

STUDENT TRANSITION INTO KINDERGARTEN: A CASE STUDY OF THE REGGIO
EMILIA APPROACH

by

Joan Oliver Stephens

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to arrive at a better understanding of what teachers contribute to the unique issues of student transition from a Reggio Emilia approach preschool into kindergarten. Transition was defined as “. . . reciprocal organization activities and cooperation (vertical connection), one of the aims of which was to connect with families (horizontal connection)” (Ahtola et al., 2016, p. 169). The central question of the research is; what do Reggio Emilia approach schoolteachers contribute to transition? Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory involved the “actual relations between individuals” (p. 57), and social constructivist theory, along with the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the more knowledgeable other (MKO) guided this study. The concepts with Vygotsky’s theory empower students in the course of transition into kindergarten. This study explored the behavior of 15 participating preschool teachers at a Reggio Emilia approach school in the Midwest. Data collection in the field was individual interviews, observations, and journal entries, and analysis was primarily through direct interpretation and secondarily with the individual instance. Fifteen Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers were interviewed and observed culminating in analysis and conclusions from the research that identified teachers’ behaviors that contributed to successful transition into kindergarten. The study data was coded and categorized that resulted in establishing themes of the Reggio Emilia phenomenon. Study findings were reviewed and results revealed in association with the literature and relevant theories and implications.

Keywords: intrinsic, Reggio Emilia approach, social constructivist theory, transition

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List of Abbreviations

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

Birth Cohort Study (ECLS-B)

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAERA)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

National Institute for Early Education (NIEER)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

North American Reggio Alliance (NAREA)

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter One introduced a 72-year-old preschool in Italy where the school is full of light, gardens, art, music, and children's laughter. Reggio Emilia's construct is "revered by educationalists around the world" (Schneider et al., 2014, p. 4). Recent literature discussing unsuccessful transition into kindergarten and research focusing on successful transition from Reggio Emilia preschool into kindergarten was overviewed. In addition research that discussed unsuccessful transitions into kindergarten and the resulting poor academic performance and withdrawal from school was reviewed (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). The motivation for this study, the necessity, and focus of the study, the study's significance, a description of the research, and research questions was overviewed. Chapter One concluded with pertinent definitions and a content summary.

Background

History offered great lessons for the future in every arena, and Reggio Emilia approach schools in Italy permeated with 72 years of history. American schools have experienced a greater divide from schools in Italy since 1945 due to their lower earnings and mothers entering the workforce. Americans do not have the same level of community commitment and civil responsibility as Italians (e.g. regarding preschool facilities and construction of said facilities), however, the Reggio Emilia construct could be modified with an American innovative mentality to restructure early education (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012; Edwards & Gandini, 2015).

Malaguzzi has discussed his career choice in early childhood education in an interview with Gandini; he stated, "World War II, or any war, in its tragic absurdity might have been the

type of experience that pushes a person into the job of educating as a way to start anew and live and work for the future” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 56). Malaguzzi became the founding director and pedagogical leader of Reggio Emilia in 1963; Reggio Emilia began in 1945 just six days after the end of World War II with the mothers of Villa Cella and the sale of an army tank, six horses, and three trucks (Edwards et al., 1998). Gandini (1991) described Reggio Emilia Schools by stating, “Reggio Emilia Schools are mirrors into the lives of all who enter there. The schools of Reggio could not be just anywhere, this is a place where adults have thought about the quality of space” (p. 48). Edwards (1995) gave a lecture at the University of Milano about the contributions of Malaguzzi to the hopes of a new culture of childhood. Malaguzzi’s philosophy of education and pedagogy is in direct relationship to the community, including educators, families, and children. Malaguzzi (1994) suggested, “It’s like we need to create a New York City traffic jam in the school” (p. 4). Many psychologists influenced Malaguzzi including Hawkins, Dewey, Gardner, Russian-born Bronfenbrenner, and Soviet Vygotsky.

Today, relevant literature regarding transition into kindergarten originates from a small research community, and current U.S. literature concentrates on the transition into kindergarten with an emphasis on federal and state standards and multiple relationships between teacher-child, child-environment, child-family, and school-family. (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Sabol & Pianta, 2015). The Reggio Emilia approach focused on four educational dimensions: an image of the child, negotiated learning, student documentation, and social relationships (Edwards et al., 2012). Reggio Emilia approach teachers are at the helm of Italian and the United States’ educational successes by transitioning students into kindergarten by utilizing effective practices and acting as a guide, co-learner, and facilitator. In contrast, elementary schools in the United States have yet to incorporate a set of successful procedures for transition into kindergarten

(Schneider, et al., 2014). Successful transition resulted in side benefits of accelerated learning and a sense of well-being (Ahtola et al., 2011). Cecconi recommended schools need a set of transition procedures (Schneider et al., 2014), while Ciari commented about the responsibility of schools to create an effective transition model approach which would shape the planet to be increasingly equitable (Lazzari & Balduzzi, 2013).

Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development was composed of tasks children can complete without assistance. When a project required help from someone more knowledgeable, the student required a teacher, parent, or classmate's assistance in order to finish the task (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher orchestrated learning at Reggio Emilia as the curriculum gradually developed from three components of negotiated learning: "design, documentation, and discourse" (Forman & Fyfe, 2012, p. 249). The Reggio Emilia approach is about change and transformations; transitions have a direct relationship with the Reggio Emilia approach and construct (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005). Schneider et al. (2014) stated, "Transition practice is an integral part of the Reggio Emilia approach to early-childhood education in Northern Italy" (p. 450). Ahtola et al. (2011) conducted a study in Finland that found the most important transition practice as well as the most implemented practice was the discussions involving the beginning kindergarteners between the preschool and elementary teachers.

This study examined, students' successful transition from preschool into kindergarten, specifically as it related to preschools and the unique contributions teachers at Reggio Emilia made to the transition process (Casper, Lopez, & Chattrabhuti, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schulting, et al., 2005). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) emphasized that the early years of school are predictors of future school achievement; thus, it is necessary to examine transition. Transition affects students, teachers, families, and the community (Corsaro &

Molinari, 2005). The research intended to add to the existing research about transition into kindergarten with an increased understanding of the unique behaviors of Reggio Emilia teachers who are successful in transition practices (Schneider et al., 2014). University of Virginia researchers Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta (2000) conducted the most recent transition research regarding the dynamic effects model of transition. The dynamic effects model of transition was an ecological model for transition and a framework for further research; in addition, Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) created a menu for transition from the Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) transition model.

Furthermore, the Reggio Emilia approach in Italy and a number of Reggio Schools in the United States incorporated a unique process where students stay in the same groups, in the same classroom, and with the same two teachers at their Reggio preschool for three years, or until they transition into kindergarten. Teachers collaborate with one another and work with parents to establish a community in the school that is inclusive to all the local village and community members (Edwards, et al., 2012). New research continued in Italy to discover if preschool success can continue from grade one through grade three and have a “sustainable impact . . . tangible effect on the quality of life of the city is the goal” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 370). This research is intended to identify the Reggio Emilia teachers’ unique behaviors contributing to students’ effective transitions into kindergarten.

Situation to Self

My fascination with the philosophical underpinnings of the Reggio Emilia approach motivated me to conduct this intrinsic case study about students’ effective transitions into kindergarten (Stake, 1995). The motivations for conducting this study began with my children, their education, and my journey in education. The plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board of Education*

(1954) were from my community, and the U.S. Supreme Court segregation decision had a significant influence on my continued connection to education. My family knew the plaintiffs and my father explained to my siblings and me the inequality of segregation. One of my cousins was the principal at the school involved in the case, and today I have continued to want impartial and just treatment for students in every arena, beginning with preschool.

The philosophical assumptions I brought to the research correspond with personal relationships among teachers in my family (e.g., my mother was an elementary teacher; my brother taught high school and college students, and one of my cousins taught in special education for 43 years). A personal relationship I had with Reggio Emilia approach teachers has continued to evolve from visits to a local Reggio Emilia Preschool, extensive reading of research, and a deep-abiding concern for U.S. schools. The Reggio Emilia approach is “negotiated learning through design, documentation, and discourse” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 247). Many educators believe that students are unable to unearth their enthusiasm for school because No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has polluted both teaching and learning in the modern classroom (Walker, 2014). Field research determined the final direction of my study; time spent in the field working with the participants was dependent on the scope and depth that was reached during the interviews. This study incorporated my cultural beliefs as well as Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory, which served as the foundation for this research. The paradigms that guided my study included observations, which were logical in construct and method checking, which reflected participatory action. In this study, I also used the pragmatic interpretive lens, which reflected the specific research design (Stake, 1995).

Problem Statement

Reggio Emilia approach preschools in Italy and other countries (including the United States) have practices in place for successful kindergarten transition. The problem is nearly one-half of children transitioning into kindergarten from preschool are transitioning successfully (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Discovering the unique contributions teachers make for students to transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten was the impetus for this intrinsic case study. When students cannot transition into kindergarten successfully, they have experienced academic failures, which resulted in their dropping out of school before high school graduation (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting et al., 2005). The most recent report (2015) from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education stated the 2013-2014 high school dropout statistics for 16–24 years old is 17.7% dropped out, and 82.3% graduated from high school. This figure did not include those students who leave school in junior high school (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicators for 2014 for the United States indicated 82% of 25 year-olds have graduated from high school (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). Successful transition into kindergarten had enduring academic achievement results for children throughout high school (Ahtola et al., 2016; Caspe et al., 2015; Patton & Wang, 2012; Puccioni, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Schneider et al., 2014). Allen, Weiss, and Weiss (2016) determined students who repeated first grade are in the greatest danger of dropping out of school. Successful transition into elementary school was the preventative mechanism for dropping out. The National Education Association recommended twelve action steps to prevent

high school dropouts, and the first step was to “intervene prior to kindergarten” (Dianda, 2008, p.8).

Corsaro and Molinari (2005) referred to change as “the bridge between preschool and elementary school” (p. 67). Transition from preschool into kindergarten is an immense change for young students and it is beneficial when they are prepared for the event. Schneider et al. (2014) commented, “Facilitation of school transitions in the Reggio Emilia tradition [is] associated with successful post-transition adjustment” (p. 448). Corsaro and Molinari (2005) acknowledged, “There is no doubt that Reggio Emilia early education is the best in the world” (p. 9). It is through the analysis of the Reggio Emilia philosophy that I examined the practices of successful transition that are unique at Reggio Emilia approach schools. A gap existed in the literature to distinguish the unique behaviors of the Reggio Emilia teachers’ contribution to successful transition (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; New, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting et al., 2005).

According to Corsaro and Molinari’s (2005) six-year study of Reggio Emilia preschool students transitioning into public kindergarten in Modena, Italy, Reggio Emilia’s early childhood education can serve as a model for the United States and other countries. Ahtola et al. (2011) recommended that pertinent learning documentation for each student be forwarded to the new elementary school for a positive transition. A dynamic ecological model of transition by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) pointed to the differences in the environment of home and preschool to the more structured and demanding environment of kindergarten, which requires the support of all the children’s relationships in order to successfully transition to elementary school. Positive transitions into kindergarten had three features according to a study of children in

Modena, Italy by Corsaro and Molinari (2005) that followed children from preschool through elementary school. They discovered:

(a) Students receive a high-quality preschool education; (b) students remain with the same teachers and peers in preschool; (c) preschool and elementary teacher's cooperation and coordination including dossiers sent from the preschool teacher to the student's future kindergarten teacher about the students' strength and weaknesses during the transition period (p. 141).

Two recent studies addressed transition with regard to socioeconomic risk, but each neglected to provide evaluations of the interactions between the teachers and students (Iruka, Gardner-Neblett, Matthews, & Winn, 2014; Lee & Bierman, 2015). Caspe et al. (2015) identified four important issues to understand about transition into school and Berlin, Dunning, and Dodge (2011) tested the efficacy of low-income children during a four-week kindergarten orientation program. This study identified the behaviors Reggio Emilia approach teachers' exhibit, which affect students' successful transition into kindergarten. This study examined the range of actions related to successful transition and filled an existing gap in the literature. The results of Schneider et al.'s (2014) study indicated that the numbers of transition practices used related to greater adaptation after transition to elementary school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to discover the unique contributions teachers make for students to transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten. In this study, transition was defined as “reciprocal organization activities and cooperation (vertical connection), one of the aims of which is to connect with families (horizontal connection)” (Ahtola et al., 2016, p. 169). Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory concepts of ZPD

and MKO served as essential aspects for the research about kindergarten transition. Vygotsky's concept of development had a particular focus relevant to this study. Empirical research has indicated that transition into kindergarten correlates with positive outcomes in academic achievement, social emotional competence, and rapid developing skills (Caspé et al., 2015). Many studies have found that change can increase students' future academic success (Puccioni, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000; Schneider et al., 2014). The Reggio Emilia Midwestern preschool in this study began 18 years ago and 100 percent of their seniors have graduated from high school and attended college. Their educational and transitional practices appeared to be achieving successful results (Reggio Emilia Midwestern Preschool Website, 2016).

Significance of the Study

This study has contributed to the knowledge base and discipline of early education. The new information from this study about Reggio Emilia approach teachers' contributions to transition benefitted teachers, students, and researchers. To illustrate contributions this study has made to existing literature, Schulting et al. (2005) emphasized, "The importance [of] a successful transition to kindergarten cannot be overstated" (p. 860). Schulting et al. (2005) discovered that lower socioeconomic status children benefit greatly from transition practices in their future academic years, especially in their social and cultural development. My study isolated Reggio Emilia approach teachers' behaviors, which contribute to transition. This study has expanded the literature for effective transition practices through Reggio Emilia teachers' interviews, observations, and documentation of their attitudes and beliefs, since the significance of education is most effectively interpreted by those within the profession (Ferrarotti, 1981).

This study benefitted researchers, school administrators, early childhood educators, and parents. Successful adjustment in early education through school transition sets the stage for

their future success in education (Puccioni, 2015; Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000; Schneider et al., 2014). Students who experienced seamless transition into kindergarten have been found to be academically, socially, and emotionally successful in their educational endeavors (Caspé et al., 2015). Students who have experienced a successful transition into kindergarten exhibit enjoyment of learning, adaptability in future changes, and emotional tools which can serve to enhance students' lives and future work environments (Ahtola et al., 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Patton & Wang, 2012; Pianta & Rimm-Kaufman, 2006; Schulting et al., 2005). Teachers and parents have benefitted with new knowledge to assist their children experiencing this change to a new environment of kindergarten. The findings of this study have expanded the knowledge base regarding effective preschool-to-kindergarten transition practices.

Research Questions

The Reggio Emilia pedagogy was built on the construct of relationships (Malaguzzi, 1998), and the following research questions have served as a compass during the field study, but they were also used to discover unique behaviors and perceptions Reggio Emilia teachers exhibited that contribute to successful transition from preschool into kindergarten (Schneider et al., 2014; Stake, 1995).

Central Question

The central question of this research was:

What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition to kindergarten?

In the Finnish study conducted by Ahtola et al. (2016), preschool teachers and parents regarded transition practices as important; similarly, LoCasale-Crouch et al.'s (2008) research indicated a connection between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' contribution to students' transition. Reggio Emilia approach teachers are "essential elements of the Reggio

Approach...as partner, nurturer, and guide” as well as “researcher” (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005, p. 8). Only six states have a coherent effort in force to successfully transition children into kindergarten. Patton and Wang (2012) confirmed there are over 3.5 million children who transition into kindergarten each year.

Sub-questions

1. What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to change and transformation of students?

Malaguzzi was the founding director at Reggio Emilia in Italy and he relied on many psychologists, including Vygotsky, to establish the Reggio Emilia approach (Malaguzzi, 1993a). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching originated in children learning from change and transformation through ZPD and MKO.

2. What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers do to address students’ fears of the new environment of kindergarten?

Teachers can strengthen students’ sense of belonging and address their fears through effective pedagogical practices. For example, meeting the new teacher in the new kindergarten environment is an effective support mechanism to waylay fears as children become familiar with unknown entities (Edwards, et al., 2012).

3. How does the Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ documentation of students’ learning contribute to transition?

As Edwards et al. (2012) stated, “Documentation has become a necessary and driving force for creating responsive curriculum and for promoting and assessing individual and group learning” (p. 289). Documentation of students and the series of actions they perform is also an integral construct of the pedagogy at Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 2012). Reflection and

documentation of students' abilities enhanced a teacher's ability to become acquainted with the children and their families, and eased the transition process (Parnell, 2012).

Definitions

1. *Intrinsic* – Intrinsic interest in a case occurs when the case itself is of primary interest (Stake, 1995).

2. *More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)* – MKO is someone or something perceived to have better skill or understanding of a task, process, or concept. This person can be a peer, parent, teacher/tutor, or another more knowledgeable person (McLeod, 2007).

3. *Reggio Emilia approach* – The Reggio Emilia approach is a construct that views children as a protagonist, collaborator, and communicator and views the teacher as a partner, nurturer, and guide (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005).

4. *Social constructivist theory* – Vygotsky's (1934/1986) theory that knowledge is co-constructed and individuals learn from one another.

5. *Transition* – Transition refers to movement from preschool into kindergarten (Schneider et al., 2014).

6. *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* – When students' developmental processes do not coincide with their learning processes, their development process lags behind their learning process. Vygotsky's (1978) theory that what is in the zone of proximal development today was the actual developmental level tomorrow – that is, what a child can do with assistance today she would do by herself tomorrow.

Summary

Twenty years after World War II ended in Italy and a group of mothers sold tanks and war paraphernalia in order to build the first Reggio Emilia Approach School, Malaguzzi became

the voice and lifelong advocate for Reggio Emilia-educated children who continued to thrive under an innovative educational philosophy of collaboration, self-direction, inquiry, and student initiation. Chapter One introduced the problem and purpose of this intrinsic case study, which was to arrive at a better understanding of what teachers contribute to the unique issues of student transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten. Documenting unique transition behaviors Reggio Emilia teachers made to ensure students' future educational successes was the significance of the study's contribution to research and stakeholders.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Education reform is closely associated with Vygotsky's theoretical influence. Chapter Two aligned Vygotsky's theoretical framework to kindergarten transition, the influence of teachers on students' educational success, documentation in education, and supporting students' confidence in change and transformation. The focus of Chapter Two was the contextual relationship of the seminal and current literature to the research problem of successful transition into kindergarten.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development is the major construct for this research because of a substructure of constructivism in which students erect their own learning. Vygotsky's theory advanced and informed the literature because Malaguzzi's conceptual elements directly aligned with Vygotsky's theory into practice through parallels of education and culture. The study's research focus on Reggio Emilia teachers relates directly to Vygotsky beliefs that adults are an important source of cognitive development. This research may potentially advance Vygotsky's theory with the Reggio Emilia approach of active learners, active teachers, and the active social environment (New, 2007; Stone, 2012). Stake recommended, "by providing information easily assimilated with the readers' existing knowledge the writer helps the reader construct the meanings of the case" (Stake, 1978, p. 126).

Vygotsky

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory is a historical cultural approach, which claims that all children's learning begins within the culture in which they were born. Because learning is a social event within culture, constructivist learning is what the child can do with and

without help (ZPD) and the learning constructed by a child with the help of MKO (Stone, 2012). Vygotsky analyzed the behavior process of social cognition breaking it into manageable sections, describing the revelations, returning to the origin, and recreating the development from the beginning.

ZPD and MKO. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the gap of what students can do without help and what they can do the cooperation of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) within their cultural realm, including teachers, parents, and peers. Vygotsky's theoretical framework supports the research for this study of contributions Reggio Emilia teachers make in students' transition into kindergarten because, according to Sawyer (2014) "Vygotsky's research discovered the process by which "what is 'out there' in the social world 'gets in here' to our individual psyches" (p. 5). This research study's focus relates to Vygotsky's theory because it expands the study through the social and individual construction of meaning with ZPD, where scaffolding occurs through the concept of the MKO (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky collaborators. Vygotsky collaborated with Luri, Leontiev, and Marx was the political and economic influence of Vygotsky's theory. In addition, Lewin's Gestalt psychology affected the social arena of the theory (Yasnitsky, 2011, 2012). In a prophetic comment, Yasnitsky (2012) offered, "we realize that we are dealing with the psychology of the future" (p. 9). Engels was also an influence on Vygotsky because of the impact tools and labor had on the environment and humans (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky was born in Tsarist Russia in 1896 before the beginning of the Russian Revolution. He died in 1934 never knowing a life outside of the Soviet Union while he embraced the social, cultural, and historical foundations of human development, which resulted in his psychological approach of cultural-historical psychology

(Stone, 2012). Vygotsky contended, “Children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Krechevsky, Mardel & Rivard, 2013, p. xi).

Malaguzzi and Reggio

Malaguzzi was not only the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, but also an educational psychologist who established the Reggio experience in progressive education in Europe and America through Piaget’s constructivism, Vygotsky’s sociohistorical psychology, Italian postwar left-reform politics, and European postmodern philosophy (Edwards et al., 2012). Malaguzzi and Vygotsky were more alike than different; as teachers and psychologists, each mainstreamed children with disabilities and both lived through wars in their own countries. Italian fascism affected Malaguzzi’s constructs; “Malaguzzi is a vivid example of the connection that education is, first and foremost, a political practice” (Moss, 2016, p. xvi). Marxism was also entangled in Vygotsky’s work, “Ideology, psychology, and policy were intricately intertwined in [Vygotsky’s] psychology” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 10). As pedagogical director for Reggio Emilia schools, Malaguzzi (1998) proposed, “Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn” (p. 83).

Reggio Emilia constructs. Reggio Emilia approach schools, founded in 1945, are equally as complicated in their construct as Vygotsky’s 20th century social constructivist theory. The transition at Reggio Emilia is a seamless process because of the implementation of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and more knowledgeable other. The transition to kindergarten is a rite of passage for students everywhere; adoption of Vygotsky’s theory including listening, documentation, and reflection can smooth the transition to kindergarten with

the application of the social constructivist approach for young children's advantage (Parnell, 2012).

Research informs literature. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) pointed to the early years of school as predictors of future school achievement. Empirical research demonstrates successful transition into kindergarten links with positive outcomes in academic achievement, social/emotional competence, and rapidly developing skills (Casper et al., 2015). Transition research has determined that literature is a combination of many issues such as, "family involvement and school achievement and less attention given to factors important in developing relationships as children enter school" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 504). Transition research results determine transition practices increase students' academic outcomes (Schneider, et al., 2014). Research about teachers' contributions to kindergarten transition is limited, and there is a lack empirical studies focusing solely on Reggio Emilia teachers, their behavior, and the resulting impact it imposes on children's transition to kindergarten.

