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Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-Inspired Kindergarten:  
Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-Based Approaches

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Daria Stowell

August 2014

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

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Title: Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-Inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-Based Approaches

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten are two arts-based approaches to early childhood education that are viewed as strong educational alternatives to traditional education and serve as sources of inspiration for progressive educational reform. This study describes, interprets, and appraises the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens in the United States in order to uncover the aims, practices, and values of both.

Five questions guide this study: (1) What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten? (2) What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice? (3) What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments? (4) What perspectives do parents have of Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten? And (5) what are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?

Educational connoisseurship and criticism are the methodology used to investigate Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. Educational criticism is composed of four dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. The six features that contribute to the ecology of schooling provided the conceptual

framework for observing these kindergarten classroom settings. They are the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, and aesthetic dimensions.

From my research questions, there are three findings: (1) in an arts-based kindergarten, children are not only learning knowledge, but also learning to be creative and imaginative with the knowledge they learn; (2) in order to have a successful arts-based kindergarten approach, the teacher, the child, the parents, the materials, and the environment all need to be involved within the curriculum; and (3) in order to fully evoke the qualities of a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten the teacher must be able to fully support the philosophies and methods of their respective approach. These findings suggest that arts-based curriculums aid in the development of the whole child to not only mature in their own time and space but also encouraging the child to build meaningful relationships with other children, the teachers, their parents, and the environment around them.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
Introduction and Overview .....	1
Rationale of the Study .....	2
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....	4
Question One .....	5
Question Two .....	6
Question Three .....	6
Question Four .....	7
Question Five .....	7
Overview of Methodology .....	7
Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism .....	8
Selection of Schools and Participants .....	8
Data Collection .....	9
Data Analysis .....	10
Conclusion .....	10
CHAPTER TWO .....	12
Background Information and Review of Literature .....	12
Waldorf Education .....	12
Waldorf Kindergarten .....	15
Reggio-Emilia Education .....	16
Reggio-Inspired Kindergarten .....	18
Play ... ..	20
Creativity .....	24
Imagination .....	26
Conclusion .....	29
CHAPTER THREE .....	30
Methodology .....	30
Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism .....	30
Elements of Educational Criticism .....	31
The Sites .....	33
Participants .....	36
Methods of Data Collection and Analysis .....	37
Validity .....	41
Research Questions .....	42

The Ecology of the Classroom.....	43
About the Researcher .....	46
 CHAPTER FOUR.....	 50
The Waldorf Kindergartens .....	50
Mrs. Schmidt’s Waldorf Kindergarten Classroom .....	50
Foundations of Westcoast Waldorf School.....	51
A Child’s Haven: The Westcoast School Classroom .....	52
Mrs. Schmidt: The Westcoast Waldorf Kindergarten Teacher.....	56
Rhythm of the Day.....	63
Morning Circle.....	68
Creative Play.....	71
Clean Up/Story.....	72
Snack Time .....	73
Outside Play .....	75
Waldorf Aesthetic .....	77
Child Assessment and Evaluation.....	78
Teacher Assessment and Evaluation.....	80
Summary .....	81
Teacher Gloria’s Waldorf Kindergarten Classroom.....	82
Foundations of the Waldorf School of California.....	83
Teacher Gloria .....	85
A Child’s Haven: The Waldorf School of California Classroom.....	90
Rhythm of the Day.....	91
Morning Circle.....	92
Creative Play.....	95
Clean Up, Rest, Story.....	98
Snack Time .....	99
Outside Play .....	101
Classroom Aesthetics.....	103
Child Assessment and Evaluation.....	104
Teacher Assessment and Evaluation.....	106
Summary .....	107
 CHAPTER FIVE .....	 108
The Reggio-inspired Kindergartens.....	108
Ms. Teri’s Reggio-inspired Kindergarten Classroom: Joy Charter School ...	108
Foundations of Joy Charter School.....	109
A Child’s World: Joy Charter School Kindergarten Classroom.....	110
Ms. Teri: Joy Charter School Kindergarten Teacher .....	112
Flow of the Day .....	119
Morning Meeting .....	119
Story Workshop .....	121



