and the process begun, that teacher decided to leave. When Felicia arrived, it became apparent that the program was “more eclectic than emergent.” Felicia described her predecessor as “still using a lot of worksheets, still using Jolly Phonics® and the parents weren’t really sure what was going on.” Some parents were apprehensive and since their children were destined for private schools they wanted an academic focus. The Director had approved emergent curriculum as an experiment, a pilot study. At the time of the interview, the pilot study had been going on for three years. Felicia felt the pressure of being “the guinea pig” and the only teacher implementing emergent curriculum instead of a theme approach.

With a number of successful projects completed including the construction project, the response of the parents and the other teachers had improved. The Director of the program encouraged the continuation of the pilot classroom but did not insist that other teachers follow suit. The teachers in the other classrooms at the centre continued to use themes, worksheets, and cutouts. The program was employing conflicting

curriculums and criticism was inevitable. Felicia was sensitive to criticism and frustrated with the lack of acceptance of emergent curriculum in the other classrooms. “Clearly I am on my own.” Representing “change that people were not willing to make,” Felicia was feeling despondent at the time of the first interview. She longed for another project like the “missing cookies” from her previous place of employment to once again affirm her curriculum choice. Her love of art provided the provocation for “the great artist project.” By the time of the final interview and culminating art show, Felicia was once again feeling enthusiastic.



Figure 18. The children’s art show.

The Director of the program has continued to be open to Felicia’s foray into emergent curriculum and while her classroom is still referred to as a pilot; the teachers in the other room have begun to make subtle changes to their curriculum planning. The parents who had received the digitally produced invitation to the art show had responded to the event appreciatively. Felicia was feeling less resistance to emergent curriculum but recognized the experience of the “cookie project” would be difficult to replicate. At her previous place of employment, there had been a centre-wide agreement to accept

emergent curriculum. Her new Director has chosen not to initiate a top-down directive to the other teachers, feeling the process of change needs to be self-initiated. Felicia felt the burden of being the lone voice for the approach.

Challenges.

In order to make the program accountable, Felicia follows the provincial guidelines for kindergarten programs. This outcome-based framework has alleviated some parent concerns with emergent curriculum and the issue of pupil learning. Felicia demonstrates accountability by making links between the children's project work and the suggested learning outcomes for this age group. Now that only a small number of vocal parents were expressing concern, Felicia realized her greatest challenge was with her co-worker.

While Felicia's co-worker is trained as an early childhood educator, her practice remains consistent with a theme approach. She is resistant to the practice of emergent curriculum and is unable to grasp some of the basic concepts. This stressful combination of trying to prove the merits of the curriculum to the parents, in addition to "trying to help" her co-worker, has impacted Felicia's feelings of worth to the point of her questioning her own collaborative skills.

Collaborators.

While Felicia says, "Emergent curriculum has brought me here," she now finds herself in an environment where "it is not embraced." This has resulted in intense feelings of frustration for her.

It would be a little less challenging had my co-worker been there to support me. There were days when I went home crying because of the burden of parent complaints. I thought I was going to burn out and this frightened me. I reached out and I said to her, I can't do this alone. The

children could have a really exciting program but I need you to take initiative. It is not a matter of emergent curriculum; it is a matter of work ethic. She is a kind person; she just doesn't see the big picture.

Once a week Felicia and her co-worker are given time to meet. "I will say do you have anything you would like to discuss. And she says no." At the end of the year Felicia's co-worker will be finished her tenure in the senior kindergarten room and will return to working with toddlers. A replacement was needed and Felicia realized that whoever was going to be hired needed an emergent curriculum background.

Parents.

According to Felicia, the other teachers are succumbing to parental pressure to focus on academics while ignoring the learning inherent in project work. While there are "complaints from parents almost weekly" Felicia refuses to incorporate worksheets, viewing them as inappropriate practice. "Sometimes I think I should just throw in the towel but I don't know how to teach the other way. I wouldn't know how to use worksheets. I wouldn't know how to go back." For Felicia there appears to be only two ways to teach; with emergent focus on projects or with a theme approach that includes worksheets.

With the "great artist project" drawing to a close, Felicia decided to invite the junior kindergarten parents to an art show to demonstrate emergent curriculum in practice. As an extension, she has invited each parent to an individual curriculum meeting. She hopes to offset the possibility of another frustrating year by establishing clear communication, in advance, about the curriculum.



Figure 19. Line art and mixed media.

Self-Image.

The frustrations of the year have had an impact on Felicia's self-esteem. Her perceived failure at collaboration has led to negative self-reflection.

Am I horrible to work with? Am I not being fair? Am I not giving her a chance? Is it because I am so eager and I always do things so quickly. Maybe she thinks that she can't do it right. I start questioning myself as a team member and those questions may be valid.

Self-criticism coupled with the continued complaints from a few parents has given Felicia a negative perspective on the success of the school year. The art show was a positive end to an otherwise difficult year. From their splatter Pollack-like mural to the self-portraits using mirrors, the room was resplendent in its display of real-artists-inspired representations. The children proudly shared their creations with their parents.

Undeterred from her journey's direction, and despite the difficulties of the year, Felicia still feels empowered by this curriculum choice. She enthusiastically shares stories of practice with anyone ready to listen. She is in a paradoxical situation with

feelings of confidence mixed with feelings of inadequacy. In a journal entry she recognized contradicting statements made during the research process.

I realize the reason for that may be that the image of myself and how I feel is constantly changing and growing. I am in the process of letting go of old perceptions of early childhood education while creating new perceptions. Some ideas are easier to replace than others.

Metaphor of teaching.

Felicia has an image of a teacher as a mountain climber and teaching like “climbing a very big mountain.” While the children guide her on this uphill journey of learning, she struggles against the elements. The rain, sun and wind represent her colleagues. These are according to Felicia, “good, essential things” but they contribute to a “challenging climb.” Also contributing to the arduous ascent are the parents who stand in opposition with their insistence that the children have a more academic program in preparation for later grades. Rather than a straight up the mountain climb, the parents represent obstacles in the journey’s trajectory.

Although difficult, if it had been an easy climb, Felicia would not have taken the time to reflect. What brought Felicia to attempt the climb up the mountain was the inspiring message that everything positive has a negative experience. The road up the mountain has certainly not been linear; it has divided and diverged. It has had obstacles thrown in the path and contextual pressures that restricted movement. Yet, Felicia is still climbing.

Emerging directions.

For a number of years Felicia has been taking courses in the evenings towards a Bachelors of Arts in Early Childhood Education. Once her degree is completed her goal is to enrol in a Masters program. Her eventual aim is to teach ECE at the college or

university level. Until that time, she will most likely remain working at her present place of employment.

After the frustrating year that ended successfully with the art show, Felicia has come to terms with some of the challenges inherent in implementing an emergent curriculum. She has more support in a like-minded new co-worker and the other teachers in the centre are beginning to incorporate some elements of emergent curriculum. The difficult climb up the mountain has strengthened her resolve to continue.

Felicia's commitment to reflection continues to the point of contemplation of theory in practice. Of the four participants she is the most articulate in describing theory and at ease with developing a personal philosophy of teaching. During the second interview Felicia described her current thinking on two prominent theorists, Piaget and Vygotsky, illustrating her continuous reflection on the place of these theories in her work.

I was wondering what about Piaget. Much about what he said seemed to be disqualified. He is calling a child egocentric and we see so many examples that would contradict that, but then I use Piaget when someone is playing in the muck in the spring and I say you know what, there are cognitive limitations and they need to see transformation. They need experiences to overcome that. For Vygotsky, I believe in scaffolding, but I also believe in letting children work their problems out on their own. I can see a little bit more pride when they develop their ideas on their own.

Advice to others.

Felicia would enthusiastically recommend emergent curriculum to others. "It is exciting; it is worth changing your mind." The first step to changing is "to let go" of the preschool icons that dominate current practice. "It is about unlearning, a metamorphosis like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly." Felicia recognizes that "it is not always easy."

I guess the most important thing is to always remain focused on meaningful learning. Ask yourself how is this meaningful to children? If

you can answer that question honestly so that it feels right to you then you'll be ok for emergent curriculum.

While the road may have been “bumpy” Felicia knows that “it is worth it.” Recognizing that emergent curriculum “won’t be embraced by all parents” it is nonetheless an important endeavour. Looking back, Felicia realized that opposition was limited to a small number of parents. Her advice to others is to focus on the supportive parents to ascend up the mountain. Once you start climbing you can never return to the theme approach—having tasted emergent curriculum, the lack of authenticity in a theme approach makes the road less meaningful.

Conclusion.

For Felicia and her fellow research participants, emergent curriculum has led to a teaching practice different than the one they implemented before (Malaguzzi, 1993). Previous practice was starkly different with the adherence to a theme approach. Felicia’s ascent up the mountain has produced an advocate of new images for both teachers and children. The role is an expanded view of the teacher image. Felicia sees children and teachers as co-constructors of the curriculum rather than how they were in the old image where children are cast in as passive recipients of the prescribed theme approach. She is joined by Rose and Layla as embodiments of this new image, with only Mary left on a plateau of indecision.

Felicia’s inspiration from Peck (1978) and the message of craving a path from negative experience can provide an example for Mary to continue the climb. Can Mary overcome the obstacles and roadblocks impeding the path’s progress? Will emergent curriculum guide her future practice? And from an even broader perspective, this

question can be asked. Can lessons be learned from the cases of all four participants that can guide the practice of other early childhood educators?

Chapter Six:

Discussion

If nature has commanded that of all the animals, infancy shall last longest in human beings—it is because nature knows how many rivers there are to cross and paths to retrace. Nature provides time for mistakes to be corrected (by both children and adults), for prejudices to be overcome, and for children to catch their breath and restore their image of themselves, peers, parents, teachers, and the world.

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 80)

Introduction

Loris Malaguzzi suggested that children have a right to a new restored image that elevates their position to one of collaborator, communicator, and co-constructer with the adults in their lives. For early childhood educators, the same parallel exists vis-à-vis their relationship to other educators. Early childhood educators are also in extreme need of a restored image that elevates their position to one of collaborator, communicator, and co-constructer with educators from all other levels. For the over thirty years that the field of early childhood education has been recognized as a distinct sector of education, those connected to it have been suffering from an image that impedes growth and development. If the image held of early childhood educators is of glorified babysitters, the rights of children are compromised. A new image for both children and their teachers should ascend in tandem. As the rivers are crossed and paths retraced, it is time to reconceptualize how we view the youngest learners and the teachers charged with their care and education.

The mistakes of the past can be overcome according to Malaguzzi. The cases of the four teachers described in the previous chapter illustrate attempts to discover new paths of practice forged by abandoning the status quo. When new information on emergent curriculum conflicted with their perceptions of practice each was faced with cognitive dissonance. As early childhood educators, they had adapted a curriculum consistent with what Wien (1995) describes as routine and tightly scripted. This traditional curriculum is not open to change, discovery, and direction. How has the abandonment of the routine in favour of the uncharted territory of an emergent curriculum impacted the practice of these teachers and their self image?

In the following pages of this chapter, the phenomenon of emergent curriculum as it was experienced by the participants will be presented. The findings from the research were distilled into four categories of themes:

1. Impact of Context,
2. Teacher as Collaborator,
3. Teacher as Curriculum Planner,
4. Teacher as Theory Builder,

In this chapter there is an attempt to “build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases” (Yin, 1994, p. 112). Searching for the variables that transcended each particular case, I conceptualized themes emerging from the case studies within a four-theme framework to illustrate the experience of emergent curriculum. During the data analysis stage, the participants’ statements and stories were interpreted as either consistent or inconsistent with the four emerging themes.

The Impact of Context

The situational context of each participant is fundamental to understanding their practice and self-image. All are early childhood educators working within the geographical area known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) within the province of Ontario. The GTA refers to the City of Toronto plus the surrounding regions of Durham, York, Peel, and Halton, and includes 24 municipalities, covering an area of 629.91 square kilometers.

Layla works in a Reggio-inspired child care centre connected to a public school. She has a two-year college diploma and has been working in the field for over 20 years. Mary, too, is a seasoned teacher with many years of experience. She has a college diploma and a related university degree. The centre that she worked at during the time of this dissertation also claimed to be Reggio-inspired and is located in a strip mall. Rose works in a centre within in a school. She received a university degree prior to obtaining a college diploma in early childhood education and has been working in the field for almost 10 years. The centre does not claim to be Reggio-inspired, but does implement an emergent curriculum based on the Project Approach. Felicia has the same years of experience as Rose. Similarly, she employs the three phases of project work within her classroom as suggested by the writings of Katz and Chard (2000). At the time of this research, Felicia had recently begun to work within a child care program housed in a community centre.

In conducting research within a phenomenological framework, describing context is crucial to the documentation of experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Time, place, and space are fundamental elements for framing experience. Each of the four case study teachers had a particular contextual situation. How did each perceive her situation?

It is the perception of experience that I seek to illuminate. Perception in phenomenology is the primary source of knowledge, “the source that cannot be doubted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). What are the perceptions of the participants about the impact of their situation on their experience in teaching with an emergent curriculum? What did they perceive as the issues and concerns facing them in their current situation or place?

Image.

It is the perception of all four participants that the current political, social, and economic context for early childhood education impacts practice and self-image. The babysitter image is a prevailing image that dominates the experience of these four teachers. As described in Chapter Two, the image of a glorified babysitter has debilitating effects on who and what early childhood educators consider themselves to be as teachers.

Mary was concerned that others in the field of education and beyond did not see early childhood educators as professionals. Felicia was frustrated, feeling that responses of others to her chosen profession were belittling, like the local gardener’s daily greeting of “how’s babysitting going?” Rose suggested that if “you tell someone [outside of the field] that you are an early childhood educator, they automatically consider you a babysitter.” According to Rose, “Some still see us as babysitters. People don’t understand that children are beginning their education with us. We should be valued, but unfortunately we are not. We are not paid enough.” Layla wanted to send a message of “we are not babysitters” to the world, seeing it as the only way to affect change.

Even if they were to find themselves working within a context of support from the system, for example, having employment benefits, these teachers were still concerned with the perception others had of their chosen career as early childhood educators.

Feeling valued and supported in their efforts to implement an emergent curriculum did not negate the surfacing of their feelings of inadequacy. Layla related that she is sometimes “embarrassed to say that I am an early childhood educator.” At times when talking to others, she has only alluded to working in education and avoided labeling herself as an early childhood educator. When she had to confess and say she was an early childhood educator, she recalls thinking “oh well, there goes any level of respect.”

Felicia described how emergent curriculum has, to a certain degree, positively changed her self-image. She now relishes telling others the stories of classroom projects. She feels that she has often received genuine interest and respect from others not in the field. However, for Felicia the remnants of a negative self-image still surface and she describes times when “I am at a swanky affair I find myself unknowingly stuttering” when responding to the question, “What do you do?” Given the lack of respect and value that the participants perceive others have towards the field, why did these four individuals become early childhood educators?

Comparisons to kindergarten teachers.

Rose, Mary, Felicia, and Layla each felt that they should be able to receive the same benefits as kindergarten teachers in the school system. Although they perceived their work as of equal value, it was their perception that kindergarten teachers did not generally share this perspective. The dynamic between kindergarten and early childhood educators was seen as uneven with the balance of power held by the teachers with more status. Layla’s recollection of her interaction with a primary school teacher is especially poignant. As she told the focus group, the encounter occurred while she was creating a

display of the children's two- and three-dimensional representations of "The Music Project."

We had all these hearing and sight things. We had three-dimensional ears made from cardboard rolls and we had these incredible drawings of sound waves. We had playdough brains. I made sure that it went up on display. On the other side of the display area, the kindergarten teacher had some children's work displayed that demonstrated how to use a crayon on its side, how to make the crayon go dot, dot, dot, and how to make it straight. This was the work of the same group of children! Another teacher from the school came up to me while I was putting up the display and said, "You guys are so creative, you should be teachers."

When describing their relationship with teachers from the school system, the participants seemed envious of their counterparts' status, compensation levels, and benefits. However, they also recognized the constraints of a mandated curriculum with specified outcomes experienced by the kindergarten teachers. In comparison, they felt they had the freedom to plan curriculum based on the children's interests. Rose felt kindergarten teachers were "more regimented."