Stake. Stake's (1995) intrinsic case study design provided the unique methodology to focus on the phenomenon surrounding how the Reggio Emilia approach teachers' MKO contribute to the issues of transition into kindergarten. Vygotsky's (1978) cultural constructivist theory and ZPD provided the guidelines for promoting the concepts of successful transition because Reggio Emilia approach leader, Malaguzzi, in addition to Vygotsky, believed children to be capable and competent (Edwards, 2012). Vygotsky's concepts of signs, tools, thought, speech, and conceptual understanding unite in principles with the Reggio Emilia approach of curiosity, self-discovery, and open-ended learning (Stone, 2012). Stake's (1995) intrinsic case study design allows the researcher to, "concentrate on the relationships identified in the research questions" (p. 77).

Social constructivist theory. Because of the relationship of the research and Vygotsky's cultural constructivist theory, there is a direct connection between Vygotsky's theory and this study. Vygotsky's writings in sociocultural theory are translations from the original Russian versions (John-Steiner & Mann, 1996; Stone, 2012). Social constructivist theory forms a connecting structure to the Reggio Emilia process of transition into kindergarten through the teacher's image of the child; the student is making meaning of his or her world through discussions with more knowledgeable others: family, friends, and teachers (Stone, 2012). The Reggio Emilia approach maintains balance and sensibility through inquiry, values, and play. It is embraced by constructivist and social constructivist attention to relationships, society, and cultures. The Reggio Emilia approach is a comprehensive pedagogy to early childhood education (Inan, Trundle, & Kantor, 2010). The Reggio Emilia approach to pedagogy is the teacher as guide and facilitator, which aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD (Malaguzzi, 1993b).

Related Literature

The related literature is a compilation of the background literature in relationship to Malaguzzi and Reggio Emilia approach schools. In a 1963 symposium speech in Italy, Malaguzzi (2016) emphasized, "Above all else education should lead to schools which are concerned with ensuring the most favorable social and emotional situation for children, as an absolutely indispensable condition" (p. 72). Malaguzzi understood education and the internal relationships between preschool and elementary school as well as the intricacies of relationships of a good school with teachers, children, and families.

Literature Review Sources

Literature for this review originated from the following sources: the Jerry Falwell Liberty University Online Library, Liberty University Research Consultations, Inter-library Loans, ERIC

(EBSCOhost), ProQuest Education Journals, Education Research Complete, and Google Scholar. Idiosyncrasies of the study required monitoring the newly translated (Italian to English) publications about Reggio Emilia through the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance Website (NAREA, 2017).

Research Methodologies

Research indicates that a relationship of successful transition into kindergarten has a connection with positive outcomes in academic achievement, social and emotional competence, and rapid developing skills (Caspé et al., 2015). Transition is a change from one state or condition to another (“Transition”, 2017). George (1993) suggested transition to school has ramifications: “the transition to school has both immediate and long-term consequences, and that racial differences in achievement emerge quickly” (p. 363). Research on teachers’ contributions to kindergarten transition is limited. As an illustration, an important study by Schneider, Shaw & Broda (2016) for the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) focused on children and their transition into kindergarten through their entrance into the workforce; the current emphasis of the NCES is the maximization of their research because of the intrinsic value added to education reform. The long reaching results for students’ academic success was examined through a Birth Cohort Study (ECLS-B), which is the richest longitudinal data set of children transitioning into formal schooling. Schulting, et al. (2005) researched 21,260 children from kindergarten until they had completed fifth grade, the results from the 1,277 schools indicated that kindergarten transition policies do have a positive effect on students’ academic achievement. Schulting et al. (2005) incorporated Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition in six states out of 50 participating in the federal Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge program.

Ahtola et al. (2011) reported successful transition into kindergarten and higher academic achievement generates from a greater number of transition practices being utilized. The kindergarten teacher's concept of students' skills is one of nine developmental practices that markedly affect children's future in kindergarten. These practices increase emotional support for all students in transition however; children at economic and social risk experience greater benefits from all nine practices. LoCasale-Crouch et al.'s (2008). The LoCasale-Crouch et al.'s (2008) study emphasized strictly preschool and kindergarten teachers' perception of students' academic skills, and the kindergarten teachers placed higher priority on academic skills of incoming students. Furthermore, research by Alexander, Entwisle, Blyth, and McAdoo (1988) indicated that educationally vulnerable children (reduced circumstances and challenges due to finances, physical or mental abilities, lack of parental support or ethnicity) are the children who are most likely to need the benefit of transition practices. Recently Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2014) determined transition to kindergarten designates the future success of students' academic experience. Their five-year study results were similar to others as a high degree of implementation practices resulted in the better judgment of the transitioning student while implementing a lower number of methods had the opposite effect (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting et al., 2005).

Transition into Kindergarten

Although it is not a new phenomenon, transition into kindergarten sets the stage for future educational success. In 1852, Fröbel submitted a detailed plan for "the organic linking of pre-school with primary school education and how to bridge the existing gap in the transition from one level to the next" (Vrinioti, Einarsdottir, & Brostrom, 2015, p. 16). In the 1960's Europe began to explore the transition from preschool to kindergarten associated with attaining

an integrated curriculum (Vrinioti et al., 2015). President Johnson was fighting poverty in 1965; federally funded Head Start preschools served as a lynchpin for the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Social Welfare History Project, 2016). Johnson, formerly a schoolteacher, spearheaded legislation, which resulted in a preschool program called Head Start (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 2015). The Head Start program is one of the many U.S. preschool programs that have become involved in research about transition to kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2014). Researchers discovered that the greater number of development practices deployed, the higher the academic achievement of students, as well as their successful transition into kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). Schneider et al. (2014) conducted a study in Italy at Reggio Emilia approach preschools transitioning students into Italian kindergartens; their five-year research results were similar to others. A high degree of implementation practices led to better judgment of the transitioning student, and lower number of practices led to a lower number of success rates. Referring to the understudied aspect of school transitions, Schneider et al. (2014) stated, “The Reggio Emilia approach to early education is admired internationally as best practice” (p. 449). Transition into kindergarten designates the future success of a student’s academic experience (Alexander et al., 2014). Referring to transition to school, George (1993) commented, “These data strongly suggest that the transition to school has both immediate and long-term consequences and that differences in achievement emerge quickly” (p. 363).

Parental and family involvement in Reggio Emilia approach school transition is important for educational success. Reggio Emilia approach schools in Italy assist parents through their child’s transition into kindergarten; they have the preschool students tell their parents and siblings about the visit to the elementary school. Many of these children have

siblings already attending elementary school, and the parents are familiar with transition into kindergarten. They are comfortable because their children go through priming events (such as the elementary school visit in May before their fall transition) to ease the kindergarten transition (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; 2005). Children in Italy are usually together for three years in preschool and the first five years of elementary school. Corsaro and Molinari (2008) developed the theory of interpretive theoretical perspective in which children take information from adults for their own use in order to tackle their own issues. Corsaro and Molinari (2008) explained, “The experience of children in early childhood education in Italy does serve as a model for other countries” (p. 264).

Relationship of Existing Knowledge to the Proposed Study

Recently, Dr. Christakis of the Yale Child Study Center published a book about young children and their preschool education. Christakis (2016) pointed out, “The most essential engine of child development is deep human connection and parents and teachers trump all others in the relationship with the growing child” (p. 297). Christakis (2016) argued “and we may have even reached the point where “doing” Reggio is no longer the appealing (and fashionable) novelty it once was” (p. 79). Christakis (2016) suggested that Reggio and other preschools such as Waldorf and Montessori “also carry a regrettable tinge of elitism” (p. 80). Of course, the problem is far more complicated than a tinge of elitism; Reggio Emilia preschools in the United States, charge tuition, specifically in New York, beginning at \$9,100 to \$21,840 for the annual term of half day or full day of preschool (Williamsburg Northside Schools Website, 2016). On the other hand, students receive many scholarships in U. S. Reggio Emilia private schools, whereas Reggio Italian schools receive municipal funding and all children have the right to attend preschool in Italy for free (Cagliari et al., 2016). The delimitation of this study is

“intentionally imposed to limit the scope of the study, using a certain group, and conducting the research in a single setting” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 8).

Moreover, Reggio Emilia teachers and their classroom behavior seem to enhance children’s self-efficacy such as “Bandura’s social cognitive theory” (Bandura, 2002). Malaguzzi, a sociologist, and Bandura, a behaviorist, both believed experiences shape children’s behavior. However, Malaguzzi considered the environment as the third teacher while Bandura considered the child is a product of the environment. Edwards (2002) referred to the “relationship dance” (p. 2) when writing about early childhood care and discussed Bandura’s social learning theory and identification a technique of “moral guidance” in making decisions. Cagliari et al. (2016) discussed that “recent research in psychology (Wallon for example) highlights the close correlation existing between children’s individual development and the nature of the relations they have with the environment” (p. 77).

Existing knowledge of teachers’ contributions to transition are often within multifaceted studies where students, families, communities, and others are subjects of research. Hindman, Skibbe, and Morrison (2013) researched the outreach of teaching staff outreach to families, and important issues about transition revealed the significance of equity, smooth transition, and family involvement for recommended practices. Reggio Emilia approach school teachers are in regular contact with parents about their children, and parents visit the school often, contributes to Reggio Emilia classes because they are involved in transition and many other arenas.

Caspe et al. (2015) also suggested strong relationships with families, community, and the school provided an enhanced and successful kindergarten transition. Parnell (2012) conducted an in-depth phenomenological study of Reggio Emilia teachers’ reflective practice of daily documentation of classroom behaviors and activities. Four weeks of field observations during

the 12-week study of 175 children at children's center on a university campus concluded with findings that teachers are not solely responsible for constructing connections in the school. Each participant (teacher, administrator, janitor, child, and parents) contributed to making meaning through reflection and research (Parnell, 2012).

McIntyre et al. (2014) addressed that the participation of school psychologists with students during the kindergarten transition period "may be a valuable asset to the process" (p. 204). Fifty-two percent of the psychologists in the study were involved in kindergarten transition and psychologists who previously had no transition involvement indicated that they would like to be participate in the future. The main activity of the psychologists in the study were providing family members with transition information and evaluating children's performance during transition. McIntyre et al. (2014) concluded there is a need for more use of valuable assets such as school psychologists in conducting transition activities.

Transition practices in relationship to academic performance. A complex web of relationships, that developed over time influenced kindergarten transition through a network of students, peers, school, home, and neighborhoods (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) combined four theoretical perspectives to conduct their ecological transition study. These theoretical perspectives included the child effects model, the direct effects model, the indirect effects model, and the dynamic effects model. The authors found several changing interactions among children and places that defined transition successes and failures. Most importantly, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) described the transition to kindergarten as a point in time to understand risk. This study examined the relationship of teachers' contributions to minimize the risk of failure in transition as well as to maximize academic success.

Eleven years after the Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000) study, a Finnish study by Ahtola et al. (2011) researched the validity of transition practices enacted during the preschool transition into kindergarten and their contribution to children's successful academic growth in kindergarten. Just as Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000), Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2000) also concluded relationships contributed to children's successful transition and future learning. However, in Rimm-Kaufman et al.'s (2000) study, they reported more than one-half of transitioning students experience unsuccessful transitions. School-based kindergarten transition practices and, according to Schulting et al. (2005), is the relationship between "children's performance during early elementary school and later academic achievement has been well documented" (p. 860). Children and teachers in public and private schools throughout the United States participated in Schulting et al.'s (2005) study. They concluded that transition practices directly relate to academic achievements and recommended the higher the number of transition practices employed, the more successful academic futures would be for students.

It is difficult to understand the failure of successful development of transition practices in the U.S. when the existence of a potential solution for kindergarten transition is within reach through the unique behaviors of Reggio Emilia approach teachers. Malaguzzi suggested, "The teacher must be treated not as an object of study but as an interpreter of educational phenomena" (Edwards et al., 2011, Locations 1519-22). The research on transition behaviors indicated that students who are economically and socially deficient, are severely at risk for failure. These children are the ones that undergo the most substantial advantages from the application of transition practices (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). Many private Reggio Emilia approach schools in the United States provide full scholarships for disadvantaged students to attend their schools.

Of course, the problem of successful transition into kindergarten is far more complicated than any one-research study. Above all transition is a matter of equity when children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds come together in a new environment. Smooth transitions influence children's future academic experiences and families are integral to a child's emotional welfare while facing strange, new environments. Relationships are the glue for kindergarten transition; relationships among children, schools, families, and early childhood programs increase the likelihood of smooth transitions (Caspé et al., 2015). In conclusion, kindergarten transition should set the stage for students' continuing joy of learning.

Interest in transition practices is mounting. Webster University in Webster Grove, Missouri has 17,000 students and one of the most diverse student bodies in a university of its size. Webster University is unique in the U.S. because it offers a master's degree in pedagogical coordination in the Reggio Emilia approach. This degree is in conjunction with Reggio Emilia in Italy and Reggio children (Webster University Graduate Catalog, 2016-2017). The Reggio Emilia preschools in the U.S. maintain Reggio Emilia pedagogy just as practiced in Italian Reggio Emilia schools. Because research is growing in relationship to advanced preschool education, this has resulted in improved academic and social behaviors for students' elementary years, according to Abry, Latham, Bassok, and LoCasale-Crouch (2015) who examined "teacher beliefs, alignment, and children's school adjustment" (p. 80). This research in the U.S. occurred at intervals with students at nine-months-old, two-years-old, preschool, and kindergarten and examined preschool and kindergarten teacher beliefs. Abry et al. (2015) found that teachers all agreed upon academic skills for children. Their agreement and the conclusion of the study was that belief misalignments were associated with negative outcomes for children (Ahtola et al., 2015). Patton and Wang (2012) conducted a year-long collaborative study in six states (New

Jersey, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Virginia, and California). According to Patton and Wang's (2012) study children need a large network of relationships to succeed in kindergarten, and, "early social performance and academic achievement are predictors of later school success" (Patton & Wang, 2012, p. 2). Social connections in this study were partnerships between preschool and community. Patton and Wang's (2012) study included 24 participants including families, educators, and state education personnel. Four conclusions about successful transition into kindergarten included the need for (a) promoting family and community partnerships; (b) initiating combined, preschool and kindergarten teacher training; (c) collaborating on training practices regionally and statewide; (d) supporting transition funding. Schneider et al. (2014) suggested more empirical research is required to learn about teachers and methods of schools linking transition practices to child outcomes. However, the primary findings of this five-year Italian study were that a greater degree of implemented transition practices results in better judgment of students making the transition. Children's feelings toward school, academic achievement, and their behavior improved with transition practices. The Reggio Emilia approach transition practices implemented to 288 students in 24 preschools in Genoa and La Spezia, Italy were studied by Schneider et al. (2014).

Families contribute to successful transition. Ahtola et al. (2016) distributed questionnaires to 230 preschool teachers, 131 elementary teachers, and 2,662 parents in their study, examined the importance of transition practices among preschool, elementary school, and families in Finland. The research specifically demonstrated any perceived differences in the value of transition practices are insignificant due to the agreement among parents, preschool, and kindergarten teachers in Finland as the result of kindergarten practices. Puccioni's (2015) study examined beliefs of parents about transition practices and their children's school readiness in

math by studying 12,622 kindergarten students through first grade. Puccioni's (2015) research was conducted through interviews with school administrators, parents, and teachers in conjunction with school assessments through eighth grade. Puccioni (2015) found that children's beginning academic achievement has clear connections with school readiness beliefs and transition practices. Hindman et al.'s (2013) descriptive study investigated how teachers networked with families in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade in relationship to the impact of their academic growth in language, literacy, and math. The research questionnaires examined how teachers reach out to students and in what ways their efforts predicted children's early academic success. The participants in the study included students in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade that attended two school districts in a major Midwestern city. Hindman et al. (2013) concluded that many strategies could be employed to reach out to families in the form of newsletters, invitations to volunteer, social events, workshops, training, and phone calls. Noticeable improvements took place over the school year. Vocabulary learning was higher in classes where the teacher had held family workshops and training. Children's mathematical skills increased when a higher number of classroom volunteers worked with them and the authors recommended teachers conduct more family outreach that leads to academic growth.

Reggio Emilia Pedagogy and Malaguzzi

While the Reggio Emilia approach pedagogy, as it relates to successful transition into kindergarten, is the central theme for the literature review, this approach is brimming in historical literature and 20 years of fascism. Malaguzzi devoted his life to educational innovation of early education and exhibited a deep respect for children's worth. Edwards, et al. (2012) documented the day Malaguzzi rode his bike into Vella Celia, Italy, to see the mothers and community near the end of World War II as they had begun the arduous task of building the

first free, community preschool. Many years later Malaguzzi reflected in an interview saying, “I even liked to mock Marx’s wisdom”; Malaguzzi’s interview (as cited in Barazzoni, 2000, pp. 13-15). Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ history permeates Malaguzzi’s 1945-1994 speeches and writings. Malaguzzi, a teacher, psychologist, and philosopher, established Reggio Emilia schools in Italy as municipal entities. Malaguzzi regarded Reggio teachers as “having an abiding auspicious perspective” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. ix). Malaguzzi’s analogy of Reggio Emilia pedagogy was a ping-pong match, the child and teacher play the game to each of their advantages, and education pivots around children, teachers, and families (Edwards, 1993). Malaguzzi was not able to contain his contagious optimism throughout his lifetime (1920-1994).

Because of Malaguzzi’s diverse influence on pedagogical construct, he greatly admired Freinet, a French educator, who believed in unstructured classrooms, trial by error techniques for living, collaboration of ideas, and students with power to change humanity through education (Cagliari et al., 2016). Malaguzzi (1993b) believed practice drives theory, not the other way around and that children, teachers, and families are at the core of education. Reggio Emilia approach foundations are the child as protagonist, teachers are researchers, and parents are partners, and that the third teacher is the environment. Malaguzzi became director of the Reggio Emilia schools in 1963 and developed the benchmark Italian municipal government school (Hendrick, 1997). The Malaguzzi Manifesto of 1994 stated: “The rights of children, teachers, and families are indissolubly woven together in schools and in education that aspires to call itself such” (Cagliari, et al., 2016, p. 106). The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on children’s relationship with other children, teachers, parents, as well as their own history and the culture around them (Rinaldi, 1993). New (2000) stated that this influence is used “not to promote

change, but reflection, debate, and conversation – that may well be Malaguzzi’s and the preschools of Reggio Emilia greatest legacy” (pp. 4-5).

Malaguzzi’s inspiration emerges from theorists. Malaguzzi was influenced by constructivists and social-constructivist theories; his life’s work was centered on, “a complementary process of constructive self-education and co-education, through the uninterrupted interactions and inter-subjectivities of ideas and acts between young and old, and between the children themselves, in all the multiplicity of their geneses and forms.” (Malaguzzi, 2016, p. 378).

There are a few educational theorists that Malaguzzi held in high regard. These included:

- (a) Dewey, who was an American philosopher and educator.
- (b) Gardner (2012), who was an American psychologist and Professor of Education at Harvard University. Gardner developed the theory of multiple intelligences and worked with Reggio Emilia on research projects through Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- (c) Hawkins, who was an American psychiatrist, physician, and researcher. Hawkins and Malaguzzi were both “Convinced that children take the same attitude about the world as scientists” (Malaguzzi, 2016, p. 282). However, at the same time, Malaguzzi (2016) commented about parents and school culture, “If only they were able to appreciate what Hawkins calls messing about.” (p. 306).
- (d) Vygotsky, who was a Soviet developmental psychologist who developed the theory of human cultural development and cultural-historical psychology.

- (e) Bronfenbrenner, who was a Russian-born, American developmental psychologist who developed the human ecology theory. Malaguzzi wrote, “Development, in accordance with Bronfenbrenner’s hypothesis, is nothing other than the constant modification of way in which an individual perceives and engages with their personal and historical environment” (Malaguzzi, 2016, p. 323).

Ferriere, social psychologist and, Marxist-inspired Swiss socialist, was an inspiration to Malaguzzi (Hameline, 1993; Gandini, 2012). Ferriere was deaf after age 20 and gave up teaching, and became an educationist. Ferriere remained a teacher in his heart while becoming a prolific anthropological and social philosophical writer (Hameline, 1993). Ferriere, a religious man, “believed that hope was the driving force behind education” (Hameline, 1993, p. 17).

Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia approach is a philosophy and, an ideological construct of public early childhood education, founded by Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Malaguzzi’s vision was a “school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and many children” (Malaguzzi, 2012, p. 41). The distinction of Reggio Emilia approach is that the construct is persistently modified to calibrate the needs of the relationships of contributing stakeholders (children, teachers, families, and the community) within the school.

Reggio Emilia approach and school reform. New (2006) wrote about the practice of collaborative inquiry by Reggio Emilia approach teachers and stated that it is “a catalyst for conversations about society’s responsibility to its youngest citizens” (New, 2006, p. 5). Reggio Emilia approach is a hopeful and confident construct about education reform, and the U.S.

continues to research all that is wrong in education. Reggio Emilia's "Image of the Child" has had the greatest motivation for U.S. educators; however, the image of teachers has perpetuated their devoted attention (New, 2006). New (2006) summarized the change in early childhood education and acknowledged it is within the realm of possibility when children, schools, and communities work with one another for a "more just society" (New, 2006, p.12).

Krechevsky and Stork (2000) examined a futuristic curriculum for the Harvard Project Zero collaboration with the Harvard Graduate School of Education by studying a Reggio Emilia preschool in Italy. The four assumptions by Krechevsky and Stork (2000) were,

- (a) learning is a result of individual activity;
- (b) teachers are consumers of theory;
- (c) assessment is concerned with evaluating outcomes, rather than learning processes, and
- (d) learning and teaching are primarily cognitive acts (pp. 60-61)

Group learning can be like a sports team where the sum is greater than its parts. Reggio Emilia teachers are generators of theory through their daily observations of children's learning activities and everyone at Reggio Emilia belongs to the culture of learning and teaching. Documentation is an excellent research tool, and it serves as a form of assessment of the child's interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Cognitive learning and education works cohesively at Reggio Emilia schools.

Italy's pedagogical model for young children. Schneider et al. (2014) declared, "The Reggio Emilia Approach is a pedagogical model for young children widely implemented in Northern Italy" (p.450). Corsaro and Molinari (2005) conducted a six-year study in Modena, Italy, at a preschool where students remained with one another for three years before transitioning into elementary school. At the elementary school, they remained with elementary classmates for the following five years. The researchers stated quality preschools, close

community, and parental involvement are critical factors in the successful transitions into kindergarten.

Philosophy of Reggio Emilia teachers. Reggio Emilia approach teachers' role does not include the processing of grade cards and letter grades; however, they do document their students' progress in the class. They document and evaluate what is and is not working during the students' play and learning to sufficiently guide and/or facilitate the students' learning activities. Edwards (2002) described the functions of Reggio Emilia approach teachers as a mixture of researchers, guides, facilitators, and the more knowledgeable others who support students in their learning. Malaguzzi forecasted the responsibilities of pedagogy as "above all to foresee, anticipate, and prepare the days of tomorrow" (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 100). Rinaldi (2012) summarized the role of an educator as someone who encourages students to demonstrate their uniqueness and promotes differences, but also promotes discussion among peers to learn from one another while sharing their individual views. This is learning at its best while the group becomes an integral quotient in each of their peer's culture.

Edwards (2002) listed functions of the Reggio Emilia approach teachers:

Teachers perform an artful balancing between engagement and attention, careful, sensitive listening, observation/documentation, reflection with other adults, all serve as resources and guides to children. Classroom teachers work in pairs; Reggio encourages collaborating and mentoring between personnel throughout the system. Teachers specially trained in the visual arts work with educators and children. Teachers organize environments rich in possibilities and provocations that invite children to undertake exploration and problem solving; teachers also act as recorders (documenters) for the

students, making learning visible, teachers provide instruction in tool and material use as needed, teachers scaffold children's learning. (p. 8)

Harvard Project Zero researchers, in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the University of Virginia, Colorado State University, and the University of Nebraska, each have active Reggio Emilia research programs on their university grounds. However, there is no known research of Reggio Emilia teachers' contributions to transition and the potential of the Reggio Emilia approach application to public schools within the United States.

Reggio Emilia approach schools in the United States. The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) "Exists to connect early childhood educators and advocates together in discovering, interpreting, and promoting Reggio Emilia inspired education" (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance[NAREA], 2017, para. 3). As of 2017, the NAREA has 52 member schools in almost every state in the United States. However, the majority of the United States Reggio Emilia preschools are not members of the NAREA and the NAREA list is approximately 10 percent of total U.S. Reggio Emilia schools.

Reggio Emilia culture. The Reggio Emilia educational experience is about relationships and the multiple benefits within the nurturing, cultural environment where "all children are rich, there are no poor children [children are rich in potential]" (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 397). Reggio Emilia's culture began in Italy when many communities in Emilia-Romagna founded their own municipal preschools leaving state-and church-operated facilities. Four characteristics stand above all others when defining the construct of the Reggio Emilia approach culture:

- a) Social relationships "involve children's entirety" (Cagliari, 2016, p. 173);
- Malguzzi (2016) believed schools need to be "concerned with ensuring the most favorable social and emotional situation for children" (p. 72).

- b) Negotiated learning is respect, communication, debate, and discourse. “Discourse is the voice we use for schooling and learning (Foreman & Fyfe, 2012, p. 249).
- c) “The image of a child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all connected to adults and other children” (Malaguzzi, 2012, p. 147).
- d) “Documentation is central to negotiated learning” (Foreman & Fyfe, 2012, p. 250). Documentation of children’s work encourages their own reflection and learning and offers a constantly available stimulus to children’s memory and reflection. (Malaguzzi, 2016)

Reggio Emilia Preschools in the U.S. and Italy fulfill the cultural constructs above. The following section elaborates about documentation within the Reggio Emilia approach schools.

Reggio Emilia Approach Teachers’ Documentation

Understanding Reggio Emilia teachers’ documentation of students requires one to visualize documentation as the pedagogical behavior that strengthens negotiated learning at Reggio Emilia preschools. Dahlberg (2012) defined pedagogical documentation as “a process for making pedagogical (or other) work visible and subject to dialogue, interpretation, contestation, and transformation” (p. 225). Any detailed record of a student’s performance, which assists others in understanding a student’s behavior, is a form of Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ documentation (Foreman & Fyfe, 2012). The three components of negotiated learning are design, documentation, and learning. Reggio Emilia’s powerful educational process is characterized by negotiation between teachers and students who each plan, document, and debate among one another. Reggio Emilia approach is the stage for mutual awareness of compassion and tolerance for one another found in their documentation and reflective study.

Documentation provides the stakeholders (children, teachers, parents, and the public) in a Reggio Emilia preschool with the range of student's knowledge and the logic of the current course of study. Gandini conducted interviews with the Italian speaking Malaguzzi for three years, from 1989-1991. Gandini recorded Malaguzzi's comments about the exhibits on the wall space at Reggio Emilia in Italy, "The walls of our preschools speak and document" (Gandini, 2012, p. 338). Malaguzzi referred to Reggio Emilia students' work presented on walls with their pictures during particular projects, which included Reggio Emilia teachers' documentation. Pedagogical development increases from the process of documentation, and the student's self-confidence improves with adult's attention to their projects. The most important facet of learning documentation for effective practice is listening to the children and hearing what they are saying.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices/Reggio Emilia and Early Childhood Education

Reggio Emilia developmental appropriate practices are quite different from the developmentally appropriate practices for teaching defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Reggio Emilia's practices revolve around teachers following children and employing an "itinerant reconnaissance education" (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 63), where all children have rights, whereas the NAEYC encourages directing children's behavior to provide targeted information (Edwards et al., 2012).

Reggio Emilia Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the focus of this research study, and understanding the Italian alignment of learning for preschool children is often in the corresponding literature. Many Reggio Emilia pedagogical authors are previous and/or current Reggio Emilia approach teachers, including Bonilauri, Cagliari, Gandini, Malaguzzi, Rabuzi, Rinaldi, and Tiziana. Malaguzzi was

designated as “the guiding genius of Reggio” by Gardner (Gardner, 2012, p. xiii). Malaguzzi wrote a poem about children’s undeniable spirit: *The Hundred Languages of Children* where he identified a hundred languages that are children’s means of expressing themselves. Malaguzzi (1993a) stated, “Our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children” (p. 10). Malaguzzi enhanced meaningful learning (Gandini, 2011) and felt social learning occurred prior to cognitive awareness and that collaborative relationships were integral to the Reggio Emilia approach (Gandini, 2012). Malaguzzi respected children and was adamant when speaking of Reggio Emilia teachers. Malaguzzi stated, “It is important for pedagogy not to be the prisoner of too much certainty” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 37). He viewed young students working together in classes with one another for several years as “a great privilege” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 67).

Rinaldi

Rinaldi’s belief was “A teacher’s work should be grounded in political beliefs and advocacy” (Edwards, 2012, p. 153). Rinaldi’s perspective was leftist progressivism and idealism similar to that area of Italy where she grew up. Rinaldi began her work with Malaguzzi in 1970 at Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and remained with him until his death in 1994; at Reggio Emilia preschool, she was the pilot pedagogical coordinator (Constructing Modern Knowledge, 2015). The pedagogical coordinator is the coordinator of a team who works in relationship with “teachers, other school staff, parents, citizens, administrators, public officials, and outside audiences” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 136). Professional pedagogical coordinators work with up to four schools of municipal infant and toddler centers and preschools, collaborating on learning issues with teachers, parents, and staff, while supervising teacher education and professional development among the staff (Cagliari et al., 2016).

Research is not isolated within the scientific community. Research is an evolving process for Reggio Emilia approach teachers as they listen and learn from their students and find new and creative ways to assist them on their educational journey. Research is an integral part of the journey for teachers and “when teachers make listening and documentation central to their practice, they transform themselves into researchers” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 244). Research by teachers at Reggio Emilia is linked to innovative behaviors in American schools (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 2015).

While the teacher’s role at Reggio Emilia schools is in constant flux, evolving with new research and creating innovative change in the child-centered learning, the courage to enter uncharted territory in education through daily research is immense and encompasses the Reggio Emilia philosophy of children searching for meaning (Biermeier, 2015). As Rinaldi (2012) stated, “The young child is the first great researcher” (245). Children are looking for meaning in every corner of their life and they are fearless about finding answers in their own way. Rinaldi (2012) concluded, “Life is research” (p. 246).

Rinaldi’s documentation of the seamless application of the Reggio Emilia approach philosophy for teachers in Australia preschools launched into one of the key constructs of Reggio Emilia, the concept of “the child as a citizen: the competent child, the child as possessor of rights” (Rinaldi, 2013b, p. 18). Therefore, students should participate in the democracy of school along with society. Colossal responsibility falls to pedagogy to understand “school is not only a place to transmit culture but to create it” (Rinaldi, 2013b, p. 25).

Rinaldi worked with Reggio Emilia founder, Malaguzzi for 24 years. Rinaldi is currently President of Reggio Children as well as the Reggio Children-Loris Malaguzzi Centre Foundation. Rinaldi worked on the production of the Rulebook for municipal schools in Italy

published in 1972. This rulebook made a “clear concept of schools and education as public and participatory, as a permanent process, as places in which the culture of children, and human culture are not only transmitted, they are produced” (Rinaldi, 2016, p. 154).

The environment at Reggio Emilia is the “third teacher” or “third educator,” according to Malaguzzi, Rinaldi (2013b) defined “the pedagogical approach as being blended with the physical space/architecture of the school” (p. 29) in such a way to reflect the relationships therein: teachers, parents, and students. The Reggio Emilia approach has a base in constructivist and social constructivist approaches, and proponents of Reggio Emilia view a child “who is driven by the enormous energy potential of a hundred billion neurons and by the incredible curiosity that makes the child search for reasons for everything” (Rinaldi, 2013b, p. 15). Reggio Emilia proponents view the child as competent and capable, possessing the right to learn, debate, and challenge while making meaning of his or her own potential.

Vodopivec

Vodopivec (2012) acknowledged that, “preschool is never the neutral space, because it is pervaded with culture” (p. 6). The article confirmed that the students, parents, and teachers are of value at Reggio Emilia. Teachers have the greatest problem learning to speak less because teaching is secondary to learning in Reggio Emilia approach schools; curriculum develops from projects at Reggio Emilia: this is called, the emergent curriculum (Vodopivec, 2012). Relationships at Reggio Emilia-inspired schools are multifaceted including, student to student, and teacher to family. According to Vodopivec (2012), “Pedagogy develops at Reggio through the processes of documentation” (p. 11). Children all have special rights at Reggio Emilia schools, including those children with disabilities.

Rinaldi (2005) discussed listening in relationship to children making meaning from the

time they are born. Reggio Emilia approach teachers continuously look for ways to define indestructible, accomplished children in order to know exactly how they understand their world and how they view their world. Listening is a function Reggio Emilia teachers embrace in their daily activities as part of their documentation and research. Reggio Emilia schools, and any preschool, intimately connects to cultural and social life as well as the family life of the students. Turnsek (2016) conducted a three-year study of 810 preschool teachers in Slovenia from 2010 through 2013, about how they incorporated the pedagogy of listening. Conversation and discussion create the impetus for teachers to initiate listening within their method and practice of teaching. Reggio Emilia students co-construct their own knowledge in order to make direct contributions and achieve autonomous participation. Lazzari (2012) discussed the public good and Reggio Emilia in connection to early childhood education and care. Lazzari (2012) also indicated that education relates directly to society and politics through life styles and past events, which forms the environment for education over the years. Lazzari's (2012) investigative, historical research article examined Italian municipal early childhood education and care for the public good. At the outset, the Reggio Emilia approach pedagogy received kudos for their excellence in this arena. Italian women reentering the workforce after World War II were the precursor for the eventual formation of Early Childhood Education and Care in Italy. Malaguzzi and Ciari were socialists in Italy and had been through an anti-Fascist Regime, the "civic spirit" was relentless, and today their pedagogical identity remains grounded in democracy – equality for all preschool students – a "cultural common ground" (Lazzari, 2012, p. 558). Lazzari (2012) disclosed "when ground-breaking psychological studies revealed children's potentialities in interactive processes, the image of a 'competent child, rich in potential and connected to adults

and other children' became the core of the pedagogical culture developed in municipal institutions" (p. 558).

Reggio Emilia approach pedagogy can never be constant because it is always in a state of flux. It changes with the culture that surrounds it through documentation, observation, and research by teachers and the children who are searching for meaning with their observations and research within the environment. The environment established in a classroom at Reggio Emilia schools is one of relationships among teachers and individual relationships formed with each child. Children are cognizant of the atmosphere within their learning surroundings. When teachers view their students as intelligent, strong, and capable of establishing a collegiate atmosphere with their peers, the learning experience continuously changed and developed in a fluid and beneficial manner, "remaining continually open to new conditions, perspective, understanding and possibilities" (Nutbrown, 2006, p. 121). Learning is not static in the Reggio Emilia approach; it is continually evolving as the children question, explore, and research to experience their greatest creativity in a venue where they receive the utmost respect.

Gap in the Literature

My proposed study specifically addresses the gap in existing research literature of pedagogical contributions by Reggio Emilia teachers to transition into kindergarten. The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to arrive at a better understanding of what teachers contribute to the unique issues of transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten. The problem for the study is to fill an existing gap of knowledge to identify the behaviors that make up the unique contributions Reggio Emilia approach teachers provide for a successful transition into kindergarten. The discovery process in the field may lead to areas not yet identified; however, the research lens points toward teachers, their unique behaviors, and the

process of transition into kindergarten from a Reggio Emilia approach school. Gandini (2012) offered a purview of Reggio Emilia pedagogy and recommended “Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching was different from before” (p. 57).

Additionally, Dalli’s (2002) finding that there was need for further investigation, research, and progress for education to determine how to meet children’s social, emotional, learning needs, as they move into early childhood education. A plan to assist the process of transition is an “understudied aspect” of the Reggio Emilia approach (Schneider et al., 2014). The facilitation of school transition at Reggio Emilia schools relates to favorable outcomes after transition into kindergarten, according to Schneider et al.’s (2014) study.

Summary

Because Vygotsky began his career as a teacher in Russia, it was only in the last ten years of his life that he practiced psychology. Vygotsky believed “historical development is a development of the human society” (Jovanovic, 2015, p.29). Vygotsky suggested through the sociocultural theory that individuals are subject to how the culture they are a part of advances through history. Malaguzzi chose Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory to guide his new Italian preschool, Reggio Emilia. The pedagogical culture of Reggio Emilia approach schools supplies the educational quality; this is due in part to the European Commission of Early Childhood Education and care (Lazzari, 2012). Reggio Emilia’s culture consists of four characteristics: social relationships, negotiated learning, the image of the child, and documentation (Edwards et al., 2012). The greatest change students at Reggio Emilia experience while they are in preschool comes when it is time for them to transition into kindergarten; leaving friends, classmates, and teachers creates fear in some children. The fear of the unknown and uncertainty about making

new friends can be unsettling for young children. Corsaro and Molinari (2005) referred to the transition period as the “bridge”; this suggested the connection of the two schools where the students would cross from one school to the other.

Teachers at Reggio Emilia approach schools help children with the approach to the bridge of transition through the zone of proximal development. Teachers are the more knowledgeable others assisting the students until they can accomplish the task on their own. However, the details of how this phenomenon occurs between the teacher and the student are not known. Many concepts contribute to education at Reggio Emilia schools; documentation of students’ behavior serves to support the teacher’s research and enhance understanding of how to work with individual children. Documentation makes it possible to provide information to parents about their children, and, documentation is on classroom walls with students’ artwork. Reggio Emilia students choose a project to work on and the two teachers in each room encourage them to develop the project themselves. Unlike projects at schools in the U.S., which are usually under strict time constraints, Reggio Emilia projects can last for a day, weeks, or months. The process establishes that children are competent collaborators and learners within a supportive, Reggio Emilia approach environment. The pedagogical director of Reggio Emilia schools, Carla Rinaldi, described Reggio Emilia schools as “places where we invite children and adults to live” (Krechevsky and Stork, 2000, p. 71).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three provided the methods, research design, and approach to the study of how Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition into kindergarten. This chapter also provided a broad overview of the history, theory, and my personal engagement with a Midwestern Reggio Emilia preschool and their teachers. The procedures for the study and approvals are described, as well as the investigator's role, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

Specifically, the type of case study used in this study is an intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) described case study by stating that it, "involves the study of a particular instance within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (p. 95). Qualitative research promotes interaction of the researcher and phenomena (Stake, 1995). Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) observed intrinsic case study is found within a case due to its unique characteristics. An intrinsic case study advances the case and is set in advance for that means by the researcher (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) discussed that a case is an object rather than a process.

To explain, an intrinsic case study was appropriate for this research because "the case of the highest importance" (Stake, 1995, p. 16), and the issues in case study, for example, "problems," played as important a part as the case itself (Stake, 1995). Intrinsic case study design is appropriate in understanding this research because the contexts of where and when something happened are vital to understanding successful transition into kindergarten (Stake, 1995). The study is appropriate because it isolated and identified Reggio Emilia approach teachers' behaviors for a successful transition into kindergarten.

Stake's (1995) approach is humanistic, and this research is about the value of human beings: teachers, parents, and students. Stake (1995) stated that, "In an intrinsic case study, the case is pre-selected" (p. 4), and in the design of the intrinsic case study Stake (1995) also stated, "The case researcher examines a part or the whole, seeking to understand what the specimen is, how the specimen works" (p. 37). Stake (1995) proffered "Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts" (p. 17). The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to discover the unique contributions teachers make for students to transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten.

Research Questions

The four research questions below served as the first set of blueprints for this intrinsic case study; they established a firm focus for the research design to follow (Yin, 2014). Reggio Emilia pedagogy is a construct of relationships (Malaguzzi, 1998), and the research questions not only served as a compass during the field study, but, they also delved into unique behaviors and perceptions Reggio Emilia teachers' exhibited in contributing to successful transition from preschool into kindergarten. Incorporation of each question is justified in Chapter One.

Central Question

What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition to kindergarten?

Sub-question 1: What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to change and transformation?

Sub-question 2: What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers do to address students' fear of the new environment of kindergarten?

Sub-question 3: How does the Reggio Emilia approach school teacher's documentation of student activities contribute to transition?

Setting

A Reggio Emilia approach school in the Midwestern U.S. is the site for the proposed research study, as it was within reasonable proximity of the researcher. Reggio Emilia schools are eclectic in their placement in U.S. cities. This Midwestern city is the site of the Reggio Emilia approach preschool where the study occurred. The location is in a city center and within walking distance of museums, parks, landmarks, community, and culture with which they interacted regularly. Natural light is an integral part of the school setting where two teachers always worked with up to 11 students in each classroom. Classrooms are casual structures with very few interior walls; artwork covers all the walls, as does the children's individual portraits, documented successes, and comments regularly posted by the teachers. There is always a garden at Reggio Emilia schools, and this Midwestern Reggio preschool was a happy place for children who confirm their history through prominent displays in every part of the school in the form of pictures, projects, and stories (Edwards, et al., 1998).

Selection of the site for this study began with the search for a Reggio Emilia school with the set of circumstances within the staff, which would enhance the research (Stake, 1995). The sample of 10-16 experienced Reggio approach teachers was within the boundaries of selection parameters. The location of the study was a Reggio Emilia approach school in the Midwest where the school has a total population of 1,200 students from ages two years through 12th grade and includes 88 students in eight preschool classes with a ratio of one teacher to every 5.5 students. The original school (first grade through 12th grade) was 100 years old in 2011, and the Reggio Emilia preschool began in 1999. The diverse population consisted of 25% of students of color (African American, Mexican American, Asian, Middle Eastern, Russian, and others), and over 100 of the students have at least one parent who was born outside of the United States.

Students come from two states and 74 zip codes (Midwestern Reggio Emilia School, 2016). The school was within 75 miles of my residence, which provided a financial advantage for the extended study period of one-five months of field observations, data gathering, interviews, and validation. Access to the fieldwork has enhanced the ability for me to return daily to my home office in order to transcribe notes, recordings, and observations.

Geographically, the Midwestern Reggio Emilia School is in a downtown area where the population was over 475,378 according to the 2015 government census estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Demographics for the metropolitan area 2010-2014 surveys included an average household income of \$53,482, 19.4% of individuals below poverty level, an 86.3% educational attainment of high school graduation or higher, 12% of individuals without health insurance coverage, and a \$175,700 median housing value. In addition there were 225,464 total housing units (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

Founded in 1999, the Midwestern Reggio Emilia preschool (students from two years old thru preschool) has a record of 100% of the graduating seniors going on to college. The two campuses, with green spaces and lacrosse fields, were approximately one mile apart and divide the school of 1,200 students into students aged two years through fifth grade and sixth grade through 12th. The faculty had an average of 18 years' experience and 50% of them hold masters degrees; six of the campus faculty members have earned doctoral degrees, and several are in doctoral programs (Midwestern Reggio Emilia School, 2016).

Leadership at the Midwestern Reggio School included a Board of Trustees made up of 22 parents, alumni city leaders, and the head of the school. The leadership positions include the Director of Communications and Marketing, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Advancement,

Assistant Head of School, Upper School Principal, Lower School Principal, and Early Childhood Principal.

Participants

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) proposed, “It is the researcher’s role to understand the multiple realities from the perspective of the participants” (p. 29). The participants were 15 female preschool teachers of various ethnicities over the age of 21 years old who were employed at the Midwest Reggio Emilia approach school for the period of the research study. Two of the participants have studied in Italy at Reggio Emilia at weeklong international study sessions. Many teachers have traveled together to Reggio Emilia-inspired schools in Missouri, Colorado, Minnesota, and Oklahoma, where they toured, attended conferences, and collaborated (Midwestern Reggio Emilia School, 2016). The history, society, and culture of the participants and myself (including the four research questions) were consolidated for emerging interpretations of the research fieldwork (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The 15 Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers have a combined 295 years of teaching amongst them. Seven teachers have master’s degrees, seven have bachelor’s degrees, and one teacher has an associate’s degree.

Table 1
Interview Sample Profiles

| Pseudonym | Years Teaching | Degree |
|-------------|----------------|------------|
| 1. Audrey | 8 | Masters |
| 2. Bethany | 26 | Masters |
| 3. Claire | 7 | Bachelors |
| 4. Danielle | 20 | Masters |
| 5. Esme | 21 | Associates |
| 6. Gabriele | 32 | Bachelors |
| 7. Hannah | 23 | Bachelors |
| 8. Isabelle | 9 | Masters |
| 9. Julia | 37 | Bachelors |
| 10. Kathryn | 31 | Masters |
| 11. Lillian | 10 | Masters |
| 12. Maria | 15 | Masters |
| 13. Nora | 8 | Masters |
| 14. Piper | 36 | Bachelors |
| 15. Rene | 12 | Masters |

The data above was obtained during the interview process at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia School (Midwestern Reggio Emilia Teachers, personal communication 2018).

I used purposive sampling as the type of sampling for this study and I selected the site and Reggio Emilia teacher participants “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 300). The most important participant selection factor was that the participants were teachers at a Reggio Emilia approach school. This provided a site where the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education was implemented. The particular criteria for the study was 15 Reggio Emilia approach teachers at a Reggio Emilia approach preschool located within the United States. In this intrinsic case study, the essential characteristics and attributes were present.