This is what we have to get done. They follow. Instead we are a lot more open. We allow children to learn at their own pace. We allow them to learn what they are interested in. But otherwise we are very similar because we are both in it for the best interest of the children. The difference is that in our program children are allowed choice.

With the exception of Mary, the three other teachers were given preparation time, a benefit they shared with kindergarten teachers in the school system. According to Doherty, et al. (2000), only 50% of early childhood educators in Canada have paid preparation time. Rose's perception is that most early childhood educators don't even have paid programming time. For Rose, having "extra staff so that documentation can be done" and paid preparation time to meet with colleagues is essential. "When you are doing emergent curriculum, you need to be working as a team." Having preparation time

impacted Rose's attitude towards her work. She saw it has recognition that validated her efforts as a curriculum developer: "It affects how you feel about your job." Compared to others in the field, Rose recognized that "we have it easy here." Felicia described the utter surprise, even shock that new employees have when they realize the extensive amount of preparation time staff in her centre are given daily. She lets them know that in this centre, "planning and preparation time will not be one of your challenges."

Educational background.

In the participants' reflections on image, they cited educational background as the main reason for the elevated image the public has of school teachers in comparison to early childhood educators. How did the educational background of the participants impact their practice and self-image? In high school, Layla made the decision to attend a two-year, early childhood education program at a community college. Mary chose a similar route after high school, but took a combined diploma and degree from the local university and college. It had been her intention to apply to a faculty of education. When admission was denied, Mary chose early childhood education as an alternative.

As many of my students indicate, early childhood education is rarely the career path they had envisioned. My experience with students suggests that becoming an early childhood educator is like accepting a conciliation prize. Students have often told me that they have no intention of teaching in "day care," their goal is to become a primary school teacher. While Rose attended university, it was also her intention to attain a teaching certificate. When her application was not accepted, Rose decided to attend community college and received a two-year diploma in early childhood education. Felicia's route was not so direct. She spent years after high school exploring various possible career choices.

Eventually, she received a three-year diploma in early childhood education and is currently enrolled at a university working towards a related degree with the intention of continuing her studies at a Master's level.

Felicia's motivation to continue to study while staying in the field is reflective of her desire to be an example for other early childhood educators who are considering an advanced degree. Layla was the only participant without any university courses, yet this did not seem to impact her ability to implement an emergent curriculum and her satisfaction with her practice. Educational background did not seem to be a major factor in this research. The ability to implement an emergent curriculum appears to be related to in-service rather than pre-service training.

Career path.

Why did these four individuals become early childhood educators? Only Layla's career path appears to have been predetermined. Rose and Mary found the route to early childhood education only after an alternative path was blocked. Felicia traveled different paths before finding the direction that would lead her forward on her journey to becoming an early childhood educator. When asked why they choose the field, they all spoke of love for children and the desire to make a difference in the lives of children. Felicia described early childhood education as a "phenomenal field – one can never really learn everything." It is this quest to learn that keeps Felicia fueled on her journey in spite of the prevailing perception that others do not share her passion and enthusiasm for the field.

Even within a field that is maligned and devalued, Layla is committed to remaining on the path of early childhood education. She describes herself as "twenty years and still in the trenches." Rose, Felicia, and Mary are also committed to continuing

in the field. Rose has been taking on additional administrative responsibilities in her centre and sees the possibility of teaching less and supervising more. Mary is currently looking for part-time work in the field now that her daughter's educational needs are more predictable. Felicia continues to work with children as she finances part-time academic study. Eventually, her goals include teaching early childhood education at the university or college level.

All four teachers continue to be early childhood educators. As a career path it may not have been their first choice, but now as they are engaged in the practice of being early educators, their experience with emergent curriculum has been significant and developmental. Each has reached a particular stage of teacher development and a certain level of emergent curriculum practice. In some ways, they seem content with their career choice. Without data on their attitude towards their career path before their involvement with emergent curriculum, it is impossible to conclude that emergent curriculum improved their attitude; however, I suspect this may be the case.

Professional development.

Mary's centre did not support conference or workshop attendance. She was not given opportunities to visit other centres to see, as she suggests, "Reggio in action." The reason for the lack of support was financial. The centre was not willing to pay for a supply teacher, or pay for workshops and conference fees. Mary appreciated when the co-director, who is a practiced Reggio-inspired educator, spent time in her classroom. With that director on maternity leave and the other director "too busy" to give Mary the support she needs, her concerns were not being met. Mary appeared to have limited opportunity to grow and develop.

While professional development opportunities are available in the evenings and weekends, Mary's family commitments made participation unlikely. Rose, Felicia, and Layla, on the other hand, participated in various professional events over the course of this research study and received compensation from their employers. When attending professional development events on the weekend, conference fees were covered. When attending events during the work week, in addition to having the conference fees covered, Rose, Layla, and Felicia continued to receive full pay. This benefit was not available to Mary, and while she may have been willing to personally subsidize her professional development, family obligations made the weekend opportunities inaccessible.

Early childhood educators need to view professional development as necessary and on-going. All four of the teachers in this study did express the belief that professional development was important to their practice. However, their commitment to professional development seemed to correlate with the support they received from their centres. With the exception of Mary, each of the participants actively searched for more challenging opportunities. Their attendance at development sessions contributed to an improved image of themselves as professionals. Mary did not participate in many professional development sessions. Perhaps, this contributed to her dissatisfaction her experience with emergent curriculum. She did not appear to have a positive image of her ability to effectively provide the children with emergent curriculum experiences.

Access to professional development, or the lack of these opportunities, factored into the case study teachers' ability to implement an emergent curriculum with satisfaction. The policy of the workplace towards professional development was especially influential. When the teachers were supported in their efforts to change their

practice with the chance to attend workshops, conferences, seminars, and to visit other classrooms, they appeared to have more success with the implementation. Mary's struggles may have been alleviated had it been recognized that professional development support is a fundamental factor to a successful emergent curriculum practice.

The balancing act.

Mary needed support from her work place to develop professionally. The issue of balance between work and family responsibility is a defining characteristic of practice for Mary. By the end of the research period, Mary had stopped working because the demands of family, especially her special needs daughter had become overwhelming. The scale metaphor, employed by Mary in Chapter Five, to describe her image of teaching, visually depicts the balance of two separate and competing elements. All of the participants experienced issues with balance which may be due to the fact that early childhood education is a female-dominated field. The need to balance various life roles is a common thread running through all four case studies. Layla describes a time when she "was putting a lot more weight on my work, wanting to learn more and become more professional." This occurred when Layla was at the beginning of the implementation of an emergent curriculum when she recognized that it was "affecting the balance between family and work."

The data collected revealed that while Rose and Felicia, both unmarried, shared comparable views, Rose related balance to the lack of preparation time. Without the benefit of compensation for preparation, "you would have to do this on your own time. The lack of preparation time will affect how you feel about your job because you would have to bring too much work home." Rose juggled a part-time job with her involvement

in the local executive of the professional early childhood association. Felicia related balance to combining work commitments with academic goals as she juggles a full-time position with part-time university coursework. Felicia worries about adding another element to the balancing act as she considers parenthood with her life partner. Perhaps a spiral image is more representative of the reality of teacher development in early childhood education, especially befitting the gender profile of the field. The nature of the lives of women often requires them to balance the demands of home with the demands of work.

Teacher as Collaborator

In Reggio Emilia, the Vygotskian approach, one that supports social construction of knowledge, is present. In particular is the collaborative approach to learning. When a teacher truly collaborates with others, the learning experience can be enriched for all involved. Particularly affected would be the children whose voices are silenced in a transmission approach to curriculum which is often the hallmark of a theme approach. When children are viewed as co-constructors and this premise becomes a value embedded in practice, there are far-reaching implications.

With the exception of Mary, the three other teachers credit emergent curriculum for producing a calmer, more cooperative environment for learning. It is the reason, according to Felicia, Rose, and Layla, for fewer occurrences of challenging behaviours. Each claimed such situations had diminished significantly with emergent curriculum. They each felt that it was the high level of engagement the children had with project work that created a calmer classroom. According to Rose, the children “don’t give us as much of a hard time because they are participating.” Layla states, “I think that when children

are interested and they are passionate about what they are doing then they are less inclined to run amok. They are feeling good about themselves and what they are doing.” Felicia claims that the children “are involved and there isn’t enough time and they feel empowered so they don’t feel the need to challenge.”

Mary revealed that even after a number of project experiences, she was still hesitant about emergent curriculum. She was not confident balancing what she termed “structured activities” with the Reggio philosophy. Control was a concern for Mary with respect to curriculum and children’s behaviour. How much control of the curriculum should Mary have? How could she control the classroom along with the behaviour of the children? Mary seemed to be especially focused on behaviour. Stuck in the transitional stage, Mary was “second guessing” herself and claimed it was “bringing me down.” She seemed frustrated with her inability to develop as the other teachers had and felt comparatively inferior in her ability to implement emergent curriculum.

I was reluctant to ask Mary about the focus group experience because I could detect a level of discomfort. Reflecting on the focus group experience, Mary disclosed that “I didn’t feel very good about myself after some of the conversations.” She went on to say that “these people are here and I was still way down there.” Mary was unsure whether she was “going to get there.” She went further to say that she didn’t “know whether I believe in all this.”

During the focus group, Mary’s contribution consisted mostly of describing the issues she faced with the children’s challenging behaviours. After the others had presented documentation from prior projects, Mary was asked to share what she had brought. She responded “Well, I brought their work, but I am nowhere near this level.”

Mary's discussion of a project on animals was overshadowed by her concerns with classroom control. "Should I be getting them to sit down? Should I be asking them to put up their hands?" Why was Mary the only one of the four case study subjects so preoccupied with the behaviour of the children in her classroom?

In the cases of Layla, Rose, and Felicia, the focus group was a forum to share the success of emergent curriculum. For Mary, it was an opportunity to seek advice on the issues of control and behaviour. Mary did not have a parallel positive experience with project work in the same way as Felicia, Layla, and Rose had. Compared to the others, Mary's development has been limited. It could be that the particular location where she was employed had a negative impact on progression. While her centre advertised itself as Reggio inspired, the practices of her fellow teachers and the Director limited Mary's ability to implement an emergent curriculum.

On-site support.

Mary is the only one of the four employed by a commercial child care facility. It was Mary's perception that the lack of professional development opportunities was tied to financial concerns of the owner. Mary was not given the impetus to move forward on her journey. Mary continued to be what she described as "old school" and succumbed to parental demands for more structured worksheets. Felicia, Layla, and Rose have had parallel experiences of parental expectations for an elementary school model curriculum, but they have continued to offer an emergent curriculum without the trappings of structure—specifically worksheets. The Directors of Rose's, Felicia's, and Layla's centres were committed to educating parents about the benefits of emergent curriculum and reinforcing an end to worksheets. In Mary's centre, parent education was left

primarily to the teachers. Mary did not seem able to counter parents' desire for use of worksheets.

Felicia described the parent community at her centre as being very demanding. The surrounding community is affluent, a fact visually apparent from the multi-million dollar, architecturally impressive homes around the centre. For Felicia, the demands of the parent population and their expectation for a traditional school model of curriculum complete with worksheets weighed heavily on her perception of practice. For Layla and Rose, parental demands did not seem to adversely impact their practice as it did with Mary and Felicia. However, unlike Mary, Felicia felt supported by the Director of her centre although she did not have the support of her coworkers. She was extremely frustrated with the lack of support from her coworkers and, despite the Director's support, felt a sense of isolation within her work environment. Unlike the centres where Rose and Layla worked, this centre is not part of a primary school building and stands alone, similar to the location of Mary's centre which is in a strip mall.

All the places of employment with the exception of Rose's are single-site locations. Three of the four centres are considered non-profit organizations with an overseeing Board of Directors. In contrast, Mary's centre is owned and operated by a single individual. Mary's centre is isolated without the benefit of multiple sites, connections to associations, networks or community events such professional development workshops. Mary had little access to experienced colleagues as there was a high turnover rate in her centre with the majority of staff members being inexperienced.

If Mary had had the same type of supportive context that the three other research participants experienced with emergent curriculum, the outcome may have been more

positive. Mary's perception of her practice was dominated by feeling anxious about whether she was "doing Reggio" the way it should be done. With the issue of family balance weighing heavily she made the decision to leave the field temporarily. Her assertion that she could work in any program with any philosophy is a testament to her years of experience, but a significant indication that she had not had a transformational experience. She had not reached the "point of no return," the pivotal time in her practice with emergent curriculum when the use of themes is no longer an option. Felicia, Layla, and Rose claim that they could never again return to using themes, worksheets, and cutouts. They feel transformed in their practice whereas Mary was still tied to the past. The adherence to practices of the past and the difficulty in embracing emergent curriculum seem connected for Mary to the lack of contextual collaboration where support and opportunities for dialogue with others help a teacher progress.

Relationships are important.

The ideas and skills that the families bring to the school and even more importantly the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favors the development of a new way of educating, and 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, 1998, p. 104)

The perceptions of the case study teachers' experience with emergent curriculum were deeply impacted by relationships. The existence of collaboration within the larger social and cultural context was a key factor in each participant's level of satisfaction with an emergent curriculum. In Reggio Emilia, collaboration is a fundamental principle that manifests itself in a tradition of maintaining meaningful relationships. The Reggio approach is based on relationships and these relationships include interactions among children, families, staff, and the community. The emphasis is on building a community of

learners. While this is a “democratic ideal” which can never be realized fully, the intention “is that all voices contribute to a collective wisdom and all should have a turn to be heard” (Jones & Nimmo, 1998, p. 8).

The schools of Reggio are viewed as social spaces (Goffin & Wilson, 2001). Relationships are valued as opportunities for negotiation and dynamic communication. Reggio Emilia schools “are designed to invite exploration, interaction, reflection, and communication among all the participants” (Goffin & Wilson, 2001, p. 234). During times of collaboration, the emergence of cognitive conflicts is not avoided, it is favoured. Such conflicts are the source for learning for both children and teachers (Jones & Nimmo, 1999). With inclusion of all those involved in teaching and learning, teachers – parents, Directors, and children -- multiple voices are heard. For all of the case study participants taken as a group, relationships were both a source of inspiration and frustration. Individually, Rose did not seem to have frustrations and Layla’s were minimal. For Felicia, inspiration and frustration seemed to hold equal weight, but for Mary relationships were a source of unequivocal frustration.

Mary felt that the Director of her centre was “too busy” to be involved in the classroom and to give support. Mary’s response to parental concerns was to offer a curriculum more aligned to the past practice of themes. This contradicted the desires of the Director who wanted her centre to be inspired by the practices of the preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia. Essentially, Mary allowed the parents to dictate the curriculum. In Reggio, the goal of the school is to hear the voices of all: teachers, parents, children, and administrators. Mary allowed the voices of the parents to overpower the voices of others.

Rose was very satisfied with the collaborative atmosphere in her organization and felt that the relationships between parents, teachers, children, and administration were positive. She felt that the experience of emergent curriculum was particularly influential on the relationship between the child care centre and the adjoining school. Having once felt inferior compared to the teachers in the school, Rose's experience of emergent curriculum has elevated her confidence; she now feels she is working on an even level with the kindergarten teachers and reports, "now they ask us questions."

In Rose's centre, efforts have been made to address parental concerns. Curriculum nights were scheduled at the beginning of the school year and information packages were made available. As a result, Rose felt that parents had begun to accept and even embrace the practice. Rose's case, more so than the others, seemed to reflect a community of interdependent and reciprocal relationships.

In Layla's case, positive relationships between the administration and the staff were key to her successful implementation of a Reggio-inspired practice. "We are a small centre; everyone is on the same page. When we hire we make sure that they are on the same page." Layla felt frustrated that all the parents were not more involved but relates stories of collaboration with a smaller number of parents. One particular relationship led to a visit from a meteorologist from the local weather channel who supported the children's work on the "Weather Project."