Procedures

Before collecting data in this study, I applied to Liberty University’s International Review Board (IRB). To elicit participants for the study, I arranged access to the Midwest

Reggio Emilia preschool site, and provided a written agreement of responsibilities (see Appendix B and D) of the researcher, and the host site. Costs, confidentiality, and written permission were reviewed. Persons at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school who discussed observations and descriptions (member checking) were also informed. Liberty University IRB required participants to agree to the research with their signature prior to the commencement of research; assent forms were issued for limited risk factors of students (see Appendices B and D). Consent and assent forms were collected from participants (Midwestern Reggio Emilia preschool) prior to the commencement of research. I visited the research site and procured the IRB forms, and provided the host site with copies of their documents. Individual interviews as well as classroom and playground observations were in copy form with recordings and notes (Stake, 1995). “Interviews can also put one on the trail of understandings that they may infer, from what they observe” (Glenn & Peshkin, 1992, p. 64). Teachers’ observations were content, archival data, and this documentation became part of the record through timer motion logs and notes, each of which focused on the setting and the teachers’ behaviors.

Fieldwork was rigorous with extensive data collection. Teacher interviews required sensitivity to participants and these preceded document and data analysis. Method checking for validation with random participants substantiated internal validity, and triangulation included documents, observations, and interviews. Prior to developing the final manuscript ethical issues were examined individually by the researcher.

The Researcher's Role

Stake (1995) defined the role of the researcher as the combination of one who is a teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer, interpreter, constructivist, and relativist. Lincoln & Guba (1985) viewed the researcher’s role as, “the principal instrument, a human instrument” (p.

193). The researcher works in the field in a natural setting, gathers multiple types of data, and employs inductive and deductive logic in reasoning. I viewed the role of the researcher to be one of integrity having entered the educational site with the responsibility to be honest, respectful, and active during encounters with all the participants, staff, and community.

Experiences or biases, which may have influence this researcher, were an affinity for the Reggio Emilia approach; I triangulated data and incorporated an objective viewpoint during observations in classrooms. As the single researcher for this study, I gathered interpretations and provided thick descriptions for readers, which formed their opinions regarding the results (Stake, 1995). Bias is any tendency that prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question (“Bias”, 2016). In research, bias occurred when “systematic error [was] introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others” (“Bias”, 2016, para 3). In this study, the amount of bias was within limits of the established study design and implementation because bias does occur in design and data collection. At this time, no personal or professional relationship with participants at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school existed; as the study commenced, I was meeting everyone at the school for the first time.

Data Collection

Triangulation was a part of the study’s protocols for critical observations and interpretations. Methodological triangulation of interviews, observations, researcher’s field notes and journal, and member checking supplied corroboration to the research and more importantly, potential for additional meanings being introduced into the study (Stake, 1995).

Collection of data for this study occurred in the following order: interviews, observations, researcher’s field notes, and journal entries. The choice for this schedule was purposive to first come to know each participant before observations or document analysis. The field notes and

journal entries were a daily procedure to capture meanings from daily encounters, and the member checking was an event with volunteers from the pool of teachers. The volunteers “provided critical observations and interpretations” (Stake, 1995, p. 115) by reviewing transcriptions of their dialogue which contributed to triangulation with my observations and interpretations (Stake, 1995). Participant teachers and gatekeepers received an outline of the research process and a short personal biography as the study commenced (Stake, 1995).

Interviews

Interviews were issue-oriented so the participants could offer their descriptions and interpretations, which should result with more overviews of all the study’s research questions. Interviews were a “. . . description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation” (Stake, 1995, p. 65). The participants received a copy of the interview questions, which this researcher has deployed as prompts for the interview, and audio tapes were made of each session with a data plan initiated before the meetings to stay on schedule with field work as it progressed. The interviews took place in a quiet room on the campus at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each of the participants. Interviews were prolonged and included intense exposure to insure rigor; the four original research questions did not go through restructuring after the interviews, “If a presumed cause of the event occurs after the event has occurred, one would have reason to question the initial causal proposition” (Yin, 2014, p. 189). Written documents were prepared within a few hours after each interview to interpret the meaning and convey the personal opinions of the participant without influencing the final product. There were not any personal comments from the researcher to allow close attention to answers and demeanors. I utilized audio tape recordings for the interviews to focus on participants and allow comments, which lead the story while I listened. It was important to

avoid bias during interviews, which would have been generated if the interviewer has lead the interviewee. To counter this potential, a triangulation of data followed in the analysis phase (Stake, 1995). Below are the interview questions, which were used during the interviews.

Issue-oriented Interview Questions

Transition into kindergarten

1. How would you construct a smooth transition into kindergarten?
2. What type of relationship do you have with Reggio Emilia parents?
3. Please, discuss details of your students whose neighborhoods and communities influence them in any way.
4. Please, describe kindergarten transition meetings you have attended with parents and kindergarten teachers.

Change and transformation

5. What are the specific details of your observations of students experiencing the zone of proximal development, having learned to carry on alone without anyone's help?

Fear of entering kindergarten

6. Please list and discuss the Reggio Emilia activities you feel give the students a sense of well-being and ease about entering kindergarten?

Documentation and transition

7. What are the particular benefits of documentation of students that you experience as well as those you see as an advantage for your students?

Academic future in education and transition

8. What do you know about the transition into kindergarten and its effect on student's academic future in education?

9. Which classroom functions enhance your research capabilities?
10. In what ways do you collaborate with your colleagues (co-teachers) in the classroom?
11. How do documentation and flexible planning contribute to your Reggio approach?
12. How will you assist students in making meaning of what they do, encounter, and experience?
13. Which of your behaviors encourage students to enjoy nature and the environment?
14. Describe your class. Is it inclusive of all children (e.g., children with rights and special rights)?
15. How do you encourage participation of student's families and the community within your class?
16. As a Reggio teacher, how do you interpret the Reggio Emilia learning philosophy?

The basis for questions one through four was to understand the Reggio Emilia approach teachers' contribution to transition into kindergarten because the 72 year-old Italian preschool contexts have resulted in national recognition for best practices in early education (Lazzari, 2012) Schulting et al.'s (2005) seminal study discussed that children's entrance into kindergarten (elementary school) and their subsequent successes had a direct relationship to future academic success. Schneider et al. (2014) emphasized how the Italian Reggio Emilia approach reinforced adaptation to elementary school.

Questions two through four were suggestive queries of the Reggio Emilia approach teachers because Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta's (2000) Model of Transition ecological study embraced parents, families, and elementary school teachers into the preschool fold of factors. They determined relationships in preschool support the learning environment (e.g., students

support each another and their peers; teachers support students and their peers; families support the teachers and their children). In a recent study, Ahtola et al. (2016) sent out 3,000 questionnaires to preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, mothers, and fathers. All recipients of the questionnaire agreed transition to elementary school is important, and they found becoming familiar with the new school was paramount to all other issues. The authors recommended all change stakeholders meet and exchange information with one another about the transition. Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2011) commented, “From the beginning in Reggio, there has been an explicit recognition of the partnerships among parents, educators, and children” (Location 343-46).

Question five was written to understand the input of Reggio Emilia teachers for the process of the zone of proximal development (e.g. scaffolding). Edwards (2002) discussed this process as working inside and outside a group of children to help them until they can help themselves. The culture in Reggio Emilia schools included a focus on well-being and ease. Children’s projects are essential to the classroom, and the concept is to follow a child’s discovery with no completion date mandated. Question six was included to highlight the intangible feeling Reggio Emilia students have about the comfort of well-being and ease as they work together discussing their projects (Edwards, 2002; Edwards et al., 2012). Question seven is related to documentation and enlightened the research on a widely used method of analysis by the Reggio Emilia teachers as they work with students and come to understand the children’s’ learning processes. Documentation is not to be confused with a grading procedure (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000). Documentation is different at Reggio Emilia schools as, “The focus of documentation as developed in the Reggio Emilia preschools and infant-toddler centers is in the acts as much as

the products of learning: product and process are closely intertwined” (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000, p. 67).

Question eight for the Reggio Emilia Approach teachers was about successful transition into kindergarten and formal school. This included the impact on children’s future success in education; literature clearly showed change practices enhance students’ academic success (Caspe et al., 2015; Entwisle, 1995; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Puccioni, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

Questions nine through 15 involved the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, which was and continues to be, open to personal interpretation at Reggio Emilia preschools throughout the world. When Zhao, Edwards, Youngquist, and Xiong (2003) wrote about Reggio Emilia schools, in China they suggested “Half the Sky believes that Malaguzzi’s principle, education based on relationships, is fundamental for orphanage children because they have fewer opportunities to form close and caring relationships with people and their environment” (p. 12).

Question nine related to listening, as it was a search for meaning according to Rinaldi, enabling pedagogy to answer children’s continuous questions (Edwards, et al., 2012). Question 10 involved colleagues and collaboration because Reggio Emilia teachers work collaboratively with their colleagues and their students and teachers work as a group, never in isolation just as Reggio Emilia students. Malaguzzi wrote (in a conference speech about summer camps at Casa di Vacanza) in Cagliari et al.’s (2016) translation from Italian, “In groups, and through groups, children restructure and are nourished through their active participation in the life and company of others . . . on the levels of collaboration and tolerance” (p. 113). Helping children find meaning in what they do through the pedagogy of listening is the *progettazione* in Italian and related to curriculum in U.S. schools. Questions 11 and 12 (Edwards et al., 2012) are related to

the principle that the third teacher at Reggio Emilia was the environment indoors and outdoors. Question 13 corresponded to searching for a means of engagement outdoors that the Reggio Emilia teachers employed through plants, rain, and gardens (Edwards et al., 2012). Reggio Emilia schools are, and always have been, inclusive of all children, and Question 14 related to successful inclusion at this Midwestern Reggio Emilia school. Questions 15 and 16 are associated with relationships and participation of the community and parents within the school and the culminated benefits of children learning.

Document Analysis

Text analysis and synthesis transpired through direct interpretation because “the qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance” (Stake, 1995, p. 75). Subsequent to the conclusion of each interview, the participants shared verbal benefits of their documentation of anonymous students’ achievements with me. Stake (1995) suggested, “Quite often; documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly” (p. 68). A teacher’s documentation is the written record, which provides insight to the research question regarding Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ documentation of student activities.

Teachers record student activity (documentation) at Reggio Emilia approach schools and use it as a tool for their own research in order to know the student and effectively guide their learning (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000). Reggio Emilia teachers engage in “documentation as communicating” (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005, p. 9) as they recorded students’ conversations in writing and photos of students’ interactions with one another to create presentations of the learning process of the Reggio Emilia approach (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005). Coming to understand the case through observations, interviews, and journal writing was my strategy to

discover patterns, which aligned with the four research questions so they may act as the template for analysis.

Observations

Because researchers maintain accurate records throughout observations, they are able to record obvious illustrations for their research and subsequent synthesis (Stake, 1995). As a non-participatory observer, I had “the chance to observe how the child-centered pedagogy is practically implemented on a day-to-day basis” (Abdelfattah, 2015, p. 1077). Data collection strategies for observations consisted of preserving accurate written records of the contexts for analysis and interpretation (see Appendix C) while the researcher remained present during the unfolding events in the classroom and play yard. The direct, video recorded, non-participatory observations occurred during the morning and/or afternoon class sessions, which were not bound to an exact time. I visited one to three of the classes each day during the study for a minimum of one hour and maximum of two hours, with a total of eight preschool classes visited. Total field observations did not consist of more than three visits for each class over a period of twelve weeks.

The two classroom teachers and students were present during the observations, in addition to me. I remained an inconspicuous, non-participant observer. As the sole researcher, I had purposefully decided to “be in the field, observing, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing, and synthesizing” (Stake, 1995, p. 41). I focused on the teachers’ behaviors and did not interact with the children; however I did concentrate on their reactions to the teacher and their surroundings in order to “observe and interpret” (Stake, 1995, p. 135) unique behaviors. Descriptive and reflective field notes in the classrooms and outdoor play areas were made on electronic recordings; I coded the graphic data and interpreted this data to provide an

understanding of the issues. Therefore, each was of value in this study; over the life of the research, the observations addressed issues of all four questions and the script. The process has positioned the reader in the environment of the Reggio Emilia play yard and classrooms through rich descriptive dialogue. Observation is unique as, “The story often starts to take shape during the observation, sometimes does not emerge until write-ups of many observations are pored over” (Stake, 1995, p. 62).

Researcher’s Journal

Journaling assisted the researcher in understanding the study participants and provided a venue for researchers to learn more about themselves, the journal is documentation of the researcher’s role as a research instrument (Janesick, 1998). A reflective journal was part of the research process and notes entered throughout the day and evening made to remind me of unique behaviors that attached meaning and balance to the interviews and observations. Reflection on daily information and the potential for a different lens in which to view the research added to the integrity and scope of the final dissertation. Journal entries were integrated into the study to enhance my personal views and serve as additional reflection and transparency about the research, as well as a check for any power imbalances that could arise (Stake, 1995).

A reflective journal can be a source of “motivation needed to move into new ways of thinking” (Collins, 2014, p. 134). Dewey (1916) indicated that children’s relationships in the world begin in their own environment where, during the process of learning about their experiences, they find results in the effects of their behaviors. A reflective journal can be the vehicle of a data set for triangulation. Reggio Emilia teachers keep journals in the form of documentation of their thoughts of students’ works to help them understand students’ learning (Edwards, 2012).

Furthermore, transparency was the researcher's goal in documenting personal observations through a journal "The aim is to make the process of data analysis as visible and transparent as possible" Ortlipp, 2008, p. 697). Pajalic (2015) discussed the benefits of researcher's journaling, stating that, self-reflective journaling magnifies the caliber of authenticity of research and is one of the numerous elements involved in the acquisition of scholarship for the research. Vygotsky's historical-cultural approach provides insight for reflective researcher's journaling because "as human beings we actively realize and change ourselves in the varied contexts of culture and history" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 131). As the sole researcher and human instrument of this study, my journal provided an avenue for self-reflection and change as the Reggio Emilia approach teachers go through observations and interviews, thereby gaining an accurate and deep understanding concerning pedagogy at Reggio Emilia.

Data Analysis

Reggio Emilia approach teachers' behavior was the object of this study, and the purpose was an intrinsic exploratory study to identify transition behaviors; a direct interpretation approach accompanied the retrospective methodology. Conducting data analysis for this case study has required me to follow Stake's (1995) advice because, "The case and the key issue need to be kept in focus. The search for meaning, the analysis, should roam out and return to foci over and over" (pp. 84-85).

Data analysis proceeded as follows:

(a) The 15 audio tape interviews with each Reggio Emilia approach teacher over the first two weeks of research (see Appendix E for interview questions) were transcribed from audio tape. I utilized open coding, focused coding, and axial coding to code the data. Grouping codes situated to create smaller, emergent themes.

(b) Next, member checks were completed with volunteer teachers of the preschool. The volunteer teachers checked for changes and added comments; these were coded. “They (member checking) also help triangulate the researcher’s observations and interpretations” (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

(c) Field observations transpired in each of the eight classrooms, and eight field observations ensued during outdoor playground activities. All field observations unfolded during week one through week twelve, and each was a minimum length of one hour with a maximum length of two hours. I made minimal notes during the visits and only limited coding resulted. Primarily I typed field observations and coding at the end of observation day with themes and categorical aggregation subsequent in the analysis proceedings.

(d) A journal and notes were kept daily during the twelve week research in the field. The journal served as a chronological record of the research activities, as well as the dissertation processes; the journal also encouraged personal reflection for research behaviors (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The journal notes moved through transcription, coding, and applicable themes, as well as categorical aggregation.

(e) Triangulation for this research involved four protocols: data source, investigator/researcher, theory, and methodological. Stake (1995) observed, “the protocols of triangulation have come to the search for additional interpretations, more than the confirmation of a single meaning (p. 115). According to Stake (1995), data source triangulation is “to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces or as persons interact differently” (p. 112). Data source is the first protocol, investigator source is second, and theory is third. Triangulation occurred when “we have other researchers take a look at the scene or phenomenon”; theory triangulation occurs “whenever multiple investigators compare their data”

(Stake, 1995, p. 113). The fourth protocol, methodological triangulation, allowed immediate triangulation because it required the researcher to confirm incidents (observations, interviews, and document review) with another observer. Each of the protocols took place throughout the research process of fieldwork and data conversion.

Files have been placed on a secure-password protected Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) in individual compartments. Coded data was culled and converted manually with much of the data discarded (Stake, 1995) and I have “provided the readers with the “analytic journey” used to identify the essence or meaning of data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 160-161). The guidelines for case study by Stake (1995) provided intricate detail for the fieldwork (see Appendix G).

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness for this research study I incorporated the triangulation of member checks, and prolonged field engagement. Furthermore, Stake (1995) recommends the qualitative constructivist researcher render “thick description” to provide “readers with good raw material for their own generalizing” (p. 102). Most importantly, any potential bias I may have interjected into the study should have been controlled through the multiple methods of validity as described below (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Credibility

My neutral, objective viewpoint established credibility for the research as well as additional validity for the trustworthiness of this project. Credibility was achieved through internal validity. Credibility is confidence in the “truth” of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); credibility maintenance in this case study took place with persistent observation, “If prolonged engagement provides the scope, persistent observation provides depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985,

p. 304). Member checking occurs when “the actor [participant] is requested to review the researcher’s rough draft for feedback” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Data verification included regularity notification and pattern matching, and triangulation took validation to the next level of confidence (Stake, 1995). To increase the credibility of this proposed study, I kept a daily journal when field research commenced to document the individual and group processes with the participant teachers, and I stopped the journal upon completion of site research. The daily writing became a part of the study and enhanced my personal views that provided an additional reflection and transparency of the research as well as checking any power imbalances that arose (Stake, 1995). Catalytic validity resulted when this study caused “stakeholders to transform their view of reality in relation to their professional practice” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 634).

Dependability

Dependability showed that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An inquiry audit for the study has made certain consistent results. Protocols for triangulation occurred in this study through data source triangulation, which has confirmed observation and interview descriptions meant the same under separate situations. In addition, methodological triangulation ensured trust in my explanations. Pattern matching (e.g. case study discoveries) compared with forecasts made before embarking on the fieldwork fortified the final interpretations of the research (Yin, 2014). Data verification included regularity notification and pattern matching, and triangulation to take validation to the next level of confidence (Stake, 1995).

Transferability

Transferability demonstrated that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The thick descriptions are “interpretations of the people most

knowledgeable about the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 102), and this research included a vast majority of major contributors to the subject of transition into kindergarten, including those who specialize in the Reggio Emilia approach.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study has been formed from respondents, not from researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation in this case study established conformability, as “multiple sources of corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of their study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 302). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested member checking to check notes and drafts when the participant is the subject. I used member checking with the teacher participants after interviews, when work was complete to review my accounts of the interactions, to allow for corrections and an upgraded document in a few research venues (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

The IRB approval process began by obtaining chair approval to start student research. General IRB Application and supporting documents forwarded to the IRB; when the IRB application arrived; it started a “preliminary review,” followed by revision requests. When the changes were accepted, the IRB issued an approval letter. The research approval process was completed within one month.

Setting access and assent required the researcher who planned to conduct his or her study at a public school to gain written permission from the district superintendent and provide a copy of that approval to the IRB. Participants who are under 18 years of age (including Liberty University students) may not participate in human subject research without the researcher first

obtaining parental permission (unless waived by the IRB) and the participant's assent.

Participants in my study did not receive pay.

Informed consent forms were required when coding collected data (demographic or otherwise). This ensured particular participant anonymity and collected information would not be damaging to the subject. Signed assent forms were required for any subjects under 18 years of age to participate in human subject research. Participants did not receive pay in this study and no data was collected prior to IRB approval. Consent forms were collected prior to the research commencement date.

The Midwestern Reggio Emilia School, the students, and the teachers have remained anonymous throughout the study and pseudonyms applied to all participants; data storage was located in locked filing cabinets and in a password-protected computer.

Summary

In the United States, researchers study school readiness in relationship to transition into kindergarten as well as outlying issues (e.g. financial and social factors), which are detractors for any age student. The Italian Reggio Emilia approach schools have a culture based in Vygotsky's (1978) learning context, which respects children as collaborators in their education. The pedagogical emphasis was as a guide, mentor, and co-learner. Transition into kindergarten (elementary/regular school) is a stressful event for all children in many ways. What is not known is what Reggio Emilia approach school teachers' contribute to successful kindergarten transition. My research reduced the gap in literature by understanding the exhibited behaviors witnessed during the field study, recording and analyzing each of the individual responses, and "understanding this one case" (Stake, 1995, p. 4). What is known is that this first transition has a positive or adverse effect on a students' future education.

This chapter overviewed the research design of the proposed study, an intrinsic case study and methodology (Stake, 1995) as well as the research questions, including one central question and three sub-questions. The setting for this study was described as well as the sample and participants. The procedures for this study were outlined, including interviews, observations, journals, and member checks. I identified my role as the researcher and human instrument. The end of the chapter included the data analysis, trustworthiness, and a review of the details of ethical considerations for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to discover the unique contributions teachers make for students to transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten. A qualitative intrinsic case study was carried out at a Reggio Emilia Midwestern preschool where educational and transitional practices appeared to be achieving successful results (Midwestern Reggio Emilia Preschool Website, 2016).

The conclusions of this intrinsic case study emerged from the analysis of interviews, researcher's journal, and observations of 15 Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers. The study isolated and identified Reggio Emilia approach teachers' behaviors that contributed to successful transition into kindergarten. Reggio Emilia approach teacher interviews deployed a coding method for each participant's responses using their pseudonyms. Categorization from responses ensued and identification of emergent codes and themes were identified. Data from interviews, observations (field/classroom), and journal entries were coded and placed in categories where emergent codes and themes were identified. Triangulation of the research established stability of the results and member checking advanced the corroboration of the research. This chapter encapsulates the Reggio Emilia approach connecting with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, MKO, and ZPD. Each of the Reggio Emilia teachers is described in Chapter Four in order to give the reader a personal connection and visual impression of these discerning educators. The data collection process (interviews, observations, journal entries) is detailed from the inception of coding, to categories, and emergent themes. Research questions are chronicled with themes and channeled with participant teachers' quotations, which fortified the research questions.

Participants

The 15 Reggio Emilia approach teachers ranged in ages from 21 to 50, and the average age was 42. The span of years of teaching was eight through 37, and the average years of teaching was 16.20 years. Seven of the teachers had master's degrees, seven teachers had bachelor degrees, and one teacher had an associate's degree. The average preschool teacher in the U.S. has an associate's degree and no work experience nor on-the-job training; however, Head Start teachers must hold a bachelor's degree internationally according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2015). The overriding characteristic among the participating research teachers was their dedication and respect for their students and the Reggio Emilia approach. Without exception, the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers never wavered in their esteem for the students and their peers throughout the research study.