For Felicia, relationships with the others in the centre had been a source of frustration and conflict. As the sole implementer of emergent curriculum at her centre, Felicia represented change that others were not accepting or willing to consider. Felicia was particularly frustrated with her coworker. According to Felicia this coworker was

“not engaged” with an emergent approach and did not support her efforts. Regarding her current place of employment, Felicia relates that although “emergent curriculum brought me here,” she has found that being in an environment where emergent curriculum “is not embraced” was her biggest challenge; she stated that it had “affected my self-esteem.” In Felicia’s program, during the course of this dissertation, parents once opposed to emergent curriculum were beginning to embrace its practice. The culminating art show for the “Great Artist’s Project” had, according to Felicia, a very positive impact, although she did have a small, constant, and consistent number of “difficult and complaining parents.” Felicia reflected often on parent concerns. Rather than allowing the concerns to impact her negatively, Felicia saw them an opportunity for her own development. “I keep asking – am I meeting their needs?” Recognizing that she is “in a state of cognitive development,” Felicia accepts the provocation as a challenge to change.

Parent opposition to an emergent curriculum is rooted in their past experiences. Parents are, themselves, products of a curriculum that supported worksheets, cutouts, and themes. According to Dodge, Diluk, and Kulhanek (2001), parents feel pressure to have the children ready for the next grade level, and they associate these practices with the school model. Themes and their associated practices approximate school content and have the purpose of preparation (Wien, 1995). Teachers may see themselves as responsible for familiarizing children with material they will encounter in school. Parents may expect it. Dodge (2001) suggests parent-teacher discussions and one-on-one conversations in order to openly discuss curriculum and parental concerns. In Layla’s case, she uses documentation to educate parents. “Parents need to be educated; they need to see the incredible things their children can do.” “Parents may not see the worksheets

going home, but everything is on the walls in full view.” Layla sees emergent curriculum as making learning visible and thus a tool for parent education and collaboration with parents.

Felicia was affected by the parental opposition to her chosen curriculum. While the conflicts caused her great concern, she did eventually embrace them as a provocation to change. Jones and Nimmo (1999) suggest that teachers can turn conflicts into opportunities “for transformative action.” Rather than avoidance, conflict is embraced under conditions that sustain the conflict to a point of resolution. When conflict is “cut short through the exercise of power by the stronger individual or group” opportunities for learning and development are missed. In order to avoid conflict, “the opposing voice” is silenced with “whatever wisdom it may carry” (p. 8).

Each of the four teaches shared a view that a positive relationship with parents was an important element of their practice and self-image. In Reggio Emilia, reciprocal relationships between parents, children, and teachers are seen as fundamental to everyone’s development. The school is seen as a “living organism,” a place of shared lives and relationships (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 62). For Layla, Rose, Mary, and Felicia, when there was not a sense of reciprocity in their relationships, the result was added stress. In a Reggio-inspired program, collaboration is valued, voice is encouraged, and opposing views are wholeheartedly embraced.

Voice and democracy.

Collaboration that allows for the voices of others, even if they produce conflicting perspectives, can lead to change and transformation. Allowing for voices to be heard is not the standard of practice for many early childhood educators. When hearing an

alternative perspective, a teacher has to accept the resulting inner conflict that says “what I thought I knew isn’t enough to deal with this new situation” (Jones & Nimmo, 1999, p. 8). Meaningful collaboration is an offshoot of conflict and is not possible with a theme approach which can silence voices. The voices of children need to be heard to reveal their wisdom. An emergent curriculum that embraces collaboration emphasizes consensus building, with the rule that conflict is sustained until agreement is reached. “It’s transformative, creating win-win solutions through the process of paying attention to the other’s point of view. Transformative change, genuine learning, happens only through disequilibrium” (Jones & Nimmo, 1999, p. 8).

By bringing voice to their work and offering a forum for the voices of children and families, teachers become transparent in their practice and collaboration can evolve. This can only happen if all involved are expressive instead of silent. As Malaguzzi (1998) has said, “teachers must leave behind an isolated, silent mode of working, which leaves no traces” (p. 69). Collaboration is the key to leaving traces of multiple voices. It is an authentic practice that values individuals within a group context. The practice of themes leaves little trace and will not perpetuate a Reggio-inspired community of collaborators.

Teacher as Curriculum Planner

All four of the participants shared similar experiences with using themes to define curriculum practice. Each had become adept at planning curriculum using this approach. All had come to a point in their practice when they were faced with new information about an alternative approach called emergent curriculum. While the transformation from themes to collaborative project work has not gone smoothly and without conflict, Rose,

Felicia, and Layla are clear about their commitment to emergent curriculum. Mary has had difficulty going beyond a thematic approach.

Beyond a thematic approach.

Felicia, Rose, Mary, and Layla described themes as the dominant approach to early childhood education. Felicia recalls her past practice as “filling in the boxes” much like what Wien (2004) describes as linear, lockstep, segmented by subject, and carried out over a week. By observing the tightly controlled time frame of one week intervals, themes do not incorporate the opportunity to “revisit” children’s work and include principles of editing, which Clemens (1999) calls “the permission to start wrong” (p. 2). Rose related that “by the end of the week your theme is done even if the children want to know more.”

Fraser (2000) suggests that in the field of early childhood education sometimes “experiences that happen in the classroom have little relationship to the written plans.” Often the children “come up with more interesting ideas than the teachers had thought of.” Teachers then “find themselves caught in the dilemma of sticking with the theme or abandoning it and following the children’s interests” (p. 124). Felicia recalled that, “When I was transforming from filling in the boxes to emergent curriculum, the boxes couldn’t hold everything – one physical activity, one cognitive, one social – this is the limitation.”

Mary claimed that themes were “more structured, more teacher directed. This is what we are doing today, this is what we are doing tomorrow and this is what we are doing next week.” The routine provides a level of comfort for those who use it. Except for Felicia, the others had not questioned or deliberated on the practice of themes. Felicia

had difficulty reconciling the emerging, expressed interest of the children with the prescribed theme and initiated reflection on practice that questioned the use of themes. Felicia recalls feelings of frustration with lack of authenticity in theme implementation. This, for Felicia, was the driving force to seek alternatives approaches. Felicia contends that “if you are following the traditional curriculum, it gets in the way of real meaningful learning.” Felicia’s perception was that themes “did not feel right.” Wien (1995) refers to themes as a practice manifested in early childhood education and reflected in a “teacher dominion” orientation. In this practice, teachers “choose the activity, its purposes, and its design, and then implement it. Ownership of the activity belongs to the teacher: part of the activity is persuading children to her purpose, motivating them” (p. 8).

Wien (1995) portrayed a case study of a teacher whose program planning was based on themes. This teacher found the “traditional content she has been using for themes: shapes, colours, alphabet, and numbers (which is remarkably similar to the content of traditional kindergarten and primary classrooms) increasingly boring” (p. 24). In Wien’s depiction, the teacher saw part of her role as familiarizing children with material they will encounter in school.

Themes are based on a school model. Child care teachers feel it provides an academic focus especially with the use of worksheets. “The teacher controls the agenda for action” and “there is a prescribed range of possible responses that the children are permitted; activity outside the range is corrected” (Wien, 1995, p. 8). Rose has observed teachers reacting to children colouring outside the lines while completing worksheets. “Mommy is not going to like it because you are colouring outside the lines.” In trying to duplicate a school model, child care programs use instructional group experiences,

construction paper cut outs (i.e., turkeys at Thanksgiving, pumpkins at Halloween, and shamrocks for St. Patrick's Day) and worksheets to "teach" the children. With the habits of practice entrenched, this legacy of a school model for child care has become the norm.

To an emergent curriculum.

During the time that this research was conducted, Mary, Felicia, Layla, and Rose had all abandoned the use of themes. The focus of curriculum planning for each participant had become project work and all were attempting to implement an emergent curriculum with varying results. The implementation of projects and emergent curriculum are not always codependent factors. Projects can become predetermined by the teachers once an interest has been established. While projects are labeled emergent curriculum, once there is an expressed interest in the topic by the children, the teachers take over. The topic is chosen; the teacher collects related resources and provides connecting activities. The direction of the project is pre-determined and teacher controlled.

Felicia engaged with the children during a daily meeting where they would make group decisions made about the direction of the project. Felicia even gave the children the opportunity to decide how they were to make decisions; "would it be consensus or majority rules?" The school age children in Rose's program would be presented with topics representing the emerging interests of the group and a decision would be made as to the project that would unfold. However, it appeared that the direction the project took had limited involvement from the children and more to do with the teacher. Despite this, careful consideration was given to the waning of interest and the emergence of other topics. In Layla's case the children's expressed and transcribed ideas and theories about

the project determined its direction. In contrast, Mary determined the activities that were presented everyday which related to the project on animals.

All the participants viewed their projects as an opportunity for children to acquire knowledge on their respective topics. The children in Layla's class were able to identify common weather patterns as well speculate upon cause and effect. In Felicia's classroom, the children were able to identify artistic elements and characteristics of the great masters of the art world. When the children in Rose's program arrived after attending school for a full day, they encountered resources and activities that engaged their sense of wonder and discovery about snakes. In Mary's classroom, the children seemed to have an abundance of knowledge related to the *Lion King* movie.

The topic of animals represents a very broad course of study. In contrast, Felicia had asked the children to decide on a small number of great artists thereby reducing the vastness of that topic. Her assumption was that the children would learn more if the topic were specific. If a project only allows for a surface level of learning then the difference between a topic and theme is almost inconsequential. It was only with the prolonged efforts of Layla and her coworker that the children's interest in weather was piqued and their corresponding knowledge enhanced. The children were encouraged to explore, discover, inquire, predict, and theorize. The topic of weather was not so much a content organizer, but an opportunity to reveal children's thinking processes.

Layla looked to the evidence of knowledge acquisition as the visual representation of children's learning. This she shared with parents whenever questions about "what is my child learning" would come up. It was the documentation of the children's learning that supported Layla's efforts with the parents. The classroom

displays documented the weather project with artifacts, artwork, and children's written interpretations of their learning. In Layla's classroom, learning was made visible. Through the inquisitiveness and enthusiasm of the teachers, the learning was not limited to broad concepts of vast topics. Layla and her coworker documented what was happening in the classroom—the emerging curriculum according to Jones and Nimmo (1999).

McAninch (2000) suggests that designing projects as islands unto themselves, with little emphasis on how the subject matter might connect to future studies, is a major pitfall. Mary tried to connect one project to the next so that the topic of plant life followed the animal topic as a natural progression expanding children's interests in what animals eat. According to McAninch (2000), "the pitfall of designing sequential projects that do not "carry over" ideas and understandings from one project to the next is the failure to exploit the principle of continuity in the cause of pupil learning" (p. 3). This progressive pedagogy of continuity suggests a visual spiral with topics growing and connecting from previous curriculum foci.

By nature, emergent curriculum unfolds; but just as I did as a preschool teacher determined to "stay on theme," a teacher can control the curriculum while staying on topic using a project approach. Valuable observations of children's learning that are not connected to the project topic can be lost if not documented. The opportunity to scaffold children's learning to the next level is removed. Relinquishing control and allowing learning to emerge, even if it is not on topic, is difficult without the safety net of preplanning the entire curriculum. With emergent curriculum, a teacher plans based on projections, but must leave room for the children to direct the course of the curriculum.

Layla recalled the experience of losing control of the curriculum when she began to implement an emergent curriculum. She recalls the experience as being traumatic. She felt vulnerable. Layla was in the vulnerable position outside of the “teacher dominion” (Wien, 1995, p. 5). By stepping out of this comfort zone to a place of cognitive discomfort, Layla experienced the colliding of past and present practice. Layla recalls that it took considerable time for her to accept emergent curriculum to define her practice. Now she claims “it has given me more confidence in what I do.” Rose also recalls being initially resistant. Felicia took to the practice immediately, accepting the discomfort of cognitive conflict as the impetus for growth and development. She now views emergent curriculum as being “instrumental” in keeping her in the field.

Embracing the inner conflict that comes with the new information presented by a curriculum that contrasted with the practice of the past enabled Rose, Felicia, and Layla to accept the challenges of being an emergent teacher. Now engaged in a spiraling process of development that has led to transformation, the need now is to focus on new challenges to continue growth. The educators of Reggio Emilia look to documentation as the source of the challenges to come.

Use of documentation.

In Layla’s classroom, it is routine to transcribe and document what happens throughout the day. This is a task that she shared with her coworker. In Felicia’s classroom, without the support of her coworker, the responsibility of documentation would have been a heavy burden. It would have been very interesting had Felicia recorded, for example, the interchange she had with the child at the water table when she asked him, “What is your thinking?” The child may have been encouraged to draw his

thought process and then return to the task at hand, which was attaching different sizes of plastic tubing to transport water.

Felicia chose to document the children's work with the artistic representations they created during the tenure of the "Great Artists Project." These surrounded the classroom and the outside hallway until it resembled an art gallery. While visually beautiful and inspiring in its depiction of children's capabilities, it did not reveal children's thinking and learning in the way that the documentation in Layla's classroom did. Without the accompanying transcriptions of dialogue the process was incomplete. Felicia did, however, try to incorporate the children's interests and desires in terms of the project's directional thrust. She planned her program using Post-it notes arranged in a web configuration. This way she could build on the direction of the project as it unfolded. The children would come to her with ideas for the project and these, too, would be recorded on the adhesive notes and affixed to the curriculum web.

Layla and her coworker made provocation a daily ritual. During meeting times, children were asked questions that provoked their theories and revealed their thinking. The questions and answers were transcribed and the documentation posted in the classroom on the wall adjacent to the carpet area where meetings took place. On the day I visited Layla's classroom, the word "fog" was listed under the caption "word of the day." and posted. In addition, Layla's classroom was resplendent with representations of the "Weather Project." Barometers and weather vanes surrounded the room; some were functional while others were the children's creations to represent the real object. Children's artwork also represented depictions of two-dimensional renderings of the four seasons. Various charts written in large block letters listed weather-related facts and

information. A newsletter produced reports on a visit from a meteorologist and published stories of the children's explorations and discoveries. The curriculum web created and posted in Layla's classroom utilized the same type of Post-it notes as was used in Felicia's classroom.

In Reggio Emilia, children are considered theory builders and documentation serves as the vehicle to represent their theories. This process of provoking and revealing children's theories was ably demonstrated in Layla's classroom when I visited and observed them creating theories on how fog was made. Representations of the children's theories or predictions revealed their thinking process. Layla and her coworker recorded the hypotheses of the children and provided opportunities for the testing of these theories as illustrated in the classroom displays. This was not just descriptive documentation, which would only provide anecdotes or captions for photographs. In Layla's classroom, the documentation made visible the learning that was taking place.

In Mary's classroom, the curriculum web was static, having been created at the beginning of the "Animal Project" and not updated as the project emerged. Worksheets depicting the letter 'T' and an adult's image of a tiger were displayed outside the classroom entrance. Adjacent to these were various-sized cutouts of elephants which the children had seriated from smallest to largest. There was a teacher-created graph that illustrated the children's favourite animal. These artifacts of a more traditionally themed approach appeared in contrast to representations freely created by the children with blank paper and markers which were interesting, individual, and visually appealing.

Moving from seeing documentation as a task to a process of pedagogy was a challenge for these four teachers. Reflection on the documentation in their classrooms

will help all four teachers grow and develop. Learning to document is about documenting to learn, as reflection on the process will improve future emergent curriculum practices. Reflecting on documentation will encourage a process of continuous improvement and increase their ongoing satisfaction with emergent curriculum. It is a process that will produce cognitive dissonance. Embracing cognitive dissonance rather than ignoring it will affect the level of satisfaction the four teachers have with emergent curriculum.

Satisfaction with emergent curriculum.

Mary is less than enthusiastic about emergent curriculum, but acknowledges that with the practice she is “more alert to what the children are talking about and showing interest in.” When asked as to whether she is satisfied with emergent curriculum, she answers with a qualifying, “pretty satisfied.” She goes on further to say, “I don’t know how far to go when doing emergent curriculum. How much is going to be too structured? I need a balance between structure and complete emergent.”

Layla, on the other hand, asserts that she is “extremely satisfied” and it is the “best curriculum we ever had.” Rose claims she is “very satisfied” with her approach to the curriculum even though she was initially resistant. She asserts that “Now I cannot comprehend pre-cut” and proclaims “I wouldn’t know how to go back.” Felicia believes that if it were not for emergent curriculum she would not be working in the field. Emergent curriculum has lent authenticity to her practice.