Audrey

Audrey's bachelor's degree in fine arts and master's degree in education was appropriate for her position as the Atelierista (art teacher) for two-year-olds through kindergarten at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. The year 2017 marked her eighth year in education. She was petite and quiet with a gentle presence and said, "One thing I hope we do in transition, as educators, is have everyone involved [teachers of art, music, Spanish, and physical education]." Audrey explained the school has a wealth of people who are able to assist in transition into kindergarten as well as international students transitioning into a different culture in the United States from other countries. She applauded the resources at Reggio of emotional therapy for children during life changing events.

Audrey used a lot of vocabulary terms related to art; e.g., math terms were applied to concepts the children are using in their classrooms. Cutting practice and skills were introduced

in the atelier with a “thumbs up” cutting technique, which was accompanied by a song about cutting safety and controlling scissors. Collages have been created outside in nature with action painting on larger paper, and the artwork has been accented with fresh dried lavender, buttons, pinecones, and seashells.

Audrey noted,

The Reggio Emilia philosophy helped us be more sensitive and aware that we are one part of a much larger aesthetic. The thing I love about this philosophy of education is that it has helped us to slow down and focus on what is right in front of us.

Bethany

Bethany has a master’s degree in education and has taught for 25 years in 11th and 12th grades at a Midwestern high school. Following her retirement from the Midwestern high school, she joined the Reggio Emilia preschool in 2016 as an assistant teacher. Since coming to Reggio, Bethany has been to Reggio Emilia training, including a four-day conference. She pointed out the principal did a great job in providing training opportunities for teachers and that after one year of experience at Reggio Emilia preschool, she felt her experience with 11th & 12th graders (a few of them were at-risk teens) and some with advanced placement had been beneficial in her first year with Reggio Emilia students. “Here, at Reggio we document children in a journal four times a week and conference video with electronic data to the parents monthly. Teachers meet weekly, read books, and discussed challenges.” Bethany pointed out eight classroom parent tutors come to the school each week. She viewed the Reggio learning philosophy as child-centered, and she felt that nature provided the best environment for teachers to work with children because it enabled them to develop independence with joy (for example, jumping in

puddles in the rain). Bethany assured me that children go outside in all kinds of weather every day throughout the school year.

Claire

Claire has been with Reggio Emilia for six years and has taught for seven years. She has a bachelor's degree in childhood education, completed six hours of her master's degree, and stopped to have her two babies. She teaches a prekindergarten class at Reggio Emilia.

Claire described a fellow teacher who walked by the Atelia and said,

You know if these families could see this and believe that this happens every day, and it does and they are engaged in their play and it is a happy place . . . and they value each other and they know from day one that we are family.

Danielle

Danielle has a master's degree in elementary education and early childhood experience. She has been teaching 20 years and has taught at Reggio Emilia for seven years. She perceived listening to her students gave them a sense of well-being, and it is important for them to learn how to play with one another as well as to play by themselves. Danielle enthusiastically commented on her class, saying, "When they are doing the right thing, they want everybody to know and they really want the positive thing to be shining and we make a huge deal of it."

Esme

Esme came to Reggio Emilia from a Midwestern independent school and has an associate's degree in child development (CDA). This was Esme's 16th year at Reggio working with the two- and three-year-old preschool children as lead teacher. She has been teaching for 21 years. Esme suggested, "A smooth transition consisted of making sure the children have the basic skills and then, just being confident in their independent skills within themselves".

Gabriel

The first 26 years of Gabriel's career of teaching was at an east coast at a cancer center in the early childhood center for hospital employees, and she has been at Reggio Emilia for six years. She was enthusiastic about Reggio, especially the children and their successes.

Gabriel proudly discussed the project work in her classroom,

One project ended and one is still going on actively a year and a half later. One of our fathers invited us to the construction site; we have seen the bare bones of the framing, putting in the electric work, measuring for the plumbing, and the way they erected the fireplace. We even got to Skype with Chip Gaines [HGTV personality] and all the children in the class received Magnolia Farm tee shirts.

Hannah

Hannah's parents were teachers, and this year is her 23rd year teaching prekindergarten and elementary school. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a degree in human development from a large, Midwestern university. When asked what brought her to Reggio Emilia she replied, she saw preschool children walking and hanging onto a huge rope with one another and said, "That looks like a journey I want to take with the children walking along with a rope."

Isabelle

In a quiet corner of the Reggio Emilia courtyard on a warm, sunny afternoon, Isabelle described her bachelor's degree in education and master's degree in curriculum and instruction from a Midwestern university. She celebrated her ninth year of teaching in 2017 and viewed the student's confidence as a major influence for their eventual achievement in the adjustment from preschool into kindergarten. She said, "We make sure they are prepared (for kindergarten), and I

think that it all plays into their being confident later.” Enjoying nature and the environment (the third teacher at Reggio Emilia enjoy nature) promoted the student’s engagement and excitement for learning. Isabelle smiled and laughed as she described her students today and how they looked at the way caterpillars change into a chrysalis. She said, “It was funny listening to what they saw about how the caterpillars had soap on their feet and so some of the kids got a book off the bookshelf and we read it and the answer was there.”

Julia

Julia enthusiastically announced, “There is a freedom here at Reggio Emilia to respond to children naturally, and it is conducive to developing the student’s curiosity.” She traveled to Reggio Emilia in Italy with her co-teacher. Julia enjoyed the close relationship in the classroom with her co-teacher and their students. She previously taught on the east coast and worked with many students from the disability benefit’s program, “Willie M.,” that resulted from a lawsuit over 36 years ago. Julia is in her 37th year of teaching. She has a bachelor’s degree and certification in learning disabilities, educable mentally handicapped, behavioral disabilities strategies, and maladjustment syndrome. She was very attractive and discussed being a very proud Junior Forest Ranger and made me promise to visit national parks throughout the United States whenever possible, saying, “Nature is a gift that is bigger than anybody.”

Kathryn

Kathryn was the “choreographer of the dance” because “progettazione is a metaphorical dance between teacher and child, a spiral of knowledge” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 8,) at the Midwest Reggio Emilia early childhood center. As principal, she is an enthusiastic supporter of advanced learning for the teachers at the Midwest preschool. Kathryn is tall and athletic with a generous smile; she delights in her second career as director of the early childhood program at this Reggio

Emilia school and has been with the school for 15 years. She has been involved in early childhood education for 31 years. Her office is full of plants, pictures of Reggio Emilia students, books, her family vacation photos, and a fish tank. Kathryn employed active listening with laser focus as she interacted with teachers, students, and me. She graciously substituted for teachers during their individual interviews and has been an enthusiastic supporter of this research.

Lillian

Lillian has been teaching in early childhood education for 10 years. She has a master's degree in educational psychology and believes intentional provocations set up for the classroom are the vehicles with which students learn to share. She believed the benefit of her documentation was to offer their work and present their ideas back to children. Lillian perceived the Reggio Emilia approach teachers get to know the child based on the child's interest as they are incorporating their own community into the process. She viewed the environment as a teacher speaking to the children and that it is a communication – a combination of communication and culture.

Maria

Maria was a pretty and enthusiastic proponent of her co-teacher, the Reggio Emilia approach, and the children who were beneficiaries of the aforementioned attributes. Her career spanned 15 years of teaching including 14 years with the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. Maria proposed the “Reggio Emilia approach school's philosophy is ongoing education.” She reflected on her travels to Reggio Emilia in Italy because it is unlike anything she had ever seen. She suggested from the beginning of preschool, “We hit the ground running and get to know the families and the relationship is strong when the children move into

kindergarten.” She believed the “dim lights and music had a calming effect on the students and provided a productive, relaxed, and calming environment to explore the children’s interests.”

Nora

Nora has a master’s degree in art and art history and a bachelor’s degree in art education. She has been teaching for eight years and viewed documentation of her students as, “Huge, because it is so beneficial, saying that certainly every aspect from the social to the fine motor – just about everything is documented.” Nora considers the environment a major factor at Reggio Emilia schools. She stated, “Provocations are deliberately chosen.” She feels that a smaller group is best way to enhance research.

Piper

Piper is a Midwestern university graduate with a bachelor’s degree in education and has worked in early education for 36 years. Her enthusiasm permeated the interview and was delightful coming from a confident, petite, and attractive woman who loves her career. She was at a Midwestern university medical preschool for three years as program director and has been at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia preschool as lead teacher for 33 years. Piper loved the autonomous philosophy of Reggio Emilia as well as the parenting piece in order to assist parents to see their children as capable. She now understands Reggio Emilia is the way she has always taught. She viewed Reggio’s philosophy as woven from a lot of philosophies and Midwestern Reggio teachers as confident in their capabilities. Piper was in awe of her students and said she has never stopped learning because she has been a co-learner with the children as well as their parents. She welcomed the opportunity to help parents view their children in a different light that children are capable, and valuable, if you see them as such - that is what they become.

She viewed all 16 students in her class as separate individuals. Giving children a feeling of worth by creating an environment where they can learn and letting them act upon it allowed children to take risks without fear. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development was a favorite construct of Piper's because, "Your expectations of children's expectations are far beyond what they currently believe they are capable of doing."

Rene

Rene had an undergraduate degree in comparative logistics from a Midwestern university and a master's degree in early childhood instruction and certification. Rene worked five years at a Head Start school, and this was her seventh year at Reggio Emilia. She viewed a large part of her responsibility at Reggio Emilia as helping the parents see that play is how young children learn. She likes the inclusive classes at Reggio and described differences to children so they can understand and said, "That is so interesting, some people like potato chips, and some people don't."

Results

Results demonstrated Reggio Emilia children are competent and successful in traversing life when it becomes all mixed up in kindergarten transition, and these children are, as Nutbrown (1996) suggested,

Pausing to listen to an airplane in the sky, stooping to watch a ladybug on a plant, sitting on a rock to watch the waves crash over the quayside - children have their own agendas and timescales. As they find out more about their world and their place in it, they work hard not to let adults hurry them. We need to hear their voices. (p. 53)

Children's voices are heard at this Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school as teams of two teachers worked with students with whom they remain for two or three years and the students,

themselves are with the same classmates for the same timeframe. Relationships are formed among teachers, parents, and the community who visit the children's homes as each school year commences. The following section guides the reader through the theme development in sequential processes.

Theme Development

One-hundred seventy four codes were manually culled from 15 teacher interview transcripts, researcher's journal entries, and researcher's classroom/field observations. Analysis, as Stake (1995) recommended, was an analysis of the research by direct interpretation. This study included aggregation of instances, as well. Clustering of codes was modified by rethinking, triangulated by multiple methods, and deliberate search for disconfirming evidence.

Codes emerged through the first through fourth coding cycles from open coding (abstract opinions and ideas) and vivo coding (short phrases from data) delegated to transcripts and teachers' words. Relationships were identified between codes and frequencies through axial coding (connections between concepts of significant features). Axial coding resulted in core category (determined theoretical composition) compilations of six, as seen below. The categories were in proportion to the numerical value of codes. The fifth cycle was focused coding (recoding) categories around significant codes and pattern coding (similarities) and these ushered in three sets of research themes as shown in the two tables below.

Table 2

Codes to Categories

| Interview Questions | Codes | Categories | Interview Dialogue |
|--|------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Q1: How would you construct a smooth transition into kindergarten? | Transition | Successful transition activities | <p>Reggio sets children up for success.</p> <p>Making new friends helps transition.</p> <p>I like to make sure all students have the basic skills.</p> <p>We start mixing the children up in January to prepare them for new friends</p> <p>Between PreK and kindergarten children are excited and engaged in a whole new way academically.</p> <p>We teachers meet all summer to talk about transition.</p> <p>I would say continuity creates a smooth transition.</p> <p>Project work helps children transition.</p> |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------|---|--|
| <p>Q8: What do you know about the transition into kindergarten and its effect on students' academic future in kindergarten?</p> | <p>Academic future</p> | <p>Academic future of lifelong learning</p> | <p>I think one of the things we really try giving value to are those emotions about transition into kindergarten.</p> |
| | | | <p>A smooth transition is making connects with other kindergarteners, visiting classrooms, getting to know routines, teachers, and what is expected.</p> |
| | | | <p>The effect of transition into kindergarten on students' academic future is a sense of self, and we try to keep our sense of child-centered.</p> |
| | | | <p>I hope successful transition and academic future creates an autonomous society.</p> |
| | | | <p>Reggio Emilia early education is what we are doing and lasts whether they are in private school or traditional school.</p> |
| | | | <p>Reggio students</p> |

Q16: As a Reggio teacher, how do you interpret the Reggio Emilia learning philosophy?

Learning

Reggio learning philosophy for future success

are more capable problem solvers.

To me, Reggio is a celebration of childhood: children's wonder and curiosity guides learning.

Reggio learning philosophy is ongoing education.

Reggio sets children up for success.

Children's wonder and curiosity guides Reggio learning.

Reggio philosophy enables parents to view their children as capable.

Reggio is like an orchestra of teachers and the principal is the maestro.

The most important part of Reggio learning is students learn how to play with each other or just be by themselves.

Teachers at

Reggio are the children, the environment, parents, and me.

Reggio Emilia learning is organic...it is what we believe.

Reggio Emilia concepts are applicable, no matter where you are in your life learning. I can see it relating to later.

Reggio Emilia helps us be more sensitive and aware that we are one part of a much larger aesthetic.

I like the Reggio Emilia philosophy because it sees the children as young investigators.

Reggio is child-centered, child-driven through the curriculum.

Children, parents, and teachers are co-learners.

Home visits are made by all PreK teachers to form a bond with parents from the

Q2: What type of relationship do you have with Reggio Emilia parents?

Relationships with parents

Partners in children's learning

beginning.

I think parents pulling their passion in and sharing it with the kids is how students learn so much.

Parents' participation make the child feel so honored.

We are partnering (teachers and parents) together to give your children the best education we can.

Children who go home with a parent or have a consistent caregiver has less emotional than those students who don't.

Q3: Please discuss details of your students whose neighborhoods and communities influence them in any way.

Community relationships

Shared culture of community

The reputation of the school influences students, parents, and the community.

The community is involved in the project work.

Culminating experience is a wrap-up of a project and we

Q7: What are the particular benefits of documentation of students that you experience/ Does the documentation of students provide the student with any advantages?

Documentation

Pedagogical maps for learning

invite families and the community to participate.

Documentation is a map of what we want to know and for families and others to see what we have learned.

Documentation gives us a plan where children want to go next.

Documentation really helps me because it holds me accountable for what we have done this week.

Documentation allows you to always have something ready and available for yourself, your children, and your parents.

Children are storytellers...I may be documenting what I am hearing.

Documentation benefits parents, helps children see themselves, and helps teachers reflect.

Q10: In what ways do you collaborate with our colleagues (co-teachers) in the classroom?

Collaboration

Collaboration and negotiations

I think my benefit of documentation is the presentation of students' ideas.

The most valuable form of documentation is the collect of visual experiences children make.

The beauty of collaboration is seeing something differently.

Collaboration is another set of eyes and another set of ears.

Mass negotiations were emerging among the three-year-olds as they worked together today.

A boy was successfully mounting a track on the wall with assistance from classmates.

At a teacher's meeting we asked for suggestions for our project...everyone helped us.

Collaboration and communication are important

Q13: Which of your behaviors encourage students to enjoy nature and the environment?

Nature/Environment

Nature and the environment, the third teacher

daily events at Reggio Emilia.

The environment is a major factor and important value.

We walk outside in nature every day.

Classrooms at school are filled with sunlight and views nature outside.

Reggio is a calming environment-soft music and soft voices.

At Reggio we are taking time with children to look at the environment.

Reggio is an environment where students have a feeling of worth and can act upon it.

Really, just putting the nature piece on the table and let them (children) explore...let them go.

Spending time in nature without an

Q12: How will you assist students in making meaning of what they do encounter and experience?

Making Meaning

Making learning meaningful

agenda is a good learning experience.

The park is the story where we are enjoying nature and the environment.

Being in nature, developing independence with joy is good.

We go outside in all kinds of weather every day, throughout the school year.

Provocations at Reggio are very deliberate.

We talk very matter-of-fact about everything.

Teacher's emotional and social problem solving skills prevent children from getting lost in those problem situations.

If the child is talking about it, then it is something that is a bigger issue than the classroom teacher knows about.

Q6: Please list and discuss Reggio Emilia activities you feel give the students a sense of well-being and ease

Well-being

Overall sense of well-being

We role play a lot and students love it. We role play right and wrong and students want everybody to know when they are doing the right thing.

The students want the positive thing to be shining and we teachers make a big deal of it.

Free time is when students are doing what they are interested in.

Free time is when students are doing what they are interested in.

Children's issues are not problems, they are just situations.

PreK students rise to expectations every day and believe in their own competency.

My co-teacher and I cherish children's lives and their experiences.

A young girl sat happily reading to

about entering
kindergarten?

herself in the
classroom today
with an apparent
sense of personal
well-being.

A community is
always going to
have conflict
because that is
when they
(children) are
solving problems.

Social emotional
is primary. We are
constantly talking
about being liked
and being a
community.

Kindergarten
preparation plays
into students'
confidence (sense
of well-being)
later.

Mindfulness and
lots of problem-
solving skills
create a sense of
well-being.

Group
cooperation
creates a sense of
well-being when
to be quiet and
when to listen to
your friends.

Q14: Describe
your class. Is
it inclusive of
all children

Inclusion

Inclusive of all
children,
celebrating
differences

We have one
student with
speech
difficulties...there

(e.g., children with rights and special rights)?

is a lot of acceptance, yes, very much so; that is one thing we stay on top of to make sure he is accepted.

We do not exclude anyone. We have students with special needs in our class. It is ingrained in them...we are a family.

We have children on the ADHD spectrum...we talk about it and say here is what they can teach you.

We often refer to our class as the United Nations because it is so magical.

Everybody feels like this is a safe place to learn and they feel safe with each other.

Absolutely, class is inclusive of all children because we do not differentiate in any way. Everything in early childhood has to be very

Q11: How do documentation and flexible

Flexibility

Flexible learning

planning
contribute to
your Reggio
approach?

flexible.

You have to
watch what your
children are
interested in that
day.

A teacher advised:
“Sometimes plans
change, and that
is okay.”

Flexibility with
students’
schedules is
number one.

Students’ interest
levels lead us to
planning.

Planning too far
ahead in the day
means you are not
following the
children’s
interests.

Flexibility is
central to children
finding deeper
meaning.

Play

Benefits of
play

I am a firm
believer in that
hour and a half of
play at Reggio,
giving them (the
children) what
they need and
embracing how
they learn.

Two girls
snuggling in an

| | | | |
|--|-----------------|---|--|
| <p>Q5: What are the specific details of your observations of students experiencing the zone of proximal development, having learned to carry on alone without anyone's help?</p> | <p>ZPD</p> | <p>Zone of proximal development, level of tomorrow's learning</p> | <p>alcove in class visiting, giggling, and pretending to talk on toy cell phones.</p> |
| <p>Q9: Which classroom functions enhance your</p> | <p>Research</p> | <p>Research capabilities</p> | <p>I think sitting next to students and taking that "fly on the wall approach" enables you to learn through their play.</p> |
| | | | <p>ZPD is a favorite Reggio construct because my expectations of their (students) potential are beyond their expectations.</p> |
| | | | <p>I think for me, it is when they (students) stop and ...actually connect.</p> |
| | | | <p>A four-year-old boy put his shoes on independently as I watched his progress.</p> |
| | | | <p>Today a teacher said, "we have to keep trying a lot of new ways until what the child wants to do, works." A smaller group (seven and under) enhances teacher research</p> |

research
capabilities?

capabilities.

I prefer to work
with children,
because for me, it
helps to track and
map the learning.

You can learn so
much one-on-one
just speaking to a
child and listening
to their questions.

Table 3

Categories to Themes

| Categories | Themes | Research Questions |
|--|---|---|
| Reggio learning philosophy for future learning success | Reggio Pedagogical Constructs | What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition into kindergarten? |
| Mindful listening and learning | | |
| Pedagogical maps for learning | | |
| Benefits of play | | |
| Academic future of lifelong learning | Reggio Children: Communities of Courage | What do Reggio Emilia teachers contribute to change and transformation? |
| Shared culture of community | | What do Reggio Emilia teachers do to address fear of the new environment? |
| Overall sense of well-being | | |
| Inclusive of all children, celebrating differences | | |
| Flexible learning | | |
| Zone of proximal development | | |
| Partners in children's learning | | |
| Nature and the environment, the third teacher | | |
| Collaborations and negotiations | | |
| Successful transitional activities | | |
| Making learning meaningful | Transition stimulus: Reggio | What does Reggio Emilia teachers' documentation of student activities contribute to student transition? |
| Research capabilities | | |

Codes to categories. The coding process was a combination of open coding to label repeated concepts from the interviews (see Table 2 and Appendix H); focused coding was employed to recode the interview transcript in order to re-code (several times) repetitive themes of behaviors which were discussed. Finally, axial coding actually deployed the 16 emergent themes of categorical aggregation (see Table 2).

Categories to themes. Categories were carried into themes by way of direct interpretation (see Table 3) which did not occur until long after the data analysis (Stake, 1995). Voices of the Midwestern teachers and their years of Reggio experience carried the research to the three themes below.

Reggio pedagogical constructs theme. Reggio has an emergent curriculum derived from student's interests and the pedagogy. Malaguzzi understood the strength and potential of children. His innovative philosophy guides pedagogy by means of children's curiosities. The Reggio Emilia phenomenon arrived in this Midwestern school through cultural diffusion. The nuances surrounding the Reggio teachers' behaviors were elusive to me during field and classroom observations. It is only in looking back that I know the teacher was observing students when I watched her as she was silently standing by a table of children.

The Reggio Emilia learning philosophy is one that perceived children as competent, possessing strong potential, and capable of developing relationships. All children have rights at Reggio. Nature and the environment at Reggio are considered the third teacher. The project-based nature of Reggio sets the stage for developing children's confidence and self-esteem. Hannah stated, "Reggio philosophy is child centered, child driven through the curriculum, opening doors through an artistic approach through drama, play, incorporating high level thinkers, um – not teacher instructed or teacher pushed."

Isabelle discussed the benefits of play by stating, “I would say during free time [90 minutes each day] to sit down with them and play with them and talk with them . . . that’s when they are doing what they are interested in.” Children need to play and because teachers are the architects and students, the directors, it is deliberate (Spielgaben, 2016). Watching children play and negotiate was a fascinating time during this research. When the children were playing in the room, I found students trying to engineer projects of their own and collaborating with their classmates in very much the manner one would observe at a construction site and/or business meeting.