Felicia recommends that early childhood educators use authenticity as the beacon for implementing emergent curriculum effectively. She suggests reflecting on “whether it is meaningful?” If a teacher answers positively, then the emergent curriculum activity was effective and purposeful. If a teacher answers negatively, then further reflection is in

order to ascertain future direction. Felicia feels very strongly about emergent curriculum, and it is her perception that her adaptation of the practice has influenced her positively, to the point of a firm resolve to stay in the field of early childhood education; as she has described its influence, she said it “definitely impacted my confidence.”

Transformation requires change and acceptance of a practice as a dynamic rather than static force. The teachers in this case study, with the exception of Mary, had each transformed her practice. They are still transforming, as transformation does not denote a finite process. And there are more spiraling paths up the mountain to ascend. There is no point in the journey from which to assume a status quo position and remain in a valley. Change and status quo maintenance are incompatible. In order to take the risky steps toward transformation, a teacher must have a positive attitude about change. As Felicia said about emergent curriculum:

It is exciting – it is worth changing your mind. You need to let go of some things. It is about unlearning. It is about a metamorphosis – caterpillar turning into a butterfly. You need to let go and change which is not always easy.

Felicia’s perception of the experience of emergent curriculum is rendered in a mountain climbing metaphor. With the children guiding the climb, the elements of wind, sun, and rain provide challenging detours. The trek becomes circular rather than straight up, but eventually the climber reaches the peak. At the top of the mountain, there is only one way to continue and that’s down. After descending, the climber reaches the valley only to be confronted by yet another mountain of cognitive conflict to be climbed. Felicia’s experience with emergent curriculum has led to an expansion of the metaphor. Realizing that she expected to climb from mountain top to mountain top without the

valleys in between, Felicia has accepted a more dynamic perspective to define her practice and now sees it as one of hills and valleys.

Since the onset of this research journey, Felicia and I have become collaborators, meeting periodically to exchange thoughts and reflections. Our meetings are peppered with stories of Felicia's work with children and by my eagerness to share resources and ideas. This process has demonstrated the empowering benefits of constructing knowledge through the integration of voices. After one meeting, Felicia wrote:

The slide show is so inspiring, and I will be joining NAREA this year, thank you. Combined with reading *A Child's Work* by Vivian Gussin Paley and *Authentic Childhood* by Susan Fraser, I should be ready to implement some changes into our environment this September. It was wonderful spending time with you and when you should see our classroom next, you can share credit . . . that you were instrumental in motivating me to get out of the valley and climb another mountain.

Being satisfied with emergent curriculum is being open to cognitive conflict. Accepting cognitive conflict as part of practice is an acceptance of theory in practice. It is the theory of cognitive dissonance that propels the forward motion and upward, spiralling movement of climbing the mountain and crossing the zone of proximal development. At the peak of the mountain comes a sense of satisfaction. As the only participant in this study who has not left the valley of past practice, Mary has missed achieving a level of satisfaction in her practice.

Teacher as Theory Builder

The teacher ought to be intellectually curious, one who rebels against a consumeristic approach to knowledge and is willing to build upon knowledge rather than to consume it. (Rinaldi, 1994, p. 49)

As in Vygotsky's social cultural learning theories, both the teachers and the child do not learn in isolation. Individual and social processes interconnect and are inseparable

(Rankin, 2004). In Reggio Emilia, the educators understand the importance of constructing knowledge within a social context. The idea that there is a creative area between the individual and social processes “where learning happens most easily” is a view valued in Reggio Emilia (Rankin, 2004, p. 31). It is a view of the child as growing within a group context (Rankin, 2004). It is also a view of the teacher growing within a group context, developing as Belenky et al. (1986) suggest that “constructed knowledge” is demonstrated with the integration of voices (p. 133).

To become a theory builder is to accept a view of the teacher as researcher. The teacher reflects upon the documentation as data and begins to theorize. Theorizing is the “cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and relationships amongst these categories” (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 239). The process calls for an abstract conceptualization of the data. It is a challenging process. Merriam (1998) describes theorizing as fraught with ambiguity as it involves speculation, risk, and inference. Loris Malaguzzi claimed that the task of theory is to help teachers better understand the nature of their problems.

As an early childhood educator grounded in the practical application of curriculum, theory was not a substantial part of my practice. I have had an aversion to, and fear of, the theoretical. I was afraid to embed theory into practice as it seemed too abstract. At the same time, it was laden with the inherent risk of asking that I come forward and assert my voice. Dissociating fear from theory has been a profound transformative experience for me during this research journey. I will speculate that it can be a powerful force of development for others as well who accept theory into their practice.

During the interview process, all the participants, with the exception of Felicia, seemed to have problems identifying and articulating theory. Felicia spoke of the “cognitive conflicts” that children experienced and reflected on the influence of both Piaget and Vygotsky on her practice. When asked about theory, Layla spoke of her philosophy of teaching and learning. While she called herself a reluctant reader, her words spoke of an understanding of the principles of Reggio. Rose’s case was particularly illuminating. When discussing theory within her practice, Rose had difficulty. Rose did put forward her own ideas but did not see them as theories. When Rose said, “Children do need a little bit of structure and a little bit of guidance, but they learn at their own pace and learn what they are interested in,” she was articulating the theory described by Wien (1995) as conflicting frameworks: teacher dominion versus developmentally appropriate practice.

Rose unknowingly articulated theory, demonstrating that she is her own builder of theories. When asked specifically about the place of theory in her practice, she recalled a theory she first encountered as a student. “I think about the one with the dog.” This is the theory of behavioural conditioning, and it is based on negative and positive reinforcements (Gordon & Williams-Browne, 2000). It is the history of *reinforcements* that determines behaviour. Children learn to choose or avoid behaviours based on their consequences. Rose places high value on positive reinforcement and includes that in her practice. She makes a point of not using negative reinforcements as she feels that they are developmentally inappropriate.

Developmentally appropriate practice is another theory that is left unarticulated by Rose, but appears to be embedded in her practice. Perhaps Rose has not realized that a

theory is just a proposed explanation of a phenomenon. To scaffold her learning she could assume a reframed image as a theorist in her own right. Stremmel (2002b) supports the notion of teacher as theorist in early childhood education as being fundamental to teacher development. Rose is representative of a teacher reaching a critical juncture in her journey where theory can become a transformative part of her practice.

Felicia was able to articulate a social constructivist worldview. She referred to theory often in the process of this dissertation. Felicia believes in the importance of children's voices and the value of the co-construction of curriculum. Teachers who are oriented toward socio-constructivism view the dialogue that occurs between and among children as an invaluable learning tool, and thus these teachers intentionally create opportunities for discussion and collaborative learning (Cadwell, 1997). Dialogue between children is a key variable in socio-constructivism. According to Cadwell (1997), children were more likely to express an authentic voice where individual response and interpretation were valued by the teacher and fellow students, and scaffolded through questioning at various levels. Of the four teachers, Felicia, while not the most experienced, was able to most clearly articulate theory.

Stages of Teacher Development

All four participants consider themselves to be experienced teachers. However, their stage of development according to Katz (1972) appears different even though each has surpassed the four-year mark in her teaching career. First conceptualized in 1972, this model of developmental stages of teachers has been revised a number of times. In 2005, a revised version was published which retained the original central ideas. In this new 2005 version, Katz defends the original conceptualization against criticism from postmodern

scholars who argue that the concept of development has doubtful validity (Burman, 1994; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). For Katz (2005), the term development is used “to indicate that both thought and behavior are learned in some kind of sequence and become increasingly adaptive to the tasks at hand and to the environment.” No one can begin a professional role as a veteran and “in most cases competence improves with experience and the knowledge and practice that come with it” (p. 1). Mary appears to be an exception to the rule as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1***Katz's Model of Teacher Development***

	Stage 1 Survival	Stage 2 Consolidation	Stage 3 Renewal	Stage 4 Maturity
Number of years teaching	May last throughout the first full year of teaching	By the end of the first year	Three or four years of teaching	More than four years of teaching
Overriding concern	Daily challenges	Individual children and problem situations	Renewal and refreshment	Addressing the larger picture
Resources needed	On-site support and technical assistance	On-site assistance, access to specialists, colleague advice, consultants	Conferences, professional associations, journals, visits to demonstration projects	Seminars, institutes, courses, degree programs, books, journals, conferences

According to Katz (2005), in the first stage of survival a teacher is concerned with getting through the day. This describes a beginning teacher who is trained but lacks experience. According to Jalongo and Isenberg (2000), the question most permeating practice is: "Am I cut out to be a teacher?" (p. 393). In the second stage, referred to as consolidation, a teacher needs particular opportunities for growth to gain experience, become committed to the field, and to be able to move on to the next stage, the stage of

renewal. The question that permeates practice during this second stage of development is: “How can I grow in competence and confidence” (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000, p. 394). In the third stage of renewal, which occurs during either the third and fourth years of teaching, the teacher searches for new, innovative ideas and approaches after tiring of the status quo. The question that characterizes practice at this stage is: “What will I do to improve with experience rather than diminish my effectiveness” (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000, p. 394). Teachers in this third stage could find themselves at a pivotal and appropriate time to consider an emergent curriculum as it exemplifies teachers who are interested in new ideas and resources to enhance effectiveness.

It may be that what the teacher has been doing for each annual cohort of children has been quite adequate for them, but that she herself finds the recurrent Valentine cards, Easter bunnies, and pumpkin cut-outs insufficiently interesting. (Katz, 2005, p. 4)

Through observation and discussions with experienced colleagues and access to resources, Katz (2004) suggests that a teacher will be able to progress forward from the renewal stage to the fourth and final stage of maturity. A teacher at this stage is ready to assume a leadership position with an improved sense of self and admiration of colleagues. Mary was not able to focus on the question that typifies this stage, “What impact has my life had on the lives of children and families” (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000, p. 395). Mary did not have access to resources and had limited exposure to experienced colleagues, both necessary requirements of stage three. Even with 20 years in the field, Mary’s practice was fraught with self-doubt and frustration. In many ways, she is similar to the first stage teacher with concerns focused on surviving daily challenges with children.

Katz's conceptualization (2004) is linear and lacks a dynamic quality since it resembles a lockstep progression. With each stage visualized as a step up, reaching the next step is only possible after successfully completing the requirements on the preceding step. It thus becomes a standardized procedure that may not be applicable to all teachers. An alternative conceptualization is put forward by VanderVen (2000) who suggests that teacher development in early childhood education needs to be seen in a nonlinear, dynamic way. For an experienced teacher, Mary seems to be displaying features of a teacher in survival, concerned mostly with classroom management and control while trying to absorb a new curriculum. Regardless of age and length of time in the field, a teacher may experience concerns that parallel those of a beginning teacher when faced with the reconciliation of a new practice with the old, especially within a context that lacks support. In this situation, although a teacher can again work her way up to a stage reflected by maturity, the process continues in a spiraling rather than linear fashion.

Katz (2004) makes suggestions for professional development at each stage. Felicia's and Rose's involvement with coursework, workshops, conferences, and professional associations demonstrates that their outside involvement may have been a contributing factor to enhancing their practice. Mary and Layla have shared the experience of parental leave and the difficulty involved in stopping and restarting professional practice. Layla seems to be moving forward and has plans for ongoing professional development, including participation in Reggio-inspired conferences. In Mary's case, progression has been dependent on contextual factors. Movement for Mary on Katz's (1972) linear model represents strides forward and backward revealing limitations to a lockstep conceptualization.

According to Katz's (1972) model, given her number of years in the field, Mary should have been in the third and fourth stages of development. During the time of this research, Mary was in her first year of teaching in a child care centre with an articulated Reggio philosophy. She found herself struggling for survival and more aligned with a teacher at the beginning stages of development. If Mary had had exposure to experienced colleagues in similar situations, she may not have reverted back to the first stage of survival.

New Images of Teacher Development

If the practice of emergent curriculum can be visualized in stages then Mary was in a transitional stage. Applying a scaffold visualization with three progressing levels suggests that the second stage or step is where reconciling past practice (themes) with the present (emergent curriculum) occurs. If a teacher ignores this cognitive conflict by maintaining the status quo, she remains on the second step. It is the acceptance of an emergent curriculum with the accompanying changes in the role of the teacher that propels the teacher up a step. Three rungs of a ladder suggest a linear and lockstep model. In contrast, Felicia's metaphor of a teacher climbing a mountain, described in Chapter Five, is a more appropriate visualization for the process of emergent curriculum implementation. For Felicia, climbing in a straightforward fashion was impossible as various factors such as parental demands and colleague support derailed the progress up the mountain, causing detours that spiraled before she reached the peak. Table 2 attempts to represent a dynamic spiraling model of development. In this model, the metaphor of the labyrinth that appeared in early chapters becomes vertical as it spirals up a mountain.

Table 2***Kashin's Model of Emergent Curriculum***

	Stage 1 Status quo	Stage 2 Transitional	Stage 3 Implementation
Description of practice	Themes	Combination of theme and projects	Projects or “projected curriculum” (Gandini, 1998, p. 113)
Trajectory	In the valley	Climbing upwards	On the mountaintop
Reaction to innovative practice	Cognitive dissonance	Acceptance or rejection. (With acceptance, the climb continues. With rejection, a return to the valley)	Transformation

The experience of emergent curriculum is similar to climbing a mountain in a spiral trajectory in order to reach the peak. Periodic downward descents may occur when new information informs practice. Then a teacher must toil in the turmoil of the valley of cognitive conflict taking time to accommodate the new information which will then require climbing another peak. These teachers each spent time in the valley before ascending the mountain of emergent curriculum. In the valley, their practice was characterized by the status quo of the thematic approach to curriculum implementation. This is the time of transition where cognitive dissonance occurs. If a teacher does not move forward and make the decision to climb the mountain, she remains oblivious to the transformative experience of reaching the peak of the mountaintop.

Cognitive dissonance is a state of imbalance between cognitions. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), cognitions are defined as being an attitude, emotion, belief or value, or even a mixture of these cognitions. Dissonance theory suggests that if teachers are engaged in activities that arouse dissonance then beliefs might change. One of the sources of dissonance identified by Festinger is “past experience” colliding with new cognitions (Raths, 2001). Mary’s comment that she is “not comfortable with everything I am hearing about Reggio” suggests the image of the new colliding with the old. Mary regrets that “I am not there yet” when she compares herself to the others after the focus group session.

The final phase of this emergent curriculum developmental model described in Table 2 is the implementation stage. This stage propels the teacher towards the peak of the mountain, providing the fuel for the journey. With an abundance of information and resources available, many early childhood educators should find themselves in the middle stage, receiving new information that would be the impetus to ascend the mountain. If the new information is rejected and the dissonance ignored, teachers can find themselves remaining in the valley. With the contextual factors as they are, it is up to the individual educator to make the climb. When operating within a context of little or no support, courage is necessary to climb the mountain. Without it, remaining in the middle stage and possibly returning to the first would be a natural and predictable outcome.

The impetus for an individual educator to make the climb could come from his or her discovery of the Reggio Emilia approach. Attending conferences, workshops, or reading the abundance of information found in books, articles, and on the Internet, could help the process that could lead to cognitive dissonance. This new information and its

availability could produce the cognitive conflict that propels the journey up the mountain. The approach to early childhood education employed by the educators in Reggio Emilia is reaching a wide audience (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005). When exposed to this, many early childhood educators may find themselves confronted by a mountain that they do not have the courage or the support to climb. Perhaps a reframed self-image would provide the recognition that limitations need not be stultifying.

The transition from the second stage to the final stage of transformation where the teacher cannot conceive of implementing any other type of curriculum is difficult. Some may begin climbing the mountain only to return to the valley in “defeat.” The critical juncture at which a teacher struggles with cognitive dissonance is the pivotal moment that will either result in taking the spiraling path upwards or remaining in the valley. Wien (1995) calls this “the pivot point,” a moment in “time/space in which the teacher is torn between two ways of acting, each reflecting a different mental image or framework for action” (p. 29).

Conclusion

With the exception of Mary, who had limited success with emergent curriculum, these cases illustrate the strong impact this approach can have on practice and self-image. These are stories of evolving teachers, each with her own path to follow to ascend the mountain and reach the peak of her potential. They were each experiencing cognitive dissonance when a pivotal point was reached where new information collided with past practice. Of the four, Felicia represented the only case where the information came as a result of self-discovery. As part of their work responsibilities, Layla, Rose, and Mary were expected to implement emergent curriculum.

Regardless of how the course of the curriculum was decided, all the participants, except for Mary, were extremely satisfied with their experiences with emergent curriculum. Layla, Rose, and Felicia highly recommended emergent curriculum and would never consider returning to the past practice of themes. Mary, on the other hand, felt that she could easily return to the thematic approach. Her experience was less positive than the others' experiences, with context appearing to be the determining variable in her perception of emergent curriculum. While in different places in their respective journeys up the mountain, each of these teachers recognized that her learning and mastery of emergent curriculum had not yet been fully realized.

In conclusion, in order to successfully implement an emergent curriculum, it is necessary to accept a social constructivist theory and embed it in practice. The community of the school needs to encircle those within and support the creation and maintenance of reciprocal relationships that empower all. With successful implementation of an emergent curriculum, a teacher's self-image and practice can be positively impacted, reframed images of children and teachers can evolve, and transformation is possible.

Chapter Seven: Future Directions

If we accept that every problem produces cognitive conflicts, then we believe that cognitive conflicts initiate a process of co-construction and cooperation.

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 80)

Introduction

It is for early childhood educators working directly with children that I have written this dissertation. In this chapter, it is my intention to go beyond the data to speculate what might happen in the future with regards to the phenomenon of emergent curriculum. What implications could there be for my students, the research participants, the children they work with, for other early childhood educators, and ultimately for me? I can only speculate on the impact this research will have on others, but for me, it has provided a transformational experience that has illuminated a future path and direction.

Studying the phenomenon of emergent curriculum has had a tremendous impact on my life. The research connected to this dissertation has opened up new possibilities for my own future growth. The Reggio Emilia approach, representing both my dissertation topic as well as a culture, provides an infinite number of opportunities for further study and research. At first, when I began the research process, I saw my journey like the path of a labyrinth, but as I progressed, I felt elevated both in status and spirit. I wanted to rise above the surface. This research has propelled my journey up the mountain, and it is from my view at the top that I see the future directions. However, the journey was not straightforward as it spiralled upwards like the paths of the labyrinth. Ultimately, I will

journey down from the mountain top, again in spiralling fashion, to what I can see before me, the next valley to descend to and cross, and then the next mountain to climb.

For others, it is my hope that the stories presented in the four case studies will provide the cognitive dissonance they need that provokes and precedes their own change. The continued view of early childhood educators as passive acceptors of a predetermined curriculum encourages the status quo. The status quo is limiting to teachers and to children. Accepting the discomfort of cognitive dissonance will elevate the status quo of early childhood educators, as the teacher who questions and deliberates on practice takes on the attributes of a researcher. In the Reggio Emilia pre-primary schools, teachers are considered researchers. They collect data, document and reflect on that documentation. They view conflicting positions as necessary to the teaching and learning process, producing teachers who are not passive. Inspired and enlightened by the Reggio Emilia approach and emergent curriculum, these teachers become empowered. This is an elevated status for a field overwhelmed with negative images which undervalue worth.

For this field to finally gain prominence, in the educational spectrum that represents others teachers from kindergarten to university, the vitally important view that learning must begin in the early, pre-kindergarten years will have to be recognized. Given the benefits of an emergent curriculum, children will gain an early start to education that will have profound effects on society. Imagine the impact of a radically different view of young children that elevates their status to one of theory-builders. Concurrently, the teachers of these young children will be viewed as much more than glorified babysitters.

In these future projections, theory must have a solid place in the field of early childhood education. It is my hope that other early childhood educators will be inspired,

as I have been, to detach themselves from their fears and their aversion they to theory. As I see it, embedding theory into one's practice can only enrich and empower the experience, creating positive results. Confronting the theoretical aspects of this dissertation required me to shift my perspective as well as reframe my own self-image. The acceptance of theory can blaze the path forward for early childhood education.

The View from the Mountain Top: My Story

It was during the process of data analysis that I really began to theorize. Merriam (1998) described theorizing as involving "moving from concrete observable data to using concepts to describe phenomena" (p. 187). It is not a task that is without discomfort. Manipulating abstract categories requires speculation which is often a risky endeavour. Merriam (1998) describes theorizing as fraught with ambiguity as it involves speculation, risk, and inference. I had been resistant to theory. Now I can see that embedding theory into my practice has afforded me a fuller view from the top of the mountain.

The journey up the mountain was not an easy climb, but as I allowed others to co-construct the path, it became clearer. By accepting collaboration and including the voice of others, I reached a point of change and transformation that had eluded me as a preschool teacher. When I was working with children, I did not have the vantage point of the mountain peak. I accepted the tightly controlled script of the thematic approach and practiced without question. The pivot point in my journey was when I began to deliberate on the practice of themes. When I planned curriculum in this way, I would choose the theme well ahead of implementation, basing my choice on a particular curriculum text that suggested what to do and when to do it.

Curriculum directions.

In retrospect, when I recall the matrix of activities that represented the curriculum I presented to children, it was irrelevant, meaningless, and incongruent. I remember the main challenge was to fill in the boxes so that each represented the overarching theme, paying little consequence to what or how children were learning. My blind adherence to themes brings to mind the words of Malaguzzi as eloquently expressed in the “100 Languages” poem:

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 speak, to understand without joy, to love and marvel only at Easter and Christmas. (1998, p. 3)

Since I no longer work with children, the rationale for this research is that I could experience the practice of emergent curriculum vicariously through the teachers in these case studies. In my own experience with themes, no concerted effort was made to include the children’s wishes and interests. Some teachers may be able to use themes flexibly and allow for transgressions from the dominant theme, but I found it necessary to “stay on theme.” I made an assumption, every week and every day, about what the children needed to know. I acted as the transmitter of this knowledge. I was not open to hearing the voice of the children, the voice of the parents, nor even my own inner voice.

The primary way I covered the theme was through the use of adult-created, precut shapes that represented common symbols. Often I would also include worksheets, which satisfied a need to have an academic focus within my classroom. As a preschool teacher, I had numerous books with reproducible worksheets that were compiled according to common themes. Worksheets that involve connecting dots and matching two-dimensional

objects created by adults removed opportunities for children to be actively engaged in their own learning. When children act on objects and are encouraged to think, theorize, and problem solve they are building knowledge. Worksheets remove the opportunity for children to make decisions. When worksheets are corrected by the teacher, the children learn that the teacher is the only one who determines which answers are right.

In my practice, I was modeling a curriculum prescribed by others. I was voiceless within my own classroom. I now understand why the Reggio educators prefer the label of “approach” rather than model. A theme is a content organizer that can exist within the conceptual framework of a particular curriculum model. An approach exemplifies a process involving a dynamic exchange between teaching and learning. Models operate from predictable representations of teaching and learning. They rely on fixed interpretations of children and teachers. Models have been created and codified to be replicable curricula in any setting (Goffin & Wilson, 2001). An approach cannot present a predetermined curriculum, it must emerge.

Theory-building.

It is very difficult to abandon the script that represents the practice of the past. It is even more complex to see a future where the teacher is the creator of the theories of teaching and learning which evolve from practice. As the creator of theories, the early childhood educator goes well beyond a custodial function. It is thus hard to speculate about why so many are still tied so closely to a predetermined curriculum represented by the theme of the week. I have tried to build my own theories that explain the reasons why teachers remain so closely attached to predetermined curriculum.

In deliberation on past practice, I can see my dissatisfaction with themes has been associated with an uneasiness regarding the power dynamic within the classroom. My learning experience dictated the course of my journey towards emergent curriculum. It did not feel authentic to deliver a curriculum based on the same dynamics that I, myself, had difficulty with as a child and as a learner. Themes only scratched the surface of possibilities and potential—my own and the children's. However, projects do not necessarily provide all the answers; they can also be controlling. The curriculum that truly will elevate the status of early childhood education will be one where power is shared and projects emerge through co-construction between teachers and children.

I spent many years teaching the Project Approach to my students. I have since realized from ongoing reflection that projects don't necessarily translate into emergent curriculum. There is a risk in allowing a single entity such as a project or a theme to define practice. I have witnessed teachers and pre-service teachers who have tightly controlled a project and its directional thrust. I am concerned that projects have replaced themes as a content organizer and, as a result, the importance of truly revealing what is happening in the classroom remains lost. Hawkins (1998) describes project work as evolving, "with great vitality, but the definition and duration of these projects" are "a dependent and restricted variable" (p. xxi). The projects that my students were able to implement were dependent on their willingness to accept the challenge of an evolving rather than a preset curriculum.

I am now reflecting upon the years spent espousing the benefits of the three-stage model of the Project Approach to a constant succession of early childhood education students. Considering the most recent experience of the last cohort of students from the

winter semester of 2006, I am overcome by a sense of tension and uneasiness. They were designing projects as islands unto themselves. Although the topic emerged from the children, these early childhood education students, for the most part, decided what related activities to bring to their placement during the course of the semester. It often appeared that there was no connection from one week to the next, except for the common topic, and no attempt to build on previous learning. In essence, many of these projects appeared to be long-term themes.

Collaboration.

The changes and transformations that I have made within my practice as a college professor have been preceded by cognitive conflict and driven by theory. As the participants in this study felt the discomfort when their use of themes collided with the practice of emergent curriculum, I, too, had had a parallel experience. When I began teaching emergent curriculum to students, I needed to reconcile classroom practice based on lectures with the pedagogy of social constructivism. Theory converged with practice, and I was inspired by the inspirational philosophy of Reggio Emilia. I allowed opportunities for dialogue, discourse, and collaboration to emerge. Fundamental to this shift was a theoretical understanding of practice. It was my recognition that the work I did existed within a Vygotskian perspective of learning in a social context which provided me with an experience of authenticity in practice. I recognized that learning takes place in a social context. I also recognized that it is through others that I have developed (Vygotsky, 1981). Where once there had been an absence of theory imbedded in my practice, now theory occupied a prominent place in my practice.

In this current semester in the winter of 2007, I have stopped expecting my students to implement a three-stage project in their field placement sites. Instead, I have focused on a projected curriculum, with a focus on documentation and Reggio-inspired environments. I am inspired by the *Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit*. The experience of initiating my college to be a partner in bringing this exhibit to Toronto, I have had the opportunity to visit it many times. As one of the organizers for the opening conference, I was instrumental in bringing to the Toronto audience Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini, two Reggio educators from Italy. Both had firsthand experience with the projects displayed in the museum quality panels of the exhibit, now made famous by its years of touring the world. The exhibit bears witness to the originality and the extraordinary nature of the years of research that have led the Reggio Emilia approach to become a primary point of reference, worldwide, for those who work in early childhood education.

Reggio Emilia has become my primary point of reference and I have become a Reggio-inspired educator. I have accepted the challenge of unfolding curriculum in the classroom and seeking collaborative, reciprocal relationships with my students and my colleagues. Visiting Italy and the pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia with three other educators was both a shared experience as well as a catalyst for collaboration. Sitting amongst the beautiful, mature trees in the park adjacent to our hotel, down the path from the famed Diana School, the Acorn Collaborative was born and our first conference planned.

Since our return in the spring of 2005, we have developed, organized, and delivered three professional development conferences based on the principles of Reggio

Emilia to early childhood educators, with another one in the planning stage. In addition, we have continued to deliver numerous sessions custom designed for specific centres or agencies. We are a testimony to the power of social construction. In our Acorn Collaborative, we try to model the spirit of the Reggio educators by maintaining an equal partnership, making our decisions by consensus.

Our ultimate aim is to share our passion with others and inspire them to be courageous enough to experiment with the Reggio Emilia approach. In the fall of 2006, one of my colleagues opened her own Reggio-inspired pre-primary school. It is with great anticipation that I look forward to the challenge of spending the 2007 summer months working in one of the classrooms, fulfilling the role of an early childhood educator practicing an emergent curriculum. In this context, I may be able to truly experience the curriculum that had eluded me as preschool teacher.

It has been the stories of the four research participants that have inspired me to once again seek the experience of working directly with children. I envy the possibilities of learning from children on a daily basis. I look forward to the opportunities of establishing reciprocal relationships with children, parents, and other teachers. From the stories of the participants, I know that these are not easy goals to achieve. However, I will finally have lived, firsthand, direct experience with emergent curriculum. At the end of the summer, I will be able to stand before the next succession of pre-service early childhood education students in my classroom having practiced what I preach.

Of Hills and Valleys: Next Steps for the Case Study Teachers

All of the case study teachers took their work seriously, applying a professional attitude and authentic desire to do the best for the children in their classrooms. Their

stories are even more inspirational when considered within the political, economic, and social context in which they exist that has historically belittled their efforts and devalued their worth.

Layla, Rose, Felicia, and Mary continue to be committed to the field of early childhood education. Layla remains in the same classroom, teaching another succession of four- and five-year-old children. Felicia has left her position in the child centre she had worked in for a number of years and has taken an early maternity leave in order to complete her final courses towards a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education. She does not know at this time what the future holds, but is determined to remain in the field. Mary is doing supply work at a number of child care centres. Rose looks forward to the opportunity to assume an administrative position as the organization she works for continues to expand with the opening of a new child care centre in the fall of 2007.

I would speculate that in order to reach the top of the mountain to see the full view of the hills and valleys below, each of the case study teachers must accept the cognitive dissonance that will come from the reading of the stories within these pages. In order for their stories to connect to each other, and in turn, connect to my story, the same categories of curriculum directions, theory-building, and collaboration will be employed as section headings.

Curriculum directions.

For Rose and Felicia, I would suggest that the next steps in their development would involve creating pedagogical documentation within a Reggio-inspired environment. Moving away from the limitations of the Project Approach should increase the level of collaboration, especially with children. For Layla, who has been working

within a Reggio-inspired environment and producing documentation, I would encourage her to continue to learn from the documentation and focus on questions of learning in addition to the accumulation of knowledge. The facts and figures about the “Weather Project” that the children were able to recite are not as important as the theories they were building which demonstrate a move from memorization to critical thinking.

I hope that Layla will be inspired in some way from reading this dissertation and that she will be motivated to continue on her path to accept the infinite possibilities of an emergent curriculum. Rather than remaining within the same classroom, perhaps Layla and her colleagues would consider the practices of the Reggio Emilia educators who follow the children as they move from classroom to classroom. Working with the same children over a number of years would create more opportunities for learning and possibilities for theorizing. Layla, who appeared to be the most Reggio-inspired of the four teachers, still has an opportunity to change and improve.

For Mary, I predict that change will be more difficult. The disposition is there, and with support there are possibilities. For Mary, it will depend on whether she seeks another permanent full-time position and whether support for her development as an emergent curriculum teacher is offered in her new setting. Without that support, the barriers will be too high to scale. Mary had difficulty accepting the challenge of cognitive dissonance in her practice when she had the opportunity to implement an emergent curriculum. She could not reach the peak of the mountain. Felicia who was faced with similar, but perhaps less insurmountable challenges recognized herself as being in a state of cognitive dissonance. It is that application of theory into practice that makes Felicia’s story so inspirational.

Theory-building.

What would be the effect on these teachers if they all accepted theory into practice? It appeared that Rose, Mary, and Layla shared my earlier aversion to theory. When it came to theory they were almost speechless. To express a voice that articulates theory would be to project an elevated image far beyond that of glorified babysitter. It is my hope for these three teachers that they are able to embrace theory into practice. To see theory simply as a well-substantiated explanation within their practice would be a way for these teachers to build theories from their work with children. If children are theory builders than certainly their teachers can be too.

The four teachers in this study recognized the information on Reggio Emilia as constituting new ideas. New ideas naturally produce tension or cognitive dissonance. This tension constitutes a cognitive conflict or disequilibrium occurring with the experience of new information. While “disequilibrium is uncomfortable” (Jones & Nimmo, 1999, p. 8), the new information needs to be assimilated in order for learning to occur. Felicia’s recognition of her own state of cognitive dissonance is evidence of her ability to theorize about practice. Her commitment to continuing her education at a Master’s level demonstrates the learning that is occurring for her.

Building theories from practice should be the aim of education. Education is, according to Malaguzzi (2001), a “situation of research, and the research produces a new pedagogy.”