According to Bethany, “The ZPD appeared to me to be two steps forward and two steps back by asking children to try to do it (the task) by themselves before requesting help from peers or the teacher.” Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as an essential, global feature of expanding cultural diffusion and intellectual responsibility. ZPD is the space which separated the growth of a student’s personal resolve in dealing with a problem and capable assistance from a more knowing other when needed. As I observed the ZPD in progress by a young boy tying his shoes at this Reggio school, I was as elated and proud as the child was of himself.

Hannah stated, “I think they (students) can walk out of here (Reggio pre-K) thinking, ‘Oh, wow, we did that’ and that has helped them toward the next early years and confidence in themselves.” According to Rene, “There are children here who do have good futures.” I continually observed children in classes and out of doors who were confident, happy, and engaged and whose academic futures would reflect their level of self-confidence.

This research found emergent curriculum came into being through the student’s ideas as partners in their own learning and because of the flexibility of the pedagogy. During observations, changes were witnessed in the classroom venues and in nature when all the

children gathered to look at something. Maria stated, “So having that flexibility; it allows the children to find deeper meaning. It allows us to let a child express ideas, and we follow them, and just keep moving forward.”

At the Reggio school, teachers were listening for provocations, they listened to children while documenting, and they listened to parents and the community’s suggestions. When pedagogy was collaborating, they listened to each other and when children had concerns, they listened for those issues. Hannah said, “You can learn so much one-on-one, just speaking to a child and listening to their questions and also, just stepping back and listening to conversations between children, back and forth.” I had to learn the “art of listening” during summer field observations when outwardly I watched the children and teachers who went from being part of the background to deploying their provocations through their support of the children.

The atelierista, Audrey, at Reggio was eager to discuss research capabilities with me and said, “I research what they are doing [teachers and other children] in their classrooms.”

According to Forman and Fyfe (2012), “Documentation referred to any record of performance that contains sufficient detail to help others understand the behavior recorded . . . Documentation is central to negotiated learning” (p. 250). Documentation is not an assessment of children’s learning; it was a record of the event (drawing or discourse of the child’s action). Reggio documentation involved several groups: children, teachers, parents, and the public in a variety of ways such as children do art work, teachers document said work, parents view it while visiting the school, and the public sees the art hanging in a community restaurant.

Collaboration at Reggio is purposeful because the bond between teachers, parents, students, and communities is created in order to establish relationships that support the children. While I conducted observations, invariably there was an opportunity to be a witness of

collaboration among the teachers, parents, and principal as well as among the children. Maria stated, “I would say my co-teacher and I have daily collaboration.” The parents are the first teachers and in conjunction with teachers and the environment (the third teacher), they are integral in the coordination of the education of their children. All Reggio teachers formed a relationship with the parents from the first home visit to weekly journal postings and documentation of the students; teachers cultivated their relationship with parents.

Reggio children: Communities of courage theme. The sense of well-being was evident when children were comfortable and happy. Hannah stated, “I think it is group cooperation that gives children a sense of well-being.” At Reggio, the children have a perceptible sense of well-being and ease because there is a pedagogy who not only knows and understands each child, they have a relationship that developed and extended to families and caregivers.

Schools that are inclusive of all children do not exclude any students from their classrooms. The Reggio Emilia teachers learn from the children, and one of the teachers at the Midwestern Reggio school suggested differences are celebrated. The children depended on one another in class as they interacted and collaborated, learning together. Malaguzzi believed successful early education was based on a multitude of relationships: communities, teachers, families, and caregivers.

Transition stimulus: Reggio Emilia theme. Nature and the environment play an important role in a student’s entire time at Reggio and their transition into kindergarten. Malaguzzi defined the responsibility of education to “intensify children’s discovery of environmental resources and condemning any offensive use of these” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 381). It was my observation that all Reggio Emilia students are out learning from and exploring in nature and the environment each day. From their entry into preschool to their final move into

kindergarten, Reggio students are prepared for transition and more. From the day children enter Reggio Emilia at age two or three, they are prepared not only for transition into kindergarten but it is this researcher's conclusion when children leave Reggio they are prepared for many academic years into the future. They are prepared to feel safe, to collaborate on projects, to be respectful to classmates, to lead and follow, to participate in a democracy, and to cherish nature and the environment. Overall, Reggio pedagogy choreographs the successful transitional details positioned for children's success and accompanied by an abundance of positive influences.

Cultural diffusion is the vehicle which transported Midwestern Reggio pedagogy from Italy. In anthropology, cultural diffusion was a theory that most of the cultural similarities are the result of diffusion. Pedagogy at the Midwestern Reggio School is a result of many years of cultural diffusion of the Reggio philosophy from Italy to the United States. After interviewing the Reggio Emilia teachers, I understand how the Reggio Emilia experience has provided multiple perspectives. Maria stated, "Really, to me it (Reggio Emilia) is a celebration of childhood."

Research Question Responses

Sub-question one. What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to change and transformation? Reggio teachers contribute to change and transformation of their students as they represent the more knowing other which encourages students toward independence and celebrating with them as they reach Vygotsky's zone of proximal development having accomplished a task independently. Danielle stated, "We see so much learning here . . . he was showing them." Danielle discussed how the children have become the more knowing other for classmates going through the zone of proximal development where they have accomplished tasks independently. Classroom observations provided me with the opportunity to view students who

have completed the ZPD process such as a child independently putting on his shoes and another student putting on a costume looking around for help and seeing none who managed to complete the process without assistance. Piper explained ZPD was one of her favorite constructs because “your expectations are beyond what they (children) think they were capable of doing.” Claire stated, “I think children rise to expectations every day.” I found the teachers were not surprised with the daily ZPD events because the level of excellence was exceeded repeatedly each day. Nora explained, “Sometimes we are waiting for it (ZPD), for example learning to use scissors.” According to Claire, “I think for me . . . they connect that word and it clicks over and that word was theirs.” Hannah stated, “So I think it is just a matter of giving them the time . . . as a teacher you know and you are watching.”

Change and transformation was perpetrated by the Reggio environment, relationships, and documentation by Reggio teachers. Audrey commented on the environment by stating, “Noticing the shape of the trees, or walking by the same corner every day to see how it has changed, helped us all to have eyes that are more open. It helped us in being aware of environment, and taking the time with children to look at the environment that is around them, whether it is the structure, the lines in this building, or the colors in the stained glass.”

Lillian added, “relationships were important and I think parents saw that.”

Sub-question two. What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers do to address students’ fear of the new environment of kindergarten? According to Isabelle, “We make sure they were prepared for kindergarten. I think that all plays into later for their being confident.” Children are only afraid when they do not feel safe. Reggio teachers inaugurate a sense of safety in the classroom, and it is adopted by the children who became respectful and very considerate of one

another. The looping (being together for three years) also contributes to the sense of well-being for the students.

Julia commented:

I have found one of our successful pathways is to say, I do not know; let us ask one of your friends. Therefore, they started to collaborate and share their ideas and we teachers stepped back and it was like a group of people speaking French; they all spoke French and they all understood it.

Sub-question two. How does the Reggio Emilia Approach School Teacher's documentation of student activities contribute to transition? Reggio Emilia teachers document students' achievements in the form of posted work (pictures and projects) as well as keeping notes and journals which are kept for parents and transferred via conversations and emails. According to Audry, "Documentation helps in understanding the larger world around them or understanding I am making meaning and how it connected to their personal interests." Danielle stated, "Documentation has value for students because they are proud to be acknowledged and honored. "It helps us figure out how they think."

Central Research Question

The central research question asked, "What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition to kindergarten?" Reggio teachers see the relationship between the children, parents, and themselves as strong when students depart preschool with the tools to be successful (competent, confident, independent). Entering the new environment of kindergarten, these Reggio Emilia preschoolers have come from a safe place to learn and have a deeply-rooted sense of well-being. Reggio teachers contributed to documentation, projects, relationships,

nature, the environment, and the Reggio Emilia learning philosophy for transition into kindergarten.

Cultural diffusion has defined interweaving of Italian constructs within Reggio Emilia pedagogy at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia school where they were deployed. The indirect cultural diffusion of Malaguzzi's philosophy for Reggio Emilia was circular in form; therefore, when teachers use documentation to record students they are following the Reggio philosophy. They create a sense of well-being for students by honoring their work and ensure relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Listed below are five of the major pedagogical behaviors drawn from sub-questions to answer the central question.

Reggio Emilia learning philosophy. Reggio learning philosophy is, according to Hannah, "Child centered, child driven through the curriculum, opening doors through an artistic approach through drama, play, incorporating high level thinkers, (um) not teacher instructed or teacher pushed"

Maria interpreted the Reggio philosophy by stating,

You know I look at it more as an approach. The philosophy is the way you interact with the children, the way you interact with the families and the learning style. You help guide them and it is truly – you as a facilitator of the children as opposed to the director you can guide them and lead them along the way, but it is not the old school – the person who has all the information to fill you with it. You take their wonder and curiosity and that guides the practice. To me, it [Reggio philosophy] is a celebration of childhood. For us [my co-teacher, and I], we valued the natural environment. It was one of the most important things for the children to embrace. You have to constantly work hard to have that experience.

Julia explained Reggio philosophy by stating, Environment was the third teacher and teachers were co-learners, we collaborated with the children to discover, to enrich our lives, our intellectual and emotional lives. We used nature as the basis for what we thought and what we felt was connected to their spirits – it is something so much deeper.

Relationships. I observed relationships at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia School every day of this study. Relationships were abundant among the children and their peers, between children and teachers, and between teachers and their colleagues. The joy the children exhibited is contagious to all who enter the portico of the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. Relationships served as a conduit for learning.

Malaguzzi (1963) responded to Gandini (2012) by stating that relationship is the primary connecting dimension of our system, however, understood not merely as a warm, protective envelop but rather as a dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting towards a common purpose (Gandini, 2012, p. 45).

According to Nora, “Getting to know the parents is very important because you were visiting the home and it is the way we have done it at Reggio.” Maria stated, “We invite parents into our room to share their expertise, especially when we were doing projects we encouraged them to come in. Our relationships were strong.”

Nature and the environment. Claire responded to the question about nature and the environment by saying, “The park is the story and we made a sack lunch in the morning and we may not have come back until after lunch.” Nora stated, “Out of the gate, day one, we took walks and I have seen a whole different side of nature. We are out and we walked an hour outside today.”

Sense of well-being. Children at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school are given many avenues to assure them they would not have to fear kindergarten such as visits to the new space so it is not so frightening, and they are reassured they will be with some of their friends in kindergarten. This researcher observed children working on a project and realized they appeared to have a sense of well-being. During play out of doors, the same group of children was laughing and happy with a visible countenance of well-being.

Lillian (September 19, 2017) provided, “I think it is interesting because, starting in the early years, it is children’s first experience as a community and social emotional is the primary thing we were doing, talking about being liked and being a community” (personal communication). “I think it [sense of well-being] is letting them have responsibility and ownership in the classroom, making it a community and being kind” (Isabelle, personal communication, September 5, 2017).

- Documentation

Documentation contributes to change and transformation. Children change and transform through the Reggio Emilia approach, particularly the zone of proximal development and the more knowing other. Change and transformation is about ZPD and MKO it occurs through reciprocal listening, respect, observations, children’s negotiations, and projects children design themselves.

According to Isabelle, “Documentation and flexible planning were important, if you plan too far ahead in the day, you are not following the children’s interest – so I think it is definitely Reggio construct.” According to Danielle, “Children at Reggio direct the planning of a project and their interest level led us there, so we had to be flexible and document the planning because flexibility is number one.”

Audrey talked about documentation benefits:

(Um) I prefer to work with the children. For me it helped, we kind of track and mapped the learning as well. Therefore, documentation really helped me because it held me accountable for this is what we have done this week, this is what we have learned, and this is what we should do next week. Children really enjoyed documentation the way I do it because they saw in the classroom I post a lot of it and they could see themselves and their peers and they could say “Oh I remember making that” and they can tell that story.

Summary

The teachers at this Midwest Reggio Emilia approach school bestowed daily doses of patience, love, respect, and consistent guidance for their students while preserving the character of the Reggio Emilia child-directed, child-centered learning environment. Any visitor to this school cannot miss the feeling of these confident, competent, curious, joyful, young children who are gentle and respectful with one another. A sense of well-being permeated the classrooms, hallways, and outdoor spaces. Chapter Four presented the interviewed participants’ descriptions (they were exceptional in their interpretations of the Reggio Emilia approach), results of data analysis methods and procedures (included codes, categories, and emergent themes, and tables), method checking, and research question responses.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to discover the unique contributions teachers make for students to transition from a Reggio Emilia approach school into kindergarten. Chapter Five presented a summary of the findings including themes. The research was reviewed in relationship to the literature and applicable theories, as well as a review of theoretical and practical implications. The study's delimitation and limitations essential features were introduced and future research was recommended.

Summary of Findings

Research study findings isolated and identified the unique behaviors and perceptions for students' successful transition into kindergarten, which were contributed to by teachers from a Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. Edwards et al. (2012) stated, "Importing foreign models wholesale has never worked: each society must solve its own problems. "Cultural diffusion is how concepts and practices radiate and spread" (p. 366).

Research Question Responses

The central research question and three sub-questions set the stage for this exploration.

Sub-question one. Sub-question one asked, "What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to change and transformation?" In a 1991 interview Malaguzzi (2016) commented, "Children are not looking for dull continuity, they are looking, avidly, for what changes, what transforms, and what becomes other than itself" (p. 412). Change and transformation, just as the chrysalis changed into a butterfly in the classroom, occurred on a regular basis at this Reggio Emilia approach school. Project-based learning, the environment, and documentation contributed to children's adjustment in new situations (change); Reggio philosophy, itself, is,

“one to be adapted” (Gandini, 1993, p. 7). The environment at Reggio supports flexibility and adaptation. As Gandini (2012) stated,

A space for learning has to be adaptable in a flexible way so that the children who live in it day by day can either signal to adults the need to modify it, or they can directly proceed to modify the space as they use it. (p. 326)

The pedagogy at this Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school continued to set provocation in order to enable the students flexible adaption for change and transformation throughout the research study.

Sub-question two. Sub-question two asked, “What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers do to address students’ fear of the new environment of kindergarten?” Several strategies were in place at Reggio to address students’ fears of entering kindergarten. Before the school year begins, the child’s two teachers visit child’s home to meet the parents and strengthen the connection between the student, family, teacher, and school. Pedagogical interviews I conducted suggested that children are told it is okay to have feelings of fear, and the children are taught many social and emotional skills, which keep them from getting lost in stressful situations. Amazingly, the parents often inadvertently transferred their angst about the kindergarten entry to the child. The move into kindergarten is smooth because the children have visited their future kindergarten class, they made the move with many of their classmates whom they have been with for two to three years, and they are equipped with the confidence that they are strong and competent. Documentation of students’ work at Reggio reinforces the child’s sense of well-being and self-confidence.

Younger children have a variety of fears albeit I observed only one event of fear at the Midwestern Reggio School during the research. A young girl was upset about her Mother

changing the time of her pick-up after school, and Kathryn assured the child that sometimes plans change and she happily walked back to join her classroom with Kathryn. This Midwestern Reggio Emilia school encouraged the children to know it is okay to be afraid because it is a safe school and their peers are supportive. Midwestern Reggio teachers consistently establish children's feelings when they are sad and believe nature provides the best environment where independence is developed.

Sub-question three. Subquestion three asked, "How does the Reggio Emilia Approach School Teacher's documentation of student activities contribute to transition?" Documentation was in the top five most valued constructs of the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers' coding list of this study. Documentation requires the teacher to listen closely to the students and ". . . detailed documentation and display of children's thought and work enhanced their learning, teachers' learning, and parents' involvement in their children's experiences in fundamental ways" (Katz, 1998, p. 44).

Central research question. The central research question asked, "What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition to kindergarten?" This question tendered the most significant surprise for me because it was central to the study findings. The study substituted pseudonyms for the Reggio Emilia School and for the 15 teachers participating in the study. The Reggio teachers assured me that children in prekindergarten at their school were fully prepared to transition into kindergarten.

A principal uniquely staffed this Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach preschool with teachers who were educated and who came to know and understand the children and their parents. The mutual respect these Reggio teachers had for their students is not what one always observes in preschools and is a central element discovered in this research; this respect provides

the students with the self-efficacy to succeed and/or accomplish specific goals. The environment where students worked and learned was encompassed by breathtakingly serene nature and classrooms full of sunlight with the calming sound of music emanating from each room. When this researcher heard a teacher's voice at Reggio Emilia, it was subtle and soft. Reggio prepared the children for the kindergarten transition through initial home visits with parents, meetings with children who were in other preschool classes, and trips to the kindergarten on their campus the spring before students entered kindergarten (these actions were referred to as priming events). To summarize how this Reggio Emilia school prepared students for kindergarten transition is, to me, more about how confident and competent the children were at the point of transition and not necessarily a particular prescription for the transition process. The essentials of the Reggio approach were from Caldwell (2003, p. 5) and Corsaro and Molinari (2005, p. 8).

The child as a protagonist was discussed in reference to Reggio children. Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2012) stated, "All young children are protagonists, heroic actors on their own community stage of growth and development" (p. 365). The child assembled his own knowledge. The child as communicator was accurately interpreted by Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 3) in his poem of *The Hundred Languages*. Children have a hundred ways of listening to each other, playing with one another, and demonstrating their feelings.

The environment as third teacher at Reggio was the space that continuously changes because of the behaviors of the players who were learning within it. Malaguzzi elaborated on the environment when he said, "We also think as it has been said that the space has to be a sort of an aquarium that mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of the people who live within in it" (Gandini, 2012, p. 339).

The teacher as partner, nurturer, and guide at Reggio was centered on “provoking occasion of genuine, intellectual growth by one or more children- in particular, listening to the words and communications of children and then offering them back to the group to re-stimulate and extend their discussion and joint activity” (Edwards et al., 2012, p.170).

Reggio Emilia considers the teacher as researcher because “To learn and relearn together with the child is our line of work . . . Our teachers do research . . . to produce strategies that favor children’s work or can be utilized by them” (Gandini, 2012, p. 61). Research capabilities were referred to as “research-action probes” by Malaguzzi during his research in 1985 (Moss, 2016, p. 288). According to Moss , (2016),

A probe . . . is an observation of an observation and above all knowledge of knowledge . . . it profoundly modifies ways of being with children . . . points of view emerge . . . making them visible. (p. 288)

The documentation as communication at Reggio Emilia refers to teacher’s observations accompanied by students’ artwork and recorded behaviors to make permanent the progress and learning for parents to observe. Wien, Guyevski, and Berdoussis (2011) suggested, “Pedagogical documentation is the teacher’s story of the movement of children’s understanding” (p. 4). According to Cagliari et al. (2016), “Children are not looking for dull continuity, they are looking avidly, for what changes, what transforms, and what becomes other than itself” (p. 412). The parent as partner at Reggio refers “. . . to the importance of involvement of parents as well as extended family and the community in preschool education” (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005, p. 9).

The principal and teachers of the Reggio Emilia approach school have all the essential skills and qualities as seen above. They intently listened to students, teachers, parents, and myself. As the research progressed, observations provided a multitude of examples of listening

and ultimate joy in the surroundings of this Reggio Emilia pedagogy approach of child-centered learning. Rinaldi (2012) discussed the “context of multiple listening” between teachers and children by saying: “This concept of a context of multiple listening overturns the traditional teaching-learning relationship. . .focus shifts to learning-children’s self-learning and the learning achieved by the group of children and adults together” (p. 237). Malaguzzi (1991) spoke about listening in a speech February, 1991, “. . . interest that is much more focused on the process than results . . .allowed us to listen to children and simultaneously listen to ourselves . . . when not listening to the children, you are not listening to yourselves” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 410).

I observed a four-year-old boy sitting on the floor trying to put on his shoes as his entire class lined up without him to go to lunch. The child did not look at me who was watching and listening as he diligently continued fastening his shoes until the Velcro straps were secure. The boy jumped up to give me a high-five; I was smiling, knowing he had managed a task independently without the help of a more knowing other, having just passed through the zone of proximal development from what he could not do to what he could do with guidance to accomplishing the task unaided.

Discussion

The study findings in relationship to the empirical, theoretical, and practical literature were substantial from the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ behaviors. The discussion below extrapolated the analogy of how this research validated, extended, contributed, and advanced the construct of Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ contribution to successful transition into kindergarten. The study was distinguished by the Midwestern Reggio teachers’ selfless generosity during interviews and their innovative, enthusiastic spirits as they added to the existing body of knowledge of Reggio Emilia early childhood education.

Validation of Prior Reggio Emilia Research

Although much of the research about successful transition into kindergarten addressed the consequences of the experience, the research on teachers' contributions to kindergarten is limited and often involves a number of transition practices being utilized (Ahtola et al., 2011; Alexander et al., 2014; McIntyre et al., 2014). Positive future academic successes after kindergarten were widely reported in studies (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting et al., 2005). The findings from this research contributed to the body of literature. In particular, this study investigated what Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to a successful transition into kindergarten and other issues with regard to change and transformation including students' fear of the new environment of kindergarten and ways documentation of students contributes to transition. It should be revealed the 15 Midwestern Reggio teachers were eager to share the benefits of the Reggio approach as it is applied to transition as well as all areas of the children's early childhood experience.

Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2011) regarded teachers as translators of the Reggio educational experience and the following are a few of the personal communications about transition made during the interview procedures: play aided transition, making new friends helped transition, project work helped, and children were engaged in a whole new way between pre-K and kindergarten. In their recent research in the U.S., Abry et al. (2015) discovered teachers' positive attitudes about transition kept the students positive about the upcoming change. During my observation, the pedagogy's positivity about transition seemed to have simulated confidence for students. According to Biroli et al. (2017),

Relative to not receiving formal care, the Reggio approach significantly boosts outcomes related to employment, socio-emotional skills, high school graduation, election

participation, and obesity. Comparisons with individuals exposed to alternative forms of childcare do not yield strong patterns of positive and significant effects. (p. 1).

Biroli's (2017) study was conducted in Italy with participants who ranged in ages of six, 18, and 30-50 in Italy at Reggio Emilia, Parma, and Padova.

Additions to Transition into Kindergarten Body of Knowledge

This research study added to the current body of transition into kindergarten by addressing what is right, what is wrong, and what needs to change.

What is right. The overall Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) revealed high school graduation rates have increased from 74% 1990-1991 and rose to 82% 2013-2014 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). A new study from Stanford University School of Medicine discovered positivity makes kids more successful. According to Hess (2018), the good attitude of self-perception and enthusiastic classroom teachers could be the new highway to academic achievement. Bakken, Brown, & Downing's (2017) five year study provided confirmation that high-quality preschool education produced advanced development in children's academic, social, and emotional lives.

What is wrong. Without successfully transitioning, dropping out of school and academic failures result (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schneider et al., 2014; Schulting et al., 2005). Eight of the top 10 universities in the world are in the United States: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, Harvard, University of Chicago, University of California, California Institute of Technology, Columbia University, and Princeton University (QS University Rankings, 2018). However, the OECD ranks the U.S. sixth for adult education level (OECD, 2016). Perhaps what is wrong in the United States is each state's failure to provide children a

route to educational success in the form of public preschools with enthusiastic teachers who reflect an orientation of self-efficacy.

The 2016 National Institute for Early Education (NIEER) recorded that 43 states as well as Guam and the District of Columbia have public preschools for their three and four year-old children (Sanchez & Nadworny, 2017). Unfortunately, according to Sanchez & Nadworny, the states that have public preschools only provide preschool for a small proportion of the three- and four-year-olds.

What needs to change. U.S. early childhood education is essential for every child in this country because as Mitga (2013) said, “it doesn't have to be "Reggio." Innovation and quality education is possible anywhere, but we have to come together to make it happen” (para. 6). According to Moss (2012), “Early Childhood Education and Care is now a global trend according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization” (p. 103).

The Reggio Emilia approach does have a sustainable, positive effect for the balance of a child's life. Reggio is about relationships, communication, and collaboration; it is an inclusive environment where children learn who they are and establish their self-confidence. According to Gandini (2012), “Things about children and for children are only learned from children” (p. 30). Malaguzzi (2012, p. 41) concurred with Piaget that the purpose of pedagogy was to produce an environment for learning. In a speech at Expeditionary School in Thornton, Colorado President Obama said, “The most important factors in determining students' success is their teachers” (Obama, 2008, para. 20). Another of the many failures of the NCLB was due to their not acknowledging the responsibility of students for their own academic achievement; teachers should not have to be the only active participants in the classroom (Ravitch, 2011).

Legislatively, professionally, and politically, appropriate changes in every state are required to ensure young learners are the recipients of every opportunity to succeed. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 provided federal funding if certain requirements were met and in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became the national education law and equal opportunity assurance for every student (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). State legislators (representatives and senators) are primary contacts for concerns about political and legislative education in school districts. Professionally, all teachers in early public education should have an opportunity for ongoing education in their craft (seminars, online classes, and national educational conventions). Positive change in early childhood education has happened through cultural diffusion of Reggio Emilia constructs.

New Contexts Which Informs Reggio Transition into Kindergarten

The study at this Midwestern Reggio Emilia School has shed new light on Malaguzzi's construct for Reggio Emilia transition into kindergarten. Aside from having confirmed previous research findings, this study proffered cultural diffusion as the axis for the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States such as pedagogical contributions to transition into kindergarten. Cultural diffusion is a mix of world cultures, and in this intrinsic case study it means the 15 Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers were successful through cultural diffusion to channel the Italian culture that supports Malaguzzi's Reggio approach. Additionally, Bandura (1997) is a contemporary of Malaguzzi. Bandura was born in Canada, attended the University of Iowa, and eventually served as head of the Psychology Department at Stanford University where he remained over half a century. His social cognitive theory and self-efficacy belief system was the foundation of human motivation and connected him to Reggio Emilia constructs. There was no record of the two men (Malaguzzi and Bandura) having ever met albeit Bandura's self-

efficacy theory, e.g. modeling, was at the center of confidence and did affect an individual's environment and outcomes (Pajara, 2004).

Cultural diffusion and self-efficacy are the extended constructs that informed Reggio Emilia kindergarten transition. Cultural diffusion was the conveyance for the Italian Reggio Emilia approach which “. . . is possible where there is nothing, provided there is respect, listening, and time” (Delrio, 2012, p. 82). Self-efficacy, as it applies to young children, is about their confidence to bring about accomplishments, which relates directly to their desired consequences (Bandura, 1997).

Reggio Emilia pedagogy is always changing, collaborating, following the children's interests, and documenting their strengths. The image of the child, negotiated learning, social relationships, and student documentation are the educational dimensions at Reggio (Edwards et al., 2012). Reggio multiple relationships are between: teacher-child, child-environment, child-family, and school and family (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Students are strong, self-confident, and fearless when they emerge from this Reggio Emilia educational culture and continue with their educational journey.

Moss (2016) “. . . tellingly described Malaguzzi and the teachers of Reggio Emilia as specific intellectuals” (p. ix). History often repeats itself such as the mothers of Reggio Emilia, Italy after WWII needed to go back to work and wanted a preschool for their young children. Seventy-three years later, I observed and recorded 15 intrepid Reggio Emilia approach teachers who respect their students and work diligently to ensure each child's own interests guide them. In 1993, Malaguzzi made notes about a future Reggio Children Foundation by writing, “Once again let us get together to help every child to be what they think” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 424).

The implications of the research suggest a young Italian educator, Loris Malaguzzi, blazed an innovative path into early childhood education with the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

This research reasonably assumed Reggio Emilia children have a successful kindergarten transition because all Reggio children are competent and strong. There are no poor children at Reggio because, “All children whatever their culture, whatever their lives are rich, better equipped, more talented, stronger and more intelligent than we can suppose” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 397).

Rinaldi (2001) proposed:

School is a place of culture – that is, as place where a personal and collective culture is developed that influences the social political, and values context and, in turn is influenced by this context in a relationship of deep and authentic reciprocity. (p. 38)

Arguably, the theoretical and empirical literature corroborated previous Reggio Emilia research and extended research with cultural diffusion and pedagogy. In addition, theoretical, empirical, and practical implications have been addressed.

Implications

Implications for successful transition into kindergarten were in abundance during the course of research as interviews, observations, and journal entries that were conducted about the behaviors of Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers and their students’ subsequent transition into kindergarten. The following sections reveal the study findings as they are applied to theoretical, empirical, and practical implications in relationship to the research literature reviewed for the study. How my study corroborated and extended previous research is discussed as well as the manner in which this study has been framed through cultural diffusion.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretical substructure for this research study was comprised from Vygotsky (1978) and Malaguzzi (1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1998; 2012; 2016). The theoretical implications were intended for all stakeholders: parents, students, and researchers, school administrators, and early childhood educators. The theoretical framework for this study was comprised of Vygotsky's theory of social development, social constructivist theory, zone of proximal development, and the more knowing other. Malaguzzi's constructs for Reggio Emilia were the social relationships, negotiated learning, image of the child, and documentation (Edwards et al., 2012). Moss (2004) described Malaguzzi's Reggio as an elaborate group of studios with a group of individuals allocating moral value through continuous relationships through a pattern of ideal theory, behavior, and aspirations for what lies ahead.

Transition into kindergarten has been wrought with interesting challenges and is known to provide lifelong benefits in the form of a successful academic future (Puccioni, 2015; Schneider et al., 2014; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Malaguzzi's constructs for Reggio Emilia were in tandem with Vygotsky's constructivist theory of active learners, teachers, and social environment (New, 2006; Stone, 2012). Learning is a social event within all cultures, and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory asserted children's learning begins in the culture in which they were born.

As the field research ended, I unexpectedly discovered an addition to existing theories through the 15 interviews of Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach teachers. An association was made between cultural diffusion and the Reggio Emilia approach. In the 20th century, Boas (1938) envisioned culture traits as being part of two historical processes, diffusion, and modification (Hatch, 1973). Cultural diffusion expansion was put to practical use with the

Reggio Emilia approach because Malaguzzi believed Reggio pedagogy relied on improvisation in order for a school to respond to young children. He proposed a school for young children should adequately react to children and be similar to a “giant rodeo” (Gandini, 2012, p. 63). Learning how fall off the horse, get back on, and to ride would be learned through the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) theorized “. . . How as human beings we actively realize and change ourselves in the varied contexts of culture and history” (p. 131). According to Rinaldi (2013b), “Colossal responsibility falls to pedagogy to understand “school is not only a place to transmit culture, but to create it” (p. 25).

Empirical Implications

Three themes emerged from the research at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school: (a) Reggio pedagogical constructs, (b) Reggio children: communities of courage, and (c) transition stimulus: Reggio

Reggio pedagogical constructs. Documentation is an integral part of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and is accompanied by negotiated learning, which was prominently exhibited during observations and interviews. Children’s pictures and writings were on every wall in every room of the school. Often children would politely request that I admire a project which was in process. The most amazing facet of the class observations was the intensity the teachers displayed when they were listening to the students. It was not lost on me that listening is a learned skill. The teachers were focused on the students who were speaking and appeared “grounded in the moment.” The lessons from the pedagogy were of a great value as this research went into print and conclusions were drawn from what was heard on the transcripts by sorting out the interference of what I originally believed. The teacher has respect for each of the students and in turn, the students respect their peers. During observations, I witnessed the

kindness and gentle manner the children openly expressed to one another. Dahlberg (2012) explained the documentation process: “it opens up the complexity, so that we can work and learn from it” (p. 227). Documentation goes side-by-side with observations not as a grading tool, but a tool for research and a way of making meaning for the students and about the students. In summary, the Reggio pedagogical constructs were outlined by Edwards et al. (2012) as, “. . . visibility, context, pedagogical documentation, projected curriculum, image of the child, education as a relationship, revisiting, cognitive knots, and participation” (p. 15). These powerful women who have done such demanding good works at Reggio set a stage for learning that is safe, polite, respectful, and most importantly a not just a pedagogical map for learning (such as cognitive knots which requires negotiations and adjustments with students during projects) but a map of social amenities that I surmised were extremely well mannered.

Reggio children: Communities of courage. Communities of courage emerged from personal observations and interactions with students, which occurred throughout the research. It is a compilation of what the children reaped during change and transformation and how the children overcame fears, which were new and frightening. One child approached me and shared that a parent had lost a close friend. She was obviously worried about her parent as she detailed her concerns, but she was buoyed by the shared culture of community and her overall sense of well-being and safety in the Reggio environment. The flexible learning and the inclusive classes that celebrated differences are lifelong lessons for the students.

When students traverse the zone of proximal development, the process of moving through it provides a strong sense of quiet courage. Moreover, the students at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school have pedagogy who model courage for them every day. The simple act of doing the right thing in being kind to one another is an act of courage in itself.

Transition stimulus: Reggio. Transition stimulus at Reggio was the priming events (such as home visits), but I did not witness home visits or visits to the kindergarten classes and future teachers. Parties are included in these events and complimented the occasion with joy. I have not witnessed any priming events aforementioned, although I did observe the close social relationships at the Midwestern Reggio approach school (children walking arm in arm in the three- to four-year-old class and laughing with one another in the four- to five-year-old-class). Those close associations were supportive when new events appeared to have scared the students, and they gave the impression there is a good social base in place for any potential fears and/or celebrations in their future.

Empirical research has indicated that transition into kindergarten correlates with positive outcomes in academic achievement, social emotional competence, and rapid developing skills (Caspé et al., 2015). This study contributed to the knowledge base and discipline of early childhood education in pointing to the improvisations and provocations pedagogy bestowed as they joined their community of students in their quest for knowledge (Gandini, 2012). The novel expansion of findings harvested from this research hypothesis was the by-product of cultural diffusion transferred from Italy to the United States by a community of young learners (powerful children) combined with enthusiastic Reggio pedagogy (powerful teachers). Students have reached the point of highest development after two to three years together, and they have come to possess a reinforced confidence in their own abilities and love of life-long learning. The children seamlessly transition into kindergarten not only due to priming events, home, and kindergarten visits, but (also) because of their recently developed, impenetrable sense of self-worth.

Practical Implications

Practical implications of this study crisscross the spectrum of early childhood education stakeholders. The research questions guided the interviews and field observations. Sub-question one asked, “What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to change and transformation of students?” Field research provided practical guidance for researchers, school administrators, parents, and future preschool teachers as was observed at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development and the more knowing other was the hub for change and transformation at Reggio. Gandini (2012) discussed ZPD as, “Put more simply, we seek a situation in which the child is about to see what the adult already sees” (p. 58). When children have been nurtured by Reggio Emilia pedagogy, they surely have experienced change and transformation through ZPD. Gandini (2012) warned that one cannot be in a rush to see change and transformation.

Sub-question two asked, “What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers do to address students’ fears of the new environment of kindergarten?” Students’ fears were assuaged by meeting new teachers at kindergarten and through teachers’ understanding and confirmation of supportive behaviors about their fears. Corsaro and Molinari (2005) discovered in their five-year Italian study that some of the children who had leadership roles in preschool had difficult adjustments as they transitioned to elementary school. The implication for educators was that fears should be acknowledged and the unknown was addressed (Edwards et al., 2012). Students at the Reggio school were distinctly courageous and independent and interdependent through consistent collaboration.

Sub-question three asked, “How does the Reggio Emilia approach teachers’ documentation of students’ learning contribute to transition?” The fearless and diligent

pedagogy at the Midwestern Reggio School was observed during documentation of students in every part of their school periods as time allowed. Malaguzzi (as cited in Cagliari et al., 2016) wrote,

The most important and decisive, which revolutionized ways of working for teachers, atelieristas, and pedagogistas generated interest on an international level, was the attention given to observation and documentation of children's processes, a transition in design from which it is impossible to turn back towards the didactics of the past. (pp. 281-282)

The very process of documentation contributed to transition on an avenue of affirmation of student's self-efficacy, which empowered the transition process.

Malaguzzi was a teacher, and his vision of the Reggio Emilia ideology always circled back to pedagogy. Gandini (2012) wrote about Reggio, suggesting teachers have to be united in a relationship with one another and the children in order to establish the learning venue. The Reggio Emilia approach is practical in many arenas: preschool, the art studio, science, math, and more. The approach is led by the students albeit in partnership with teachers and the other students. The most inherent agents in a young child's life are his relationships with parents and teachers (Christakis, 2016). The pedagogical culture at Reggio is enhanced by student self-efficacy (Bandura 2002). Vygotsky's (1978) theory surmounted all other applicable research at Reggio because the more knowing other supported the zone of proximal development while making meaning (Parnell, 2012). This study added support to the prior research of Ahtola et al. (2016) by confirming transition practices applied in preschool contributed to children's academic growth in kindergarten.

Most all of the states in the U.S. have public-supported preschools and teachers; educators, teachers, and parents might benefit from this study and the Reggio Emilia approach philosophy. The application of documentation by teachers fortified negotiated learning at Reggio and made work visible for students and teachers (Dahlberg, 2012). The image of the child is strong and compelling according to Malaguzzi (Malaguzzi, (as cited in Cagliari et al., 2016).

What do Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition to kindergarten?” Reggio Emilia approach teachers contributed the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach philosophy to transition into kindergarten. Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development was the interval between the child understanding a dilemma on his own or with the collaboration of a more knowing other. Observations of the ZPD and MKO occurred several times during the field research, and the interviews provided numerous vignettes of both ZPD and MKO. Reggio play for children was immersed in learning, social and emotional skills and was observable throughout the day during the term of the research in the form of physical play, pretend play, constructive self-directed projects, and games. Flexibility, listening, and research were all tools of documentation for Reggio teachers. Daily documentation provided a written or video record of the students’ learning and served as a tool for understanding the process. Negotiated learning was a byproduct of documentation for parents and teachers, and the negotiations I observed were about classroom events and issues they wanted to discuss between students and teachers (Forman & Fyfe, 2012).

The practical implications of this study became apparent and appeared to be applicable for preschools in the United States; they would potentially involve federal and state early education policy makers and stakeholders, which would be incorporated in the U.S. diverse

society. I came to understand transition into kindergarten was not a process successfully implemented through a written agenda or an itinerary; it was the result of gradual acquisition of pedagogical transmission and created culture (Rinaldi, 2013). The phenomena of successful transition into kindergarten had practical applications ranging from two Reggio teachers visiting the student's home to confirmation of a child's self-worth by way of documentation and display of his/her work. The Reggio Emilia phenomenon has arrived and remains steadfastly in place today at this Midwestern school through cultural diffusion.

The functional applications of the Reggio Emilia approach would appear to be applicable in any educational setting prekindergarten through 12th grade; in addition, college coursework would be enhanced by Reggio constructs such as student directed projects, class collaboration, and research. The phenomena of successful transition into kindergarten has practical applications ranging from two Reggio classroom teachers visiting their student's home, which demonstrated a practical method to get to know the parents and honor the child with the visit at the same time. Citizens in every country have a responsibility to children, a civil responsibility, an ethical liability, and a political liability (Delrio, 2012, p. 84).

The United States was well known for the Federal Department of Education; however, the U.S. currently ranks seven out of 10 countries in U.S. News Best Countries in a recent U.S. News Report, a ranking, news, and analysis project created to capture how countries are perceived on a global scale (McPhillips, 2017). Switzerland is ranked first, followed by Canada, the U.K., Germany, Japan, Sweden, U.S., Australia, France, and Norway (McPhillips, 2017). One cannot replicate the culture of Reggio Emilia, Italy, founded in the 11th or 12th century, although the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school has created a community and culture

that has improved the quality of early childhood education opportunities in this Midwestern metropolitan city.

Many universities and colleges in the U.S. provide Reggio Emilia certifications, classes, and/or master's degrees, including University of Colorado, Webster University, Lesley University, Antioch University, Goodwin College, and Bank Street College of Education. A practical application is the provision of preschool training for teachers in the Reggio approach and adoption of looping (keeping students together until elementary school) whenever possible.

Delimitations and Limitations

My study has essentially concentrated on 15 Reggio Emilia approach teachers from one Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school. Therefore, the three limitations were conclusions interpreted from a single Reggio Emilia School with participants who were all female and over 21 years of age. The participant teachers were well qualified (experience and education) to answer the interview questions albeit another study involving parents is likely warranted.

Furthermore, the delimitation of the research is a single case analysis, which set boundaries because it was preselected in order to present a Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school and its teachers as the unique phenomena of the intrinsic study (Stake, 1995). The research described and interpreted Reggio pedagogy and successful transition into kindergarten. Aside from the limitations of the smaller participant sample and single location, the participants' interviews and knowledge of Reggio Emilia philosophy was a conglomerate of pedagogical skills, and observations provided the portrait of Reggio children who daily define their own educational adventures.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several Reggio Emilia researchers have recommended further research to gain more information concerning Reggio Emilia pedagogy and successful transition into kindergarten.

The following four studies are my recommendations for further research:

- (1) Conduct a Midwest State kindergarten quantitative questionnaire study of children who have not attended preschool (public, private, Reggio) prior to entering kindergarten.
- (2) Conduct a Midwest State kindergarten quantitative questionnaire study of children who attended private preschool prior to entering kindergarten.
- (3) Conduct a Midwest State kindergarten quantitative questionnaire study of children who attended public preschool prior to entering kindergarten.
- (4) Conduct a State of Midwest State quantitative questionnaire study of children who attended Reggio Emilia preschool prior to entering kindergarten.

Each of the four groups could answer the same questions in late spring of the study year. The research would provide sufficient numbers to determine the effect of pedagogy and successful transition into kindergarten without preschool, with private preschool, with public preschool, and with Reggio Emilia preschool.

Summary

Hawkins also reminded that America is a “scattered and diverse society” compared to Italy (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 366). Malaguzzi proffered, “Our social landscape is different and so must our battles be” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 77). A sense of communality was well established at this Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school as presented in this research, and the school grounds, ambiance, the culture could just as easily be found in any Italian city. It is the teachers who set the stage at this Reggio Emilia approach school. According to Edwards et al. (2011),

“The teacher must be treated not as an object of study but as an interpreter of educational phenomena” (Locations 1519-1522).

The results of the research surprised me because clearly, transition into kindergarten at Reggio Emilia benefits from preparation activities. These preparation activities consisted of meetings of student and parents in students’ homes, children mingling with kindergartners in their classrooms, teacher’s discussions about the fears of “getting all mixed up” with transitioning students, and Reggio teachers providing observational information of each child to new kindergarten teachers. More importantly, the children receive personal skills enabling them to surmount the more difficult life altering circumstances. The Reggio Emilia school is inclusive, a safe environment where strong relationships are forged between teachers, family, and parents and where teachers are willing to listen anytime, anywhere to their students.

Katz (1990) wrote,

I cannot recall having seen anywhere before, preschool child’s work of such high quality as in Reggio Emilia . . . But most important, teachers do not underestimate children’s capacities for sustained effort in achieving understanding of what they are exploring nor do they underestimate children’s abilities to capture and depict these understanding through a variety of art. (p. 11)

The best manner in which to summarize this researcher’s discoveries at the Midwestern Reggio Emilia approach school is from the Audrey’s statement:

Reggio Emilia approach helps us slow down and be more sensitive and aware that we are one part of a larger aesthetic This philosophy of education forces us to be aware of what is happening right now in this moment. It gives us permission to put all the other stuff

that we have going on in our brains aside to focus on what is right in front of us. Reggio Emilia takes us into a larger consciousness.

In a world that is full of chaos, technology, and diverse cultures, preschool students in the United States should be entitled to the tools of the Reggio Emilia: the constructs, the courage, and the transition stimulus to begin each of their educational journeys in the best possible manner.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Form

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
4/28/2017 to 4/27/2018
Protocol # 2847.042817

Student Transition into Kindergarten: A Case Study of Reggio Emilia Teachers Approach

Joan Oliver Stephens
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of what Reggio Emilia Approach teachers contribute to kindergarten transition. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Reggio Emilia preschool teacher. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Joan Oliver Stephens, a student/doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand what contributions Reggio Emilia Approach teachers contribute to transition into kindergarten.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. The first task will be an individual recorded confidential interview.
2. The second task will be providing the researcher with a few confidential documentations.
3. The third task will be random confidential member checking (review of transcripts).
4. The fourth task will be classroom and outdoor confidential observations.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are not benefits to participating in this study. The study benefits will be to educational research and future preschool teachers.

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill because of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be vigorously protected with the use of pseudonyms and the site will be referred to as a Reggio Emilia Approach pre-school in the Midwest e.g. all participants and the site will be kept confidential.
- Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office and will be shredded when the study is published by Liberty University.
- The recordings will be used and maintained by Joan O. Stephens, who will have the only access and they will be erased when the study is published at Liberty University.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the group will maintain their confidentiality and privacy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Joan Oliver Stephens. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

Student Transition into Kindergarten: A Case Study of Reggio Emilia Teachers Approach
Joan Oliver Stephens
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of what Reggio Emilia Approach teachers contribute to kindergarten transition. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Reggio Emilia preschool teacher. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Joan Oliver Stephens, a student/doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand what contributions Reggio Emilia approach teachers contribute to transition into kindergarten.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. The first task will be an individual recorded confidential interview.
2. The second task will be providing the researcher with a few confidential documentations.
3. The third task will be random confidential member checking (review of transcripts).
4. The fourth task will be classroom and outdoor confidential observations.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are not benefits to participating in this study. The study benefits will be to educational research and future preschool teachers.