Pedagogy is movement, continuous movement . . . I don’t believe that pedagogy can know, each day, where it is going and where it may go; it is a route that you discover as you travel...if the ship breaks down along the way, you repair it as you go. (p. 6)

However, the ship cannot be repaired alone. To construct or reconstruct within the field of early childhood education, we must look to others. As Vygotsky indicated “it is through others that we develop into ourselves” (1981, p. 181).

Collaboration.

Within a collaborative environment, there is an integration of voices. Children, teachers, parents, and administrators are all heard. According to Palmer (1998), “a teaching and learning space should be a place where “the group’s voice is gathered and amplified, so that the group can affirm, question, challenge” (p. 75). Documentation is the key to building a collaborative environment that allows for group voice. It invites reflection and challenge as the foundation of collaboration.

Building an environment where voice is encouraged and collaboration fostered is to create an atmosphere of support. For Layla and Rose, the support they felt within their organization was consistent with a higher level of satisfaction and desire to remain in their positions. I do not predict either will seek employment elsewhere. Felicia, who had limited opportunities for collaboration, looked at the lack of support from parents and colleagues as a challenge to continue in her academic studies. For Mary, the lack of collaboration and support had more devastating effects.

As the only one of my participants with almost no on-site support, Mary was stifled in her growth and development. I believe that Mary would have been at Katz’s maturity stage of teacher development if she had had more support. Teachers in the maturity stage find it rewarding to meet with colleagues from other programs to share ideas, to attend regional and national conferences and workshops, and to experiment with developing new strategies. In Katz’s final maturity stage, the teacher asks deeper and

more abstract questions, and develops a commitment to the child care profession.

Teachers in this stage need professional journals, opportunities to attend seminars and institutes, and opportunities to pursue recognition and join professional organizations (Katz, 2004). Mary did not have any of this necessary support. Mary's voice was not listened to. Mary is silenced in the valley of the status quo. To be heard she must accept the cognitive dissonance that will lead her way up the spiraling path of the mountain to its peak.

Finding voice.

The deep and everlasting transformation that I have experienced through the collaborative and constructive process of this research has been profound. I have found a true and authentic voice which I am no longer afraid to use. I no longer feel the debilitating effects of the muteness I experienced when I kept my voice silent, because I did not feel worthy as a teacher or learner. With this research, I now feel empowered to speak and be heard not only to tell my story, but to tell the stories of the four teachers who participated in this study. It is their stories that have contributed to my own deeply personal internal paradigm shift, reframing everything I believe about the field of early childhood education. While I present my voice within the pages of this dissertation, I also want to integrate the voices of the four research participants. It is my hope that it is through the integration of their voice that we may inspire others to carry the banner of emergent curriculum and change the field.

In order for Mary to find her true an authentic voice, she needs to be in a position that allows for a full and realistic view of practice. If she continues the climb up the mountain in a new setting and reaches the top, she will be in a position to see her

curriculum choices from a broader vantage point. When she gains the confidence, she will feel more inclined to find her voice and will understand the importance of hearing the voices of others, reaching “the other side of silence” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 3). As Rose accepts more responsibility in her organization, her voice will become amplified and her experience of collaboration will continue to inspire the “integration of voices” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 131).

Layla’s organization is not expanding and with her resistance to further education, opportunities for voice may be limited. Somehow Layla needs to descend the mountain and reach a valley to once again experience the tension of cognitive dissonance. She must push herself out of her comfort zone so that others can benefit from hearing about her experiences with emergent curriculum. Giving workshops and presenting at conferences may be the vehicles and opportunities Layla needs to find her true and authentic voice. Felicia’s voice will be heard. She understands that she cannot jump from mountain top to mountain top. As she climbs up and down the mountain range, her voice will be heard far and wide. By engaging in a continual process of searching for a unique and authentic voice, Felicia has come to the basic insight of constructivist thought: “All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 137). Whatever mountain she is climbing, Felicia will remain true to her authentic voice.

The power of the labyrinth.

When the paths of the labyrinth lead to the centre there is a realization of power (Artress, 1995). The labyrinth metaphor remains a constant in this research, but it now resembles a vertical conceptualization as if the path spirals round a mountain. To get to

the centre, or to the peak of the mountain, ego has to be sacrificed (Artress, 1995).

Maslow (1968) suggests that self-actualization is associated with functioning fully and being more open for experience. With experience, according to Dewey (1959), change is likely.

Emergent curriculum allows the user to reach the vantage point of being “outside of self”; it “enables them to look backward, bringing the whole self in view” (Belenky et al., p. 32). Emergent curriculum provides opportunities for the integration of voices. This dissertation was an exercise in emerging from silence to voice for both the researcher and her participants. Voice “is an essential part of the reconceptualization of the field of early childhood education” (Ayers, 1992, p. 266). Rust (1993) suggests that with a shared voice in the field, “There is no limit to the transformation that could take place” (p. 107). This field has been affected by silence far too long. With Reggio Emilia as inspiration, the field and the practitioner can reach a place where voices integrate, “where all knowledge is constructed and the knower is the ultimate part of the known” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 137).

I hope that I have demonstrated an integration of voices. While my story coincides with that of the participants, I am conscious of not wanting my words to overpower the stories of the practitioners who are actually working with children within a context that is isolated, marginalized, and undervalued. I would presume that their level of feeling speechless would be much greater than my own. I am, however, so closely aligned in my soul with the early childhood educator that I, too, have experienced the disempowering impact of being silent. Unlike any prior experience, this dissertation has given me an opportunity for voice. Working collaboratively with a thesis supervisor, an

editor, a friend, and the participants, my writing became richer as I socially constructed this dissertation. Correspondence received from my editor is evidence of the impact that social constructivism has had on my self-image and practice:

The woman, whose voice was originally subdued, withheld, and tentative, has become an assertive, fully expressive proponent for her own research, insights, and point of view. And thrilling (I truly mean this) for me to witness the new you emerge.

It is as if I have reached the centre of the labyrinth which for me is on top of a mountain—but I could not get there on my own. My editor, my thesis supervisor, friends, and colleagues served as guides as I made my way to the point where I had a fuller image of myself; the point from which I could speak in volumes. While the guides were there to help me find the spiralling path up the mountain, I would not have been able to take one step, if it had not been for the four case study teachers. It is their stories that have inspired me to continue this arduous climb. Many times, I felt like giving up, but I knew that I wanted these voices to be heard. Now that I find myself looking down from the mountain top with visions for future climbs, I feel powerful. This empowering position in which I find myself is one that I envision for the field of early childhood education as a whole. I want the nurturing and caring early childhood educators that I know to feel empowered. Empowerment does not imply the taking of someone else's power. By giving power to the children, early childhood educators can feel what it is like to simultaneously reach the centre of the labyrinth and the top of the mountain peak.

Reaching the Peak: Implications for the Field

Early child development is the first tier of human development. Early experiences shape brain development and set the foundation for later learning, behaviour, and health.

The social and economic importance of investing in early childhood education is an urgent matter for communities and governments (McCain & Mustard, 2002). Early childhood educators teach children during a time in their lives when the greatest window of opportunity for learning exists. This should make us proud to speak. Theory as a component of practice should be a desired goal for early childhood educators intent on development. VanderVen (1993, 2000) has suggested that there is a “breach” between theory and practice in the early childhood education field. What is required is a reconceptualization of the theory-to-practice issue. According to Spodek (1995), the lack of a theoretical base constitutes a barrier to professionalization for the field of early childhood education. Accepting theory in practice will propel early childhood educators, as a group, to higher levels of professionalization and, as individuals, to higher planes of development.

Some teachers may be waiting for external forces to initiate change. If the context of early childhood education changes, with increased educational requirements and mandated professional development, those unwilling to change will no longer be able to resist if there is an alteration in the context of the field. However, to wait for an improved context is to limit the possibilities and to prolong the situation faced by early childhood educators with respect to self-image and practice. At the same time, if contextual changes contribute to higher expectations for early childhood education teachers with respect to education and professional development, an enlightened teacher may readily and easily accept new ideas and reframed images. In this future projection, those who are resistant to change may find their stance as keepers of routine challenged by their own colleagues.

As I envision the future, it holds many positive opportunities for the field of early childhood education.

Fu (2002) calls the challenge to reinvent the Reggio Emilia approach within our own situational context as “a pedagogy of hope and possibilities” (p. 23). I hope that these four testimonies of practice will illustrate for others the value of change and the transformation which is possible. All four cases, even Mary’s, illustrate possibilities. Now, with the *Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit* on display in Toronto for the first time possibilities seem endless. After close to 20 years of touring in over 30 different cities in North America, from September 2006 to February 2007, this exhibit is reaching thousands of educators in Toronto.

A catalyst for change.

In many communities around the world the exhibit has become a catalyst for change. These beautiful panels of hope and possibility have reached many individual educators, administrators, and policy makers. They, like me, have felt the impact. Abramson and Huggins (1999) have chronicled the affect of the exhibit on the state of California where support for the initiative had state, regional, and local representation. The exhibit garnered the attention of the media and, with many professional development opportunities offered, individuals, institutions, and communities changed the way they viewed children and teachers. The impact of the exhibit became like a stone dropped into water with deliberation. The result was many ripples of change and transformation.

Concurrently, more child care centres across North America are now reconsidering their physical environment after being inspired by the pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia. A quarterly journal devoted to articles by North American and Italian

educators, *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*, documents the stories of many of these inspired centres and teachers. With 13 volumes published, there are many North American examples of change and transformation. The teachers in these stories report encountering a time in their own practices when they were having their first contact with the approach of Reggio Emilia which brought them face-to-face with an influx of new ideas.

In Reggio Emilia, the newly erected Loris Malaguzzi International Centre stands as evidence of the power of early childhood education. The centre, dedicated in 2005 to the memory of Malaguzzi, was vast and impressive when I toured it. It houses workshops, laboratories, a child care centre, and a primary school. Juxtaposing my experience in Reggio visiting the very first centre built by the hands of determined parents with my visit to this expansive and beautiful edifice made it clear why this is called “the centre of the possible.”

The pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia grew out of the ashes of almost total devastation following the Second World War. This was the context for the transformation that occurred for the children and teachers of Reggio Emilia. Context should not limit possibilities. Context does not erect a wall from which we cannot see past. Malaguzzi understood the significance of the wall metaphor. According to Malaguzzi (2001a) there is a wall which prevents us from going beyond what we know. His poetic words tell us that, “beyond the wall there is always a beyond” (p. 6).

When the *Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit* was in its first incarnation, it was called “When the Eye Jumps Over the Wall.” According to Malaguzzi (2001a), inside the title there was a message “that the eye, when it looks beyond the wall of habit,

of custom, of the normal, of the non-surprise, of assumed security” (p. 6), will find the possible. When the wall of old habits and customs is broken down the quest for the possible can begin.

According to Malaguzzi (2001a), the obstacle to overcome is the accepted image of the child. If education is seen as just a service offered to young children, it subjugates the child within a message that their voice need not be heard. The aim of the exhibit for Malaguzzi was to give “shape and vitality to research that vanquishes silence, that affords both children and adults a way to explore, to construct theories and ideas” (p. 6).

The challenges of context.

Reframing images will transform and elevate the status of the early childhood educator by positively impacting the teacher’s self-image. Every early childhood educator who accepts the challenge to change and transform can ascend up the mountain. Letting go of the image of babysitter to accept the elevated status of teacher as theory-builder will be transformational to the field. This empowering image can positively influence every teacher’s very personal self-image and can transcend to impact the field as a whole. As the field emerges from undervalued obscurity and evolves towards professionalization, the underlying supposition is that the catalyst for this change can be the inspirational philosophy and practice of the pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy.

With the constraints inherent in child care -- lack of support, wages that are not reflective of the value of their providers, the limited access to preparation time, and the possible adverse effects of working a longer day with children than their primary teacher counterparts – early childhood educators could easily choose to ignore these new ideas

and remain with the status quo. They can choose to erect the wall that Malaguzzi (2001a) calls the wall of the “finite” (p. 6). When responses to curriculum become habituated and when they are left unquestioned, the result is the continuation of dubious practice and a limited view of what is beyond the wall. For some it takes direction from above to encourage change. However, a top-down directive can produce resistance (Wai-Yum, 2003). If the impetus for change comes from within, early childhood educators can have a “sense of the infinite” (Malaguzzi, 2001a, p. 6).

To recognize their working contexts as living organisms is to understand that curriculum and relationships evolve. It is a dynamic force with shared power. It is ironic that in a field which has long been disempowered, the key is to let go of power. By doing so others will be empowered and, in turn, will transform the field of early childhood education. By uniting as “one voice” and assuming a more assertive stance in education, “there is no limit to the transformation that can take place” (Rust, 1993, p. 107). If early childhood educators come together with one voice that supports the benefits of a social constructivist Reggio-inspired curriculum, the impact could be exponentially greater. To do so means being ready to absorb the impact of a new world view that collides with the way of the past.

Teacher as theory-builder.

Without a theoretical base in an individual teacher’s curriculum practice it is unlikely that there can be an engagement of colliding worldviews. A worldview is a philosophy of education, a pedagogy representing a particular view of teaching and learning. It requires an articulation of theory. If the field of early childhood education is seen as lacking a theoretical base then it is imperative that a grass roots acceptance of

theory in practice take place for the field to increase to a higher level of professionalization. The next step for the field of early childhood would be to firmly accept theory into practice.

Early childhood educators need to go beyond loving and nurturing to embrace theory in practice. Ayers (2001) suggests that for teachers “love for students just as they are – without drive or advance toward a future – is false love, enervating and disabling” (p. 138). Teaching and learning can be a transformative experience for the student and the teacher. To become a transformative teacher, early childhood educators must see themselves as students, seekers, and aspirants. As teachers “we must understand our lives and our work as a journey or a quest” (Ayers, 2001, p. 138). While on the journey, early childhood educators can become “students of our students, in part to understand them, in part to know ourselves” (Ayers, 2001, p. 138). Paola Friere (1985) describes the transactional process of teaching and learning:

Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the teachers cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 67)

Guided by the visionary Loris Malaguzzi, the Italian educators of Reggio Emilia have continuously revisited the works of leading theorists in conjunction with their own experiences in order to reconstruct their practice to meet the changing needs of the children they teach. The history and philosophy of Reggio Emilia can give North American educators “the courage to reconstruct and reinvent the Reggio Emilia approach – to make it *our* own” (Fu, 2002, p. 29). In Reggio Emilia, the child is often referred to as the protagonist or the centre of the story. Teachers and parents, though, are

also made of hundred languages and are, by consequence, also protagonists in the story of Reggio Emilia. Recreating an approach that is dynamic and responsive to children, in a diverse, democratic society can impact teachers and parents as well (Fu, 2002). The process can be transformative for all.

Implications for Children

The Reggio Emilia approach helps us to imagine the impact this particular worldview would have on children. To see children as protagonists of their own experiences of learning is to view children as having special rights. Children have the right to express their understanding of the world through many languages. These are the “languages that already exist in the mind and activity of the child.” These languages “have the power to become a generative force for other languages” (Malaguzzi, 2001b, p. 12).

Moving beyond themes to experiences that encourage deep thinking while making learning visible will give voice to children. The impact of doing this can be seen in the magnificent panels of the *Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit* where it becomes apparent what would happen if children were allowed to keep the hundred languages of thinking and expression with which they were born. The panels depict those “hundred languages” in paint, in wire sculpture, in clay, and in words. This is because the child has responded to “the school and the culture” that tells the child “the hundred is not there” by saying, “no way. The hundred is there” (Malaguzzi, 2001c, p. 10).

Children as curriculum developers.

I recall the experience of hearing Lella Gandini discuss the Reggio way of teaching and learning during the opening conference for the exhibit’s tenure in Toronto.

The question being pondered was; where does learning take place? For Lella, teaching and learning take place when children encounter a problem during the course of active exploration with materials. Presented with new information, they experience cognitive dissonance. When a teacher recognizes this cognitive conflict, an authentic teaching and learning opportunity presents itself. Giving the example of a child trying to affix two balls of clay together, Lella suggests that the lesson be embedded in that real experience, for it is at this time that the teacher can scaffold the skill of applying small amounts of water to the structure. In this way teaching and learning is holistic, natural, and authentic.