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill because of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be vigorously protected with the use of pseudonyms, the site will be referred to as a Reggio Emilia approach pre-school in the Midwest e.g. all participants, and the site will be kept confidential.
- Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office and will be shredded when the study is published by Liberty University.
- The recordings will be used and maintained by Joan O. Stephens who will have the only access and they will be erased when the study is published at Liberty University.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the group will maintain their confidentiality and privacy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Joan Oliver Stephens. You may ask any questions you have now.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C

Observational Protocol Midwest Reggio Emilia Approach School

| | | |
|--|-----------|-------------------------|
| Date: | Location: | |
| Teachers present: | Class: | |
| Type of Activity: | | |
| Time In: | Time Out: | Activity Length: |
| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
| <i>Transition into kindergarten</i> | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| <i>Change and transformation</i> | | |
| | | |
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| | | |
| <i>Fear of entering kindergarten</i> | | |
| | | |
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| | | |
| <i>Documentation and transition</i> | | |
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| <i>Academic future in education and transition</i> | | |
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APPENDIX D

Invitation Letter

Study Title: STUDENT TRANSITION INTO KINDERGARTEN: A CASE STUDY OF REGGIO EMILIA TEACHERS' APPROACH

Dear Participant,

I am doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my Ed. D. in Leadership and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying Reggio Emilia teachers' contribution to transition from preschool into kindergarten. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to join me in an interview about transition from Reggio Emilia preschool. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last 1 hour. The interviews will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me, and I will transcribe and analyze them. The tapes will be destroyed following the member checks.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not wish to do so. I hope the educational research community, preschools, teachers, and administration will benefit from the research.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at Liberty University in Virginia. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional conferences. Participation is anonymous, which means that no one will know what your answers are. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials. .

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at the phone number and/or email below. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached form and return it in the attached self-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

Joan Oliver Stephens

Joan Oliver Stephens

SIGNATURE FORM

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for Reggio Emilia Approach Teachers

1. How would you construct a smooth transition into kindergarten?
2. What type of relationship do you have with Reggio Emilia parents?
3. Please, discuss details of your students whose neighborhoods and communities influence them in any way.
4. Please, describe kindergarten transition meetings you have attended with parents and kindergarten teachers.
5. What are all the specific details of your observations of students experiencing the zone of proximal development, having learned to carry on alone without anyone's help?
6. Please list and discuss the Reggio Emilia activities you feel give the students a sense of well-being and ease about entering kindergarten?
7. What are the particular benefits of documentation of students that you experience as well as those you see as an advantage for your students?
8. What do you know about kindergarten transition and its' effects on students' academic future in education?
9. Which classroom functions enhance your research capabilities?
10. In what ways do you collaborate with your colleagues (co-teachers) in the classroom?
11. How do documentation and flexible planning contribute to your Reggio Approach?
12. How will you assist students in making meaning of what they do, encounter, and experience?

13. Which of your behaviors encourage students to enjoy nature and the environment?
14. Describe your class. Is it inclusive of all children e.g., children with rights and special rights?
15. How do you encourage participation of student's families and the community with your class?
16. As a Reggio teacher, how do you interpret the Reggio Emilia learning philosophy?

APPENDIX F

Reggio Emilia Guiding Strategies for Teaching/Developmentally

Appropriate Practices

1. Drawing: the teacher first helps the children establish a relation to the object or event drawn.
2. Technique in Using Art Media: Children at a young age have a great deal of opportunity to explore media and materials.
3. Invented Solutions with Media: Older children who have mastered the basic techniques are encouraged to invent solutions.
4. Revisiting and Co-construction: The teacher is more interested in helping children become aware of their choices and assumptions.
5. Special Education: It is understood that teaching children with learning challenges requires particular scaffolding at the beginning of mastering something new.
6. The Next Day: Teachers are more likely to use a documented episode from the previous day as the starting point for the current day.
7. The Role of Metaphor: teachers note children's metaphoric speech and do not dismiss it as "cute."
8. Reinforcement versus Reflection: The teacher works to increase the children's awareness of their perspective, their perspective, theory, assumptions, and rules.
9. Affordances: The teachers give children the opportunity to express the same idea in different media (paper, wire, clay, and wood) so that they will become aware of affordances of each media.
10. The Importance of Light: The teachers prepare the environment to allow light into the room, to flood light from underneath and through objects on the light table, to create shadows on the floor and the wall with an overhead projector.
11. Individuality within the Collective: Teachers are aware that children desire to reconcile the one within the many without losing either.
12. Plans before Production: The teacher will take days and weeks to help children create a plan for what they want to accomplish.
13. Thinking versus Skills: The teacher works to be consistent with her image of the competent child, rather than to meet achievement milestones.

14. Wondering: The teacher realizes content must flow from the child's endogenous worry and wonder.
15. Scaffolding Co-construction: The teacher will write down the comments from the children and look for counterpoints that could generate an interesting debate.
16. Suggesting a fest: The teacher listens and supports the children's speculations.
17. Reframing the familiar: The teacher sometimes initiates a project or investigation with a provocative reframing of the familiar.
18. The Value of Misconceptions: The teacher does not treat a child's misconception as something to be summarily replaced but rather as something that derives from an interesting and plausible logic that needs to be understood.
19. Group Dialogue: The teacher establishes classroom routines, furniture arrangements, emotional excitement, and small-group composition that encourage children to talk among themselves.
20. Group Composition: Teachers are not rigid in organizing which students take a turn in the atelier.
21. Emotion and Knowledge: The teacher understands that an emotional relation to the subject under study is more than a motivator that energizes effort.
(Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2016, pp. 376)

APPENDIX G

Guidelines for Field Observations at Reggio Emilia Midwest Preschool

I. ANTICIPATION

Review or discover what is expected at the outset in the way of a case study.
 Consider the questions, hypotheses, or issues already raised.
 Read more case study literature, both methodological and exemplary.
 Look for one or more studies possibly to us as a model.
 Identify the “case.” Was it prescribed, selected to represent, or merely convenient?
 Define the boundaries of the case as they appear in advance.
 Anticipate key problems, events, attributes, spaces persons, vital signs.
 Consider possible audiences for preliminary and final reporting.
 Form initial plan of action, including definition of role of observer on site.

II. FIRST VISIT

Arrange preliminary access, negotiate plan of action, and arrange regular access.
 Formal agreement indicating obligations for observer and for host (Appendix C).
 Discuss real or potential costs to hosts, including opportunity costs.
 Discuss arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of data, sources, and reports.
 Discuss need for persons to review drafts to validate observations and descriptions.
 Discuss publicity to be given during and following the study.
 Identify information and services to be offered hosts.
 Revise plan of action, observer’s role, case boundaries, and issues, as needed.

III. FURTHER PREPARATION FOR OBSERVATION

Make preliminary observation of activities. Use other sites for tryouts.
 Allocate resources to alternative spaces, persons, methods, issues, phases, etc.
 Continue to develop instruments or standardized procedures.
 Work on record-keeping system, files, tapes, coding system; protected storage.
 Rework priorities for attributes, problems, events, audiences, etc.

IV. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Reconsider issues or other theoretical structure guide the data gathering.
 Learn what audience members know, what they want to come to understand.
 Identify the possible “multiple realities” how people see things differently.
 Allocate attention to different viewpoints, conceptualizations.

V. GATHER DATA, VALIDATE DATA

Make observations, interviews, debrief informants, gather logs, use surveys, etc.
 Keep records of inquiry arrangements and activities.
 Select vignettes, special testimonies, illustrations.
 Classify raw data; begin interpretations.
 Redefine issues, case boundaries, renegotiate arrangements with hosts as needed.
 Gather additional data, replicating or triangulating, to validate key observations.

VI. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Review raw data under various possible interpretations
Search for patterns of data (whether or not indicated by the issues).
Seek linkages between program arrangements, activities, and outcomes.
Draw tentative conclusions, organize according to issues, and organize final report.
Review data, gather new data, deliberately seek disconfirmation of findings.

VII. PROVIDING AUDIENCE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNDERSTANDING

Describe extensively the setting within which the activity occurred.
Consider the report as a story; look for ways in which the story is incomplete.
Draft reports and reproduce materials for audience use.
Try them out on representative members of audience groups.
Help reader discern typicality and relevance of situation as base for generalization.
Revise and disseminate reports and materials. Talk to people.

(Stake, 1995, pp. 52-53)

APPENDIX H

Table H1

Original Codes

| Source | Code | No. of Times |
|----------|---|--------------|
| | Transition | 26 |
| Maria | Reggio sets children up for success. | |
| Bethany | Reggio provides a bridge to elementary school transition. | |
| Isabelle | Play aids transition into kindergarten. Making new friends helps transition. | |
| Esme | We make sure they are ready for kindergarten. I like to make sure all students have the basic skills. | |
| Danielle | When children are confident in their independent skills they meet their future kindergarten teachers. It is important for students to recognize their future kindergarten teachers. It is very important for teachers to set children up for success and make transition comfortable. Kindergarten transition is really a fragile time for children. | |
| Claire | It is mostly the families that struggle with transition. We do a good job setting up children to transition into kindergarten. We start talking about transition at the beginning of the school year. We start mixing the children up in January to prepare them for new friends. | |
| Audrey | Our former students return from kindergarten to visit at our pre-K class. Teachers of art, music, Spanish, and physical education can help with transition because they get to know students in a really different way. If they were involved in that discussion (transition), resource teachers would maybe be a buffer. Between pre-K and kindergarten students are growing exploding, and understanding things in math, language, and writing sequentially. Between pre-K and kindergarten | |

- children are excited and engaged in a whole new way academically. I have consistently been noticing that children that normally did not have emotional or behavioral issues in pre-K, sometimes do in kindergarten.
- Rene We teachers meet all summer to talk about transition. I would say continuity creates a smooth transition. Project work helps children transition.
- Gabriel Mingling with other pre-K and kindergarten classes help construct a smooth transition. Families and teachers make a difference in transition.
- Lillian I think one of the things we really try giving value to are those emotions about transition into kindergarten. Those transitions begin to happen in our class when they (the children) say good-bye to Mom and Dad.
- Hannah A smooth transition is making connections with other kindergarteners, visiting classrooms, getting to know routines, teachers, and what is expected.

Reggio Emilia Learning Philosophy

20

- Maria Reggio provides a strong, solid foundation and through that. . . confidence. To me, Reggio is a celebration of childhood – children’s wonder and curiosity guides learning. Reggio learning philosophy is ongoing education. Reggio sets children up for success. Children’s wonder and curiosity guides Reggio learning.
- Piper Reggio philosophy enables parents to view their children as capable.
- Researcher’s Observation Loris Malaguzzi’s ‘The Hundred Languages of Children’ posted on preschool entry wall – the many ways children express themselves. Reggio teachers are encouraging, positive, and accepting in the classroom. Reggio teachers always refer to the children as curious.
- Researcher’s Journal It has occurred to me that Reggio learning philosophy may easily adapt in U.S. public schools for pre-K and kindergarten. Reggio is like an orchestra of teachers and the principal is the maestro.
- Danielle The most important part of Reggio learning is students learn how to play with each other or just be by themselves. Teachers at Reggio are the children, the environment, parents, and me.
- Claire Reggio Emilia learning is organic . . . it is what we believe.

| | |
|---------|--|
| Audrey | Reggio Emilia concepts are applicable, no matter where you are in your life learning. I can see it relating to later. Reggio Emilia helps us be more sensitive and aware that we are one part of a much larger aesthetic. The thing I love about Reggio Emilia philosophy is it helps us slow down . . . be aware of what is happening right now, in this moment. |
| Gabriel | I like the Reggio Emilia philosophy because it sees the children as young investigators. Reggio Emilia is not teacher directed, it is child directed. |
| Lillian | I think the common thread of the Reggio philosophy is that the teachers are getting to know the child-based learning on the child's interests. |
| Hannah | Students leave Reggio Emilia with confidence in themselves. Reggio is child-centered, child-driven through the curriculum. |
| Bethany | Reggio provides bridge to kindergarten. |

Relationship with Reggio Parents

16

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Hannah | I think parents pulling their passion in and sharing it with the kids are how students learn so much. |
| Gabriel | Families are encouraged to contribute to project work. We think the home visit (before school starts) is a nice connection for the children and their parents. |
| Lillian | Parent's participation make the child feel so honored. We are partnering (teachers and parents) together to give your children the best education we can. |
| Rene | You end up being very close to the primary caregiver. |
| Audrey | Children who go home with a parent or have a consistent caregiver has less emotional needs than those students who do not. I have a relationship with parents because I do documentation they receive every week . . . and what we do in the Atelier relates back to provocations in the classroom. |
| Nora | Knowing parents establishes a close relation with teachers. families participate as guest readers and chefs in our class. |
| Maria | Families have relationships with the school and teachers |
| Julia | You cannot subcontract parenting. |
| Piper | Children, parents, and teachers are co-learners. |
| Researcher's Observation | The parent's day parade has just ended and the children was so proud and excited. Parents were gathered on the portico of Reggio to pick up their children and were visiting with teachers like a family. |
| Researcher's Journal | Home visits are made by all pre-K teachers to form a bond with parents from the beginning. |

Reggio Emilia teachers appear to be devoted to their students and involved with all the families.

Nature and the Environment

16

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Nora | The environment is a major factor and important value at Reggio Emilia. We walk outside in nature every day. |
| Researchers Journal | This researcher never tires of driving onto the scenic school grounds at Reggio peppered with students orderly moving from one activity on to the next. Classrooms at this Midwestern Reggio school are filled with sunlight and views to the nature out of doors. |
| Maria | Reggio is a calming environment – soft music and soft voices. |
| Audrey | At Reggio we are taking time with children to look at the environment around them. We get outside in nature for our artwork. We also bring nature in and document it. |
| Julia Piper | Environment is the third teacher. Reggio is an environment where students have a feeling of worth and can act upon it. |
| Hannah | Really, just putting the nature piece on the table and let them (children) explore . . . let them go. |
| Rene | We take nature walks and encourage children to take notice of what they see to have a positive association with nature. |
| Lillian | Spending time in nature without an agenda is a good learning experience. |
| Claire | The park is the story where we are enjoying nature and the environment. |
| Bethany | Being in nature, developing independence with joy is good. We go outside in all kinds of weather every day, throughout the school year. |

Documentation

15

| | |
|---------|--|
| Gabriel | Documentation is a map of what we want to know and for families and others to see what we have learned. |
| Claire | Documentation gives us a plan where children want to go next. When you document a project it shows you the experiences and its benefits. |
| Nora | Everything – every aspect from social to fine motor skills are documented . . . everything about documentation is beneficial. |
| Audrey | Documentation really helps me . . . because it holds |

| | |
|----------|--|
| | me accountable for what for what we have done this week. |
| | I find documentation is really beneficial for parents because it is always a place for me to go back to, and discuss student's skills and how they are applying them. Documentation allows you to always have something available for yourself, your children, and your parents. |
| parents. | |
| | Children are storytellers . . . I may be documenting what I am hearing. |
| Rene | Documentation benefits parents, helps children see themselves, and helps teachers reflect. |
| Lillian | I think my benefit of documentation is the presentation of students' ideas. |
| Maria | Documentation is powerful. |
| Bethany | At Reggio we document students in a journal four times a week and conference video to the parents monthly. |
| Piper | The most valuable form of documentation is the collection of visual experiences children make. |
| Julia | Documentation allows us to veer off course or keep on track. |
| Maria | Documentation is powerful. |

Making Meaning

13

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Nora | Provocation at Reggio is very deliberate. |
| Rene | We talk very mater-of-fact about everything (death, grief, etc.). The Reggio teacher's job is to be an informed observer. Teacher's emotional and social problem solving skills prevent children from getting lost in those problems situations. |
| Audrey | If the child is talking about it, then it is something that is a bigger issue than the classroom teacher knows about. |
| Danielle | We role-play a lot and students love it. We role play right and wrong and students want everybody to know when they are doing the right thing. The students want the positive thing to be shining and we teachers make a big deal of it. |
| Isabelle | Free time is when students are doing what they are interested in. |
| Researchers Journal | Driving home, I am still thinking about the little girl who wanted to tell me that her Mother's best friend had died because it was important to her. |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Julia | Children's issues are not problems they are just situations. |
| Researcher's Observation | The more discovery tools (numbers and letters) students use, the more productive they become. |
| Claire | Today a teacher advised the students their LEGO creation could not be saved forever. |
| | Pre-K students rise to expectations every day and believe in their own competency. |

Sense of Well-being

12

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Julia | My co-teacher and I cherish children's lives and their experiences. |
| Researchers Observation | A young girl sat happily reading to herself in the classroom today with an apparent sense of personal well-being. One of the teachers referred to her student today endearingly as a little nugget. |
| Lillian | A community is always going to have conflict because that is when they (children) are solving problems. Social emotional is primary. We are constantly talking about being liked and being a community. |
| Isabelle | Kindergarten preparation play into student's confidence (sense of well-being) later. |
| Audrey | Choice-based art projects give children a sense of well-being. |
| Rene | Mindfulness and lots of problem solving skills create a sense of well-being. |
| Hannah | Group cooperation creates a sense of well-being . . . when to be quiet and when to listen to your friends. |
| Nora | We talk about issues because it is important. |
| Researcher's Journal | The very young students have a total sense of confidence. Researcher became drowsy today, along with students, from meditation music and teacher's occasional soft voice in the background. |

Inclusive of All Children

| | |
|----------|---|
| Hannah | We have one student with speech difficulties . . . there is a lot of acceptance – yes, very much so. That is one thing we stay on top of to make sure he is accepted. |
| Danielle | We have diverse student populations. We do not exclude anyone. We have students with special needs in our class. It is ingrained in them . . . we are a family. |
| Rene | We have children on the ADHD spectrum . . . we talk about it . . . here is what they can teach you. “That is so interesting, some people like potato chips and |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| | some people don't" (Rene, September 14, 2017, Teacher interview). Reggio supports all children, especially those who could be marginalized are considered full of potential and possibilities. |
| Researcher's Journal Claire | Reggio is inclusive at this Midwestern school – many students are receiving various forms of counseling services. We often refer to our class as the United Nations because it is so magical. |
| Audrey | Everybody feels like this is a safe place to learn and they feel safe with each other. We do a lot to let students know that. Absolutely, class is inclusive of all children because we do not differentiate in any way. Researcher's Children are very respectful to one another at Reggio. |

Collaboration

6

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Danielle | The beauty of collaboration is seeing something differently. Collaboration is another set of eyes and another set of ears. |
| Researcher's Observation | Mass negotiations were emerging among the three-year-olds as they worked together today. A boy was successfully mounting a track on the wall with assistance from classmates. The class was working on several individual projects today, while each student migrated to the same child for advice. |
| Hannah Gabriel | I just ask my colleagues questions. At a teacher's meeting we asked for suggestions for our project . . . everyone helped us. |
| Rene Maria | We have different strengths and collaboration is beneficial. Collaboration and communication are important daily events at Reggio Emilia. |

Flexibility

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| Gabriel | Everything in early childhood has to be very flexible. You have to watch what your children are interested in that day. |
| Researcher's Observation Danielle | A teacher advised: "Sometimes plans change, and that is o.k." Flexibility with student's schedule is number one. Student's interest levels lead us to planning. Students were noticing the tunnel in the hill and the and tunnels in the entries at the park – this led to our project last year, coming straight from the students. |
| Rene | Flexible planning means I don't make lesson plans a |

- month in advance.
- Isabelle Planning too far ahead in the day means you are not following the children's interests.
- Maria Flexibility is central to children finding deeper meaning.

Benefits of Play

8

- Claire I am a firm believer in that hour and one-half of play at Reggio, giving them (the children) what they need . . . embracing how they learn.
- Researcher's Observation Children are collaborating and excited watching the wind tunnel lift objects as they discuss what else it can lift (e.g. back packs, dolls, toy trucks).
Two girls snuggling in an alcove in class visiting, giggling, and pretending to talk on toy cell phones.
I would say play is more important than listening.
I passed a group of pre-K students going to the swim area on a very hot July, day and they were so excited and laughing and oh, so joyful – play at Reggio makes learning meaningful.
Students at a light table were moving the sand with a variety of objects (shells, cups, and their hands) and discussing how the light moved as they moved their objects.
- Maria Play is an intentional provocation providing meaningful work in a variety of ways.
- Claire I think sitting next to students and taking that 'fly on the wall approach' enables you to learn through their play.

Zone of Proximal Development

8

- Piper ZPD is a favorite Reggio construct because my expectations their (students) potential is beyond their expectations.
- Lillian I think for me, it is when they (students) stop and . . . actually connect.
- Researcher's Observation Today I noticed a large handwriting guide of a child's first scribbles to writing his name (Zone of Proximal Development) hanging on the hall wall at Reggio Emilia.
A four-year-old boy put his shoes on independently as I watched his progress.
Today a teacher said, "we have to keep trying a lot of new ways until what the child wants to do, works."
- Nora There is a point where they (students) do not need your help (ZPD).
- Audrey I have been using my thumbs up cutting technique (this helps children move from the more knowing other to the zone of proximal development).

Neighborhood and Community 7

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| Researcher's Observation Gabriel | The crossing guard at Reggio is engaged talking with a young boy who wants a badge like the guard is wearing. I think the reputation of the school influences students, parents, and the community. |
| Isabelle Maria | The community is involved in our project work. Culminating experience is a wrap-up of a project and we invite families and the community to participate. |
| Audrey | In our neighborhood and community the socioeconomics is very different. |
| Rene | The children of affluent communities have the same issues of neglect as poor communities. |
| Researcher's Journal | Arrived late today and got lost on campus having gone to the wrong parking lot – the grounds crew was mowing and graciously took me to the pre-K building. |

Academic Future 4

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| Julia | The effect of transition into kindergarten on student's academic future is a sense of self and we try to keep out sense of child centered. |
| Nora | I hope successful transition and academic future creates an autonomous society. |
| Lillian | Reggio Emilia early education is what we are doing and lasts whether they are in private school or traditional school. |
| Hannah | Reggio students are more capable problem solvers. |

Research Capabilities 3

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| Nora | A smaller group (seven and under) enhances teacher research capabilities. |
| Audrey | I prefer to work with children . . . because for me, it helps to track and map the learning. |
| Hannah | You can learn so much one-on-one just speaking to a child and listening to their questions. |

Listening 2

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| Julia | All children require mindful attention and to have their teacher listens anytime, anywhere. |
| Kathryn | Listening is the most important function of the teachers at Reggio Emilia |