There is an understanding in a Reggio classroom that learning does not happen in isolation. For teachers it is an opportunity to collaborate and find shared meanings and common values. Planning involves making hypotheses and predictions or “projections” about “contexts, materials, tools and instruments” needed to create “opportunities pertinent to the learning process at hand.” Documentation provides the basis for “true professional training of teachers” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 122). It is an opportunity for in-service professional development as teacher and child engage in reciprocal learning.

Working with students and early childhood educators, I struggle with providing the training necessary to help them become adept at pedagogical documentation that reveals children’s thinking processes. I have presented loose parts and examples of interesting items to provoke their own questions and musings. Even when interesting theories emerge, there seems to be a fixation on finding the right answer.

When children ask questions such as the omnipresent, “Why is the sky blue?” teachers have the opportunity to elicit theories. When children explore natural objects and wonder how the sound of the ocean gets into the conch shell, then teachers can proceed

with further questions that will reveal thought process. I have been asked a number of times, “When would it be the time to present the right answer”? When I have explained that it is necessary to let go of the need to find the right answer, teachers and student teachers seem resistant to the view of a teacher who does not have all the right answers.

Children as theory-builders.

During her presentation in Toronto, when Amelia Gambetti related the “story of the fax,” artfully illustrated in the panels of the exhibit and described in “Making Learning Visible” by Piazza and Barchi (2001), I finally understood the importance of letting go of finding the right answer. To be able to communicate over the long distance between the Model Early Learning Centre of Washington, D.C. and the Villetta School of Reggio Emilia had intrigued both the American and Italian children. “After numerous messages, gifts, cassettes, and videos had been sent back and forth,” there was the realization by the children that “the ten days of waiting time for a reply to a message” to be received in Italy produced a “weakening of the communication expectations” (Piazza & Barchi, 2001, p. 214). And so the children at the Villetta School began to speculate and create hypotheses on the rapid communication abilities of a facsimile machine. From individual theories to a group theory, to a creatively illustrated pipe that brings the message from Reggio Emilia to the depths of the ocean and across Ireland, to arrive rapidly in Washington, D.C., is so detailed in the representation that the value of letting go of the right answer is reinforced.

During the conference in Toronto, when someone in the audience asked Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini, “When do you present the right answer?” Lella responded and called attention to the project about the fax machine. When would it be

developmentally appropriate to tell a child how a fax machine works? How many adults in the room could truly understand the engineering of a fax machine? It is necessary to help children *arrive* at the right answer without *giving* them the answer. The thinking that occurs during the process of theory building is more in tune with the way children learn. Rather than memorizing the right answer, the children have been challenged to speculate, make predictions, and create theories. This skill will serve them far better over time than any soon-to-be-forgotten answer from a teacher.

Children as collaborators.

While Reggio Emilia exists as an inspirational example of communities of shared power, as demonstrated in the multiple voices that are heard, it is an ideal difficult to attain unless there is a shift in perceived images. Children need to be viewed as co-constructors, not passive recipients; creators, not consumers; colleagues as collaborators, not competitors. Parents need to be supported and encouraged to voice their opinions rather than viewed as a threat and a source of unwanted conflict. In North America, our culture supports individualism rather than pluralism and, as a result, the possibilities for building community are limited.

Encouraging children to think more deeply does not imply incorporating an academic curriculum. In recent years, the term academic has come to describe those parts of the early childhood curriculum intended to help children master the basic skills involved in literacy and numeracy (Katz, 1999; Jacobson, 1996). Katz (1999) describes a gradual, more apparent pressure in the field to introduce academics into the early years. In part, this is due to the increasing demand and widening expectation of politicians, administrators, and parents that preschool and kindergarten programs ensure children's

readiness for the next grade or class level. Mary, for one, has felt the pressure to include academics in her program. “You have to find a program that will allow them to read, allow them to do their numbers but allow some to play with cars.” Ayers (1989) has described the pressure to include an academic focus in the early years as a “trickle-down” effect in which the needs of international competition and the economy dictate to colleges and high schools, and the demand for a reconstituted curriculum trickles down to the younger grades. Kindergarten and preschool reconstruction thus becomes linked with the movement to reinforce reading, writing, and mathematics. In the process, according to Ayers, early childhood educators are left “speechless” (p. 3).

Early childhood educators can no longer be silent; we need to have our voices heard and we need to hear the voices of children. There needs to be an integration of voices that occurs within a collaborative culture of co-construction. To celebrate the creation of communities where adults and children alike flourish in the glow of reciprocal learning should be the incentive to seek. Early childhood education has always represented a holistic, inclusive, caring, and experiential philosophy. In my opinion, it is our inability to articulate our strengths and their theoretical basis that have left us unheard. We need to establish discourse communities that will provide a safe place to tell our stories. Each of us has a story to tell. When a community is created there is safety in the telling of the story.

Conclusion

When my path led to early childhood education, at first I considered it a consolation prize, reaching this destination only after other avenues were blocked. I entered a field traumatized and stigmatized by prevailing negative images. Dissatisfied

with this perception of my field, I sought to travel a road that would reframe the image of the early childhood educator. Along the newly formed path I took, I encountered many others. In order to be open to this experience, I had to let go of ego to reach the centre of the labyrinth and the top of the mountain (Artress, 1994). I learned that I am a social constructivist. I learned that I need others to develop. From this vantage point, I could let go of a focus on self and open myself to hear the voices of others. As Maslow (1968) suggests, self-actualization is a place where ego is transcended. I can honestly and humbly say that where I now find myself is in a self-actualizing position. It is with this fuller view that I feel I am engaged in an authentic practice, a genuine teaching and learning experience.

It is not my story that I want to rise from the pages of this dissertation, but the stories of the case study participants. Theirs are the voices of early childhood educators who have toiled with contextual constraints, yet all have reached a place of self-actualization where they are open to change and transformation. Emergent curriculum is empowering for an emerging field and its corresponding developing practitioners. As both the field and the educator proceed in tandem, each keeps pace with the other in order to reach an elevated status. Letting go of images that suggest silence and competition between colleagues, early childhood educators can express voice and collaborate. It is not a time for ego attachment. Accepting conflict as provocation for collaboration and change will allow teachers to proudly see themselves in full view from the top of a mountain.

Relinquishing complete control of the curriculum and sharing it with others is to accept new images of children and their families. Accepting these new images will help to shape the self-image of teachers. Teachers will find themselves within a social

constructivism framework and accountable for learning. Sharing control with children does not mean letting children take over; it is not entirely a child-centred curriculum. Moving from a romanticized child-centred view of early childhood education to one that involves teacher direction does not imply a didactic pedagogy. Emergent curriculum involves leading a child to new levels of thinking, scaffolding across the zone of proximal development. Integrating this theory into practice will positively impact the self-image of the teacher. The teacher has a defined and accountable role. This role can be empowering. My own story and the stories of the four teachers in my study, individually and as a group, depict the empowering potential of emergent curriculum.

Emergent curriculum is pedagogy of infinite empowering possibilities. As I now stand on the peak of the mountain, I see the past, the present, and the future. In the past, there was a woman whose voice was tentative, whose spirit was broken, and who felt powerless. In the present, there is a woman who wants to be heard and wants the voices of others to resonate alongside hers. In the future, it is the voice of all early childhood educators that will be heard. By coming forth and speaking, we will change the world for children and teachers. And by embracing the transformational possibilities inherent in a curriculum that emerges, the field of early childhood education can emerge from the shadows of the valley and assume its rightful place on the peak of the mountain.

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Appendix A:
Invitation to Participate in a Research Study



252 Bloor Street West, Room 4-485, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6

November 6, 2003

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Early Childhood Education Teacher:

If you like telling stories about your experiences with children you may be interested in participating in a research study entitled: *The Image of the Teacher: The Impact of Using an Emergent Curriculum on Early Childhood Educator's Self-Image and Practice*.

My name is Diane Kashin and I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I am currently conducting a research study in teacher development within the field of early childhood education. I am looking for teachers who are implementing an emergent curriculum within their classrooms even if at the beginning stage.

Participation in the research would involve interviews, the sharing of stories of practical knowledge and a visit by the researcher to your classroom. I will be beginning my research in January 2004 and hope to finish collecting data by June 2004. Interviews and classroom visits will be arranged at the convenience of the research participants. If participants are interested I could arrange a number of group meetings so as to facilitate an exchange of stories.

I will be looking for participants from diverse backgrounds with varying degrees of experience. Involvement in the research study should prove to be a unique and beneficial professional development opportunity. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at anytime if they so choose. I am looking for approximately four participants in total.

Please let me know if you are interested. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Diane Kashin
416-491-5050 (6129)
905-884-7406

Appendix B:

Informed Consent Form



252 Bloor Street West, Room 4-485, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in a research study of the image of the teacher, as described in the previously distributed study description. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Doctorate of Education Degree, including a dissertation, any future publications (i.e. journals, books, etc.) and/or conference presentations.

I understand that:

- ▶ I will participate in an initial audio taped interview of 1 to 1 ½ hours, and will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place for an additional 1 to 1 ½ hour interview.
- ▶ The primary researcher will conduct a written observation of me over a 2-hour time frame while in my own classroom and engaged in normal day-to-day activities.
- ▶ Names (i.e. my names, other individuals identified, names of institutions, organizations, local communities, etc.) and any other information (i.e., specific identifying events, situations, dates, etc.) that potentially identifies me will be deleted and replaced by codes during the transcription process.
- ▶ Information included in the raw data not relevant to the study will not be used.
- ▶ Audiotapes of the interviews will be maintained in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- ▶ Transcriptions of interviews and photocopies of other raw data, as well as relevant documents that I may voluntarily submit will be maintained in a locked cabinet and/or a secure hard drive file and destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- ▶ Transcriptions of interviews and photocopies of other raw data, as well as relevant documents may be shared with the faculty supervisor for this research study, Dr. Clare Kosnik of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

- ▶ I am free to decline to answer questions during the interview process.
- ▶ I understand that I may be contacted to participate in a focus group session that will be taped and transcribed. I am free to decline participation in this focus group. Audiotapes of the focus group will be maintained in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed one year after the study is complete. Transcriptions of the focus group session will be maintained in a locked cabinet and/or a secure hard drive file and destroyed one year after the study is complete.
- ▶ I will have the opportunity to review my own individual/composite depictions and verify that my identity has been concealed to my personal satisfaction. This review process will require approximately 1 hour.
- ▶ In total my involvement in this project will require approximately 6 to 10 hours of my time.
- ▶ I will not be asked or expected to take part in any analysis or interpretation of the data or to write or in any way prepare the manuscript.
- ▶ I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation, sanction, or prejudice to pre-existing entitlements or future rights.

Research Participant

Diane Kashin, Primary Researcher
 43 Okanagan Drive
 Richmond Hill, Ontario
 L4C 9R9
 905-884-7406
 416-491-5050 (5454)

Provincial Location

Provincial Location

Date

Date

Appendix C:
Interview Protocol: Initial Interview

Interview Protocol – Initial Interview

The Image of the Teacher

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Background:

1. Tell me about your educational background.
2. How many years have you been working in the early childhood education field?
3. What is the age group of children you currently work with and how long have you been working with this age group?

Current Practice:

1. Tell me about your work as an early childhood educator in this past year.
2. Tell me about the programming/curriculum that you do.
3. How do you develop the curriculum and with whom to you work to develop it?
4. How satisfied are you with your programming? Can I see a copy of your most recent program plan?
5. Describe a typical day in your classroom.
6. Choose a teaching moment that you feel really good about. What was happening in the classroom during this time?

Philosophical Framework:

1. Does any particular approach or philosophy influence the work you are doing with the children?
2. Where did you get the idea to use this approach or philosophy?
3. Tell me what you know about emergent curriculum?

4. What are the strengths of this approach to curriculum and why do you like or dislike it?
5. How comfortable do you feel as a teacher implementing an emergent curriculum?
6. What impact has this approach had on your thinking/teaching?
7. What attributes do you believe a teacher needs to have before implementing an emergent curriculum?

Professional Development:

1. What parts of the early childhood education program that you took at college have been helpful to you in implementing curriculum?
2. What do you think should be added to the college program to help future early childhood educators?
3. What are your current professional development needs?

Image:

1. What attributes do you believe a teacher needs to have to be an effective ECE teacher?
2. How do you see yourself as an early childhood educator?
3. In what ways has your understanding of being an early childhood educator changed since beginning an emergent curriculum focus?

Challenges:

1. What are the challenges facing early childhood educators?
2. As an ECE teacher how do you think parents see you?
3. How do you think society values your work?
4. Do you have any issues with the children you are currently working with?

Future Directions:

1. What do you want to do with your programming/curriculum in the future?
2. What would you say to a teacher considering implementing an emergent curriculum?

Appendix D:
The Image of the Teacher: Metaphor Exercise

The Image of the Teacher

Metaphor Exercise

A metaphor is the application of a word or phrase to something that it does not apply to literally. Identifying your metaphor of teaching and learning can help you to understand your practice. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1988) metaphors structure a range of curriculum practices. For instance it makes a difference if we think of children as clay to be molded or as players on a team or as travelers on a journey. It makes a difference if we think of teaching as gardening, coaching, or cooking.

After you write a few journal entries, read them over and see if you can identify a metaphor. You may come up with only one or you may find several. You can also draw your metaphor if you like. To help you begin complete this sentence:

My Metaphor(s)

I see teaching as...

Date:

Name:

Appendix E:
The Image of the Teacher

The Image of the Teacher
Focus Group
March 22, 2004

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Sharing of materials – documentation etc.
3. Discussion - traditional approach versus an emergent approach to curriculum
4. Discussion - impact on practice and image
 - a. Confidence in self
 - b. Children's response (includes impact on behaviour)
 - c. Parent response
 - d. Response of others
5. Challenges – i.e. responding to the push towards a more academic preschool curriculum
6. Scheduling of final interview

Appendix F:
Interview Protocol: Final Interview

The Image of the Teacher

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Current Practice:

1. Describe the traditional approach to curriculum. What are its benefits and what are its limitations?
2. What would you be doing if you weren't working with an emergent curriculum at this time?
3. How do you inform parents and others about your practice, i.e. implementation of an emergent curriculum?
4. In your opinion, what are the differences between an ECE teacher and a kindergarten teacher in the school system?
5. Are there any specific theories that influence your work?
6. What does an ECE need to know before starting an emergent curriculum?

Challenges:

1. In your practice are you faced with the challenge of support, i.e. from co-workers, parents, supervisors or others?
2. Is behaviour guidance a challenge for you in your current practice? If it is do you have any ideas about why? If it isn't do you have any ideas about why not?
3. Is integrating academics a challenge for you in your current practice?

Involvement in Research:

1. Tell me about the experience of the interviews, classroom visit and focus groups.
2. Has it changed you in any way?

Image:

1. How does the image others have about ECEs impact on the self-image of ECEs?
2. Do you think the way you see yourself as a professional differs from other ECEs that you know?

Future Directions:

1. How would you suggest the working conditions for ECEs be improved?
2. How about the wages of ECEs?
3. What can an ECE teacher do to improve wages and working conditions?
4. Where do you see yourself professionally in a year's time, in two year's time, in the next five years?

Appendix G:

Narratives of Experience

Visit to XXXX Child Care

March 11, 2004

When I enter the classroom, I count seven children tidying up the area in which they were playing. All are participating in the clean up process. The children then line up outside the room and travel to another classroom down the corridor. This is where the “meeting time” will take place. It is 9:35 am. The children are sitting on a carpet area. They are not in any type of formation but are sitting with their legs mostly crossed looking forward to the couch directly in front where the two teachers sit (, my research participant and Erica). Layla asks Erica “did you get a newspaper?” Erica then gets up and returns with a newspaper. There is an additional supply teacher, Cathy who is the former supervisor at this centre who sits with me at a table to the left of the meeting area.

Asks whether “anyone has anything they’d like to share.” A child says “I have 70 bucks at home” Layla asks “how did you get all that money?” The child says “4 20 bucks for Chinese New Year another 5 for my tooth and 5 for free.” Layla then says “let’s count that.” She adds up the numbers given by the child out loud and then says “that’s 90 bucks; you better go back and count again.” Another child says “at Chinese New Year I actually got 100 bucks.” Still another child says “I go to gymnastics.”

The teachers then take control of the conversation and Layla says to Erica “when you woke up what did you see?” Erica then says, “Fog, it was very, very foggy.” A child says “I have night vision.” Erica and Layla acknowledge the child and both laugh at this response but they don’t pay much attention to it as they try to refocus the children. Erica asks, “How is fog created.” At this point I begin to wonder what is going on as the interactions between the teachers themselves and between the teachers and the children seem so adult-like in nature. I’m shocked at this question because the answer is not

obvious to me and I react with great anticipation as the children begin to answer the question.

Child 1: Fog is created by cloud

Child 2: Maybe by moisture and cloud mixed together

Child 3: That does not create fog

Child 4: Snow makes fog

Child 5: Maybe because the clouds are gray and it is starting to rain

Erica: But it is not raining. It looks like the sun is out now. Do you have a thought on that?

Child 3: It is acting air

Erica: These are great thoughts on fog. Maybe later this could be our word of the day and maybe our friends who have these thoughts can write them down in their own handwriting.

Erica has recorded the answers while the children were giving them. Layla writes out the word FOG and puts it up on the “word of the day” board. The conversation continues.

Child 6: Snow cannot make fog because it is white and cannot change colours.

Child 3: How about the top 10 foggiest days?

Layla gets up and retrieves a book. The child asks again “can we do the top 10 foggiest places” but as Layla looks in the book she says “but foggiest place is not in the book.” She then says “let’s move along to our highs today”

Erica reads from the paper as Layla stands at a large map of the world with a pointer. “Today it is 6 degrees and we will get to minus 6 tonight. Rain will turn to freezing rain. We are seeing a lot of activity on our map today. Can anyone tell us which the coldest place in the world is today?” As the child call out answers Layla points to them and Erica gives the temperature of the place. One child calls out Churchill, but it is not the coldest place. Another calls out Whitehorse but it also not the coldest place. Then another child mentions a name that I could not decipher which was the coldest place (30 minus) and Layla points to it on the map. A child then says “even when you spit it freezes when it hits the ground.” There is much laughter as I am told that Erica “taught them that.” I am struck here by the thought that these teachers are talking to the children as almost equals. They have high expectations for these children and the children are meeting the expectations. They seem to have incorporated the Reggio principle of the “Image of the Child.”

Layla: OK what is the hottest place?

Child 1: Arizona?

Child 2: Acapulco?

Erica: Yes Acapulco is 33 degrees and sunny. In Halifax there is rain.

Child 1: Ice pellets

Child 3: Freezing rain

Child 2: I actually know where Reunion is

Layla: That was the place with the largest amount of rain in one day.

Layla gives the child the globe – as the child is looking on the globe Layla stands in front of chart paper on the back wall and asks the children “what the top ten best parts of our weather project has been.” Meanwhile the child finds Reunion on the globe and tells of having found it on a map at home which is on a pillow!

Hands go up and a list is compiled including “making the weather game” and “doing our top tens.” One for the children mentions “sketching the weather when we go for walks.” Layla then says, “Let’s revisit our walk yesterday. Does anyone have anything to share – what we said, what we felt?” Some of the answers included “buds,” “little leaves growing,” “we felt the fresh air” and “the garbage.” Layla then talks about how she felt “a little funny inside” when she say the shoots coming up because she thought about her garden at home. She said she got excited because she was anxious to see her own plants. She mentions that part of her garden is on the north side of her house and asks the children “what does that mean?” One child says something about snow in the garden. Then there is a discussion about the garbage and Layla says “I was dismayed which means sad about the garbage situation. What can we do ourselves about the garbage situation?” One of the children says, “tell people” and Layla asks how. Another child says “we can make signs and put them everywhere.” Layla suggests that the children “do that today.”

Meanwhile, Erica has found a book and tells the children that in the book it says that there are three types of fog – smoky fogs, sea fogs and dew drop fogs. Erica continues to read out information about fog as Layla puts out sign making material. She also creates some words related to the sign making for the word wheel. Erica has written out the ideas the children had about fog on strips of Bristol board and gave it to the children who are going to write the words themselves.

The meeting time was finished at 10:20.

Visit to XXXX School Age Program

March 11, 2004

As I walked down the corridor and into the busy, double classroom my first thought evolves around the realization that I have entered into an unfamiliar domain; this is a school age program! In the classroom to the left, the junior school age children reside. In the classroom I entered the older children gather after a full day of 'regular' school. The second thing that strikes me is of the comfort level in the room. The children and the teachers seem relaxed and happy to be there. The noise level while not overly obnoxious registers high on my tolerance scale.

The children are engaged in various pursuits. At first the focus is on homework. Rose, my research participant asks a number of children "did you finish your homework?" Some, rather reluctantly retrieve their workbooks from their bags. Rose sits with the children as they go through the pages. At least one of the workbooks is in French as this program incorporates children from an English stream and French immersion stream. A quick glance at the books and I feel uncomfortable. The tasks seem difficult, abstract and developmentally inappropriate. This is their homework from school and the children tackle the chore without question. Rose sits with them. She does not interfere but offers support. She seems confident to do so much more than I would perhaps this stems from fluency in both languages.

While these children carry on with their homework dutifully, three other boys are sprawled on the carpet playing cards. A few girls are engaged in an open ended art activity. There are at least two tables set up that are related to the project topic: snakes. At one table a large plastic snake rests beside a multitude of books on snakes. At another, a bin of water is set up with pebbles and small plastic snakes. One boy spins the large snake around in his hand while another leafs through the books. The conversation at the

table relates to the topic. The water bin is full of busy hands. As the boys move the plastic snakes about and engage in a dialogue of symbolic play.

The actual room does not have documentation displayed connected to the topic of snakes. This is a shared space used by a kindergarten class during the day. The kindergarten teacher moves about the classroom doing some clean up and preparation. She seems undeterred by the action in the room and the children don't pay much attention to her. There is a front entrance to the classroom that is shared as well as common foyer of sorts leading to the outside in the rear of the classroom. This is the area used for project documentation. This is where the snake project comes alive!

When I do training on the project approach I am always confronted by the issues of shared space. It becomes one of those road blocks that many use as an excuse. They have to keep doing the common traditional approach to curriculum because they are in shared space and are not allowed to display documentation. Rose has not let this stop her. She has obviously negotiated well with the classroom teachers. When I ask her about this she says "anyone not able to do the project approach in shared space hasn't not worked it out with the teacher, which is what you have to do." The comfort level of all tells the tale of collaboration. The walls of the back foyer are covered with brightly coloured representations of the topic both 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional. The use of display boards provides the answer as they are portable and can be put out at the start of the afternoon and put away at the end.

On the boards are webs – activity webs, teacher's or topic webs and children's webs where the children's prior knowledge of the topic has been recorded. The boards are colourful and creative with a combination of teacher created material and children created material. The program plan is posted which describes past events and coming events. Rose seems excited and proud as she shows me around the foyer. She seems particularly enthused about a planned trip to a pet store specializing in reptiles. We have a little discussion about bringing an actual snake into the classroom and the question of health and safety becomes the issue.

During my visit I realize that the project approach is possible in a school age program. The children are old enough to direct their own learning and with the materials available seem readily able to do this. Rose and the other teacher in the room do not seem to be too involved in moving the project along in terms of recording children's questions, predictions and conversations. There is not a meeting time planned the day I visited. I know from my interview with Rose that this is usually done at the beginning of a project to discuss possible topics. With the time constraints of a school age program and the intrusion of homework and the real need of these children just to play and socialize (i.e. the card players) I realize that there are limitations to doing emergent curriculum with school agers. However, I think with reflection Rose can think of some ways to get around this and it would be interesting to bring a deeper level of documentation into the project.

Narrative of Experience

Visit to XXXX Child Care Centre

March 12, 2004

When arrive in the room at 9:30 am I find myself struggling to record my observations as there is so much happening at once. The room is beautiful in its design. There is a natural ambience created with the use of fabric, colour and natural materials. It should have calming effect but what is going in the classroom is anything but calm. The activity level of the children is high; they move around the room, they engage in conversation with each other and the teachers Mary, my research participant and Franca, the classroom assistant. There is also a supply teacher in the room that I suspect was brought in to provide support to Mary because of my presence. The children overall are very physical; they crawl, roll, flop and move around at what seemed to be a constant level. I am relieved when Mary calls the children to the carpet for a meeting time which begins at 9:40 am.

The children gather on the carpet. Some in our field would describe this time as "circle." Mary calls it "our meeting time." The children are not in any particular formation. The

supply teacher has a child in her lap. Franca seems surrounded and inaccessible in the corner and Mary sits up front. Mary says, “Let’s get started. I see a lot of my friends brought things to share with us” She mentions one particular child who has brought in a TV guide that has a picture of Harry Potter. Mary asks the child to “tell us about it.” The child holds the TV guide so that the children can see the picture but his response is inaudible. Mary asks him a couple of questions about the movie, i.e. “what is your favourite part?” The child answers but very quietly. The other children seem to be getting restless.

Another child displays a plastic bottle filled with rocks. Mary asks her to “tell us about it” The child responds that she put the rocks in the bottle to “keep them safe.” Mary prompts her about the bottle and what it resembles and the child responds “like maracas, it makes noise.” Another child has brought in a book “What colour is your underwear.” Mary reads the book to the children.

Then another child shows the children a puzzle which is new and unopened. The puzzle is about the Lion King. This is the first item related to the project that is going on in the classroom, which is animals. Mary asks the child to “tell us about that” and the child stands up and points and discusses the puzzle. Mary then directs the children towards another child, “everyone look at...” The child has brought in a book created at home using animal stickers. Some of the children continue to be restless and Mary reminds them to put their “hands in your lap, we are listening now.” Mary reads the book that the child brought. She then asks the children to give the child a clap and suggests that this is something all children can do with “mommy and daddy.”

At this point there are about 6 children that seem to be focused on the meeting and 8 who are not. Franca seems a little frustrated as she cannot move about to redirect some of the children. Mary reminds the children to “stay on your bottom.” A couple of children get up to find something to share. When one brings a picture and says “this is my picture, I drew it here.” Mary asks “who is it?” and the child responds “Cinderella.” Another

child seems to be searching around the room for something and ends up bringing to the carpet area a small scrap of paper and calls it a snake.

At this point Franca begins to discuss “words that start with E.” She is sitting in front of chart paper and she prompts the children and they mention words such as eel and earth. Franca draws pictures to match the words printed. At this point a child says “Franca we have been here long.” Franca then discusses the activity options for the children and name cards are distributed.

The children are dispersing with their name cards and going to the activities. There is a light table set up with animal forms for the children to trace. There is a table set up with animal forms created from cookie cutters and modeling clay. The children are retrieving their creations and painting them. There is another table set up with the modeling clay and some tools such as rollers. The carpet area has large plastic animals and a number of children gather there. There is a table set up with animal related cognitive activities such as classification and counting. A number of children are in the dramatic play centre and are acting the role of “dogs.”

I spend some time at the carpet area and I am amazed as one child is able to sort the animals into categories of those found in Africa and those found at the farm. Another child seems to be somewhat obsessed with the Lion King and only wants animals in front of her that can be found in the movie. I move over to the table with the modeling clay and watch as two boys surround plastic animals with clay. I wonder whether they are doing this so that the other child who wanted all the animals from the movie cannot find these particular ones!

At this point I begin to take notice of the documentation in the room related to animals. There is a web, there is graph “what is your favourite animal” (zoo animals are the obvious favourite). There is a chart of zoo animals with beautifully drawn pictures and related observations about these animals. I'm not sure whether these are the children's observations or the teachers. Outside the classroom is a record of a discussion held with

the children regarding the characteristics of a tiger. Displayed around that document are worksheets connected to the letter T with a tiger illustration as well as collages made from various stripped papers to which the children have added their own colourful lines with pastels. Also outside are adult created elephant shapes in various sizes that the children have cut out and put in order of size. When I talk to Mary about the documentation and the animal project she refers to it as a unit and also discusses a previous unit on snow to which there is still some documentation and a wonderful story posted on a polar bear in the fridge!

The children are now cleaning up the room and preparing for lunch. At this juncture I leave.

Visit to XXXX Child Care Centre

March 25, 2004

I entered and sat down at a table with a few children. A child almost immediately asks “who are you?” I respond that “I am here to see all the wonderful things you are doing in your classroom.” The child then says, “Like the pirate ship but that will be taken down today.” I ask the child if they are starting something new and she responds “yes, great artists.”

Thus begins an eventful morning that is so full of visible learning that it is difficult to document all that was there is to see. As I looked around from my position in the middle of the classroom I saw a sink and float activity, a pirate ship in the dramatic play centre that takes up the entire north end of the classroom. The science centre is filled with artifacts about tea! The children beside me are painting with ice cubes and there is table set up with play dough. The displays on the wall show evidence of the emerging project and I am drawn to the mural where the children have splattered painted ala Jackson Pollack.

Felicia is engaged with the children asking questions and expanding their thoughts and language. When she asks the child at the water table what he is thinking I am amazed at the potential of this simple question that I rarely hear in my many visits to child care programs. Snack is put onto the tables and the children serve themselves, taking the portions they require and pouring their own juice. After snack the children sit on the carpet. It is almost meeting time and I anxious at what will unfold.

I'm not the only one anticipating great things because a child sitting beside me notices the other teacher taping paper to the bottom of the table. She calls out, "Oh my gosh, we are going to paint on the ceiling." It doesn't take an art expert to realize that these children have been introduced to the works of Michelangelo!

Felicia takes her place by the flip chart and before she starts she mentions to the children that she "wants to see everyone's eyes." She suggests to a child that "I don't think that is a great spot, what should you do?" Instead of becoming the enforcer of circle time positions of folded legs and arms she is empowering the children to find their own positions!

After saying good morning to the children and the children responding with their greetings, Felicia tells the children that she went home to look for A R T (she spells the word but does not say it); the children respond and say 'art'. Felicia says "I went to my dining room and found A R T" She displays a framed print and asks the children if they can tell her who the artist is. She asks them to notice the lines and the colours. When they don't come up with the answer she gives them a hint, "the sunflowers in this artist's work are in this same colour." A child then responds, "Vincent Van Gogh" and Felicia tells the child to "give yourself a pat on the back."

Felicia then continues, "I went into the bathroom and saw A R T." She tells the children that this artist usually does dancers and a child calls out 'Degas.' Then he goes on to say that he went to a place that has all the pictures that Degas did in the gallery. (I amazed as I recall that the Art Gallery of Ontario did have a Degas exhibit some time ago!). The

conversation about A R T continues and then the children sing a song about great artists that is to the tune of DO RE ME.

After a few rounds of the song, Felicia says, “this week what I am finding is that there are many artists. Here is our dilemma. Remember when we were talking about animals – that was a big project so we talked about a smaller project – so now we can focus on a smaller group of artists.” The children then proceed to vote on their favourite artist and the other teacher records the names.

At this time, Felicia directs the children to the painting on the bottom of the tables and shows the children a print of Michelangelo’s work from the Sistine Chapel. A child says, “it’s kind of cracking” and another says” It’s not the paper it is the actual church.”

Appendix H:

Example of Coding System

1 Satisfied with program

2 I am pretty satisfied – it has come a long way –

3 we are covering all areas of development. It is

4 stimulating enough – part of the frustration in the

5 past was that they were bored – they didn't have

6 enough to do – I don't think they had enough toys

7 to play with – whatever I think they are more

8 focused now that there is more variety. The

9 centres are set up so that they can move from one

10 to another. There is puzzles if they want to do

11 something quiet. There are blocks available if

12 they want to build. So right now I am pretty

13 satisfied with the way things are going

14 Describe a typical day

15 I start at 8:15. We have tables set up at that point.

16 Mark making, puzzles, breakfast served at the

17 time. Quiet time until we get into our program.

18 When we get into our program we often have a

19 meeting beforehand so the children know what

20 the choices are for the day. What we try to do is

21 have a creative going on, one or two sensory

22 going on, puzzles or another activity that one of
23 us is supervising, for instance is we have
24 introduced the letter D we will sit at the tables
25 and do that. If we have a dot to dot we will sit at
26 the table with that. There is a variety of things
27 going on.