Clean Up, Sharing and Reflection, Snack.....	124
Outside Play .....	124
Reader's Workshop.....	125
Lunch/Quiet Time.....	127
Physical Education.....	129
Read Aloud .....	130
Community Work .....	130
Closing and Dismissal.....	132
Engaging the Creative Arts .....	133
Child Assessment and Evaluation.....	134
Teacher Assessment and Evaluation.....	136
Summary .....	136
Ms. Paula's and Ms. Jenna's Kindergarten Classroom.....	137
Foundations of The Experiential School.....	138
The Experiential School Kindergarten Classroom .....	139
Ms. Paula and Ms. Jenna.....	142
A Day in the Life of a Reggio-inspired Kindergartener .....	149
Morning Meeting .....	151
Morning Recess .....	153
Center Work: Story Workshop .....	154
Patterns.....	155
Lunch/Recess .....	156
Atelier/Atelierista.....	156
First Grade Rest .....	156
Clean Up/Afternoon Recess.....	158
An Arts-based Learning Environment .....	158
Parents .....	158
Child Assessment and Evaluation.....	159
Teacher Assessment and Evaluation.....	160
Summary .....	161
CHAPTER SIX.....	163
Overview of the Study .....	163
Findings.....	167
Question #1 .....	167
The Waldorf Kindergartens .....	168
The Reggio-inspired Kindergartens .....	170
Question #2 .....	173
The Waldorf Kindergartens .....	174
The Reggio-inspired Kindergartens .....	177
Question #3 .....	179
The Waldorf Kindergartens .....	181
The Reggio-inspired Kindergartens.....	183

Question #4 .....	186
The Waldorf Kindertagens .....	193
The Reggio-inspired Kindertagens .....	197
Question #5 .....	202
Further Research .....	202
Limitations .....	203
Conclusion and Personal Statement.....	204
 REFERENCES .....	 206
 APPENDICES .....	 217
Appendix A .....	217
Appendix B.....	218
Appendix C.....	221
Appendix D .....	224
Appendix E.....	226
Appendix F.....	228
Appendix G .....	229
Appendix H .....	230
Appendix I.....	232
Appendix J.....	234
Appendix K .....	236

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS .....	35
TABLE 2: TEACHER PARTICIPANTS .....	37
TABLE 3: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED .....	39
TABLE 4: ACADEMIC SKILLS .....	61
TABLE 5: WALDORF SCHOOL OF CALIFORNIA.....	89

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

What we do, if we are successful, is to stir interest in the matter at hand, awaken enthusiasm for it, arouse a curiosity, kindle a feeling, fire up the imagination—and now she who is exposed in this fashion goes on her way.

—Professor Julius Sumner Miller

Waldorf education and Reggio-Emilia education are seen as unyielding educational choices to traditional education and reform (Edwards, 2002). Each approach considers children as effective composers of their own development, powerfully influenced by the forces within themselves, initiating the way towards growth and learning (Edwards, 2002). Aesthetically gratifying environments serve as a pedagogical tool as well as providing strong messages about curriculum and respect for children (Barnes, 1991). Interaction with parents is deeply valued, and the children are evaluated by means other than standardized tests and grades (Barnes, 1991). These two arts-based approaches offer both parents and children other educational possibilities, where teachers are attentive to supporting children to become “intelligent, creative, whole persons” (Edwards, 2002). Both Waldorf education and Reggio-Emilia education encourage a child’s creativity, stimulate his imagination, and allow him to explore (Edwards, 2002).

Waldorf kindergarten engages children in activities through imitation and imagination that facilitate sensory-motor integration and sensory-motor imagining (Edwards, 2002). Academic activities are not presented to children in Waldorf kindergarten. The children spend their time in imitative and imaginative play within a

homelike environment (Oppenheimer, 2007). Rather than introduce an early intellectual focus, Waldorf kindergarten seeks to nourish and to keep alive the young healthy imagination and creative thinking powers. They focus their attentions upon each child's ultimate good and upon the protection of his childhood with the goal of a healthy, well-rounded adult in the future (Steiner, 2007). The innovative methodology and developmentally oriented curriculum permeates with the arts exposing the children to movement, drawing, water coloring, song, drama, puppetry, finger knitting, embroidery, beeswax sculpting, and felting.

Reggio-inspired kindergarten curriculum is flexible and emerges from children's ideas, thoughts, and observations. The goal is to cultivate within children a lifelong passion for learning and exploration (Lewin-Benham, 2008). At the heart of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten philosophy is the belief that children are full of curiosity and creativity; they are not empty memory banks waiting to be filled with facts, figures, and data (Rinaldi, 2006). One of the most interesting elements within Reggio-inspired kindergarten is the central importance given to the arts as a vehicle for learning. They are encouraged to participate in a variety of expressive activities such as sculpture, dramatic play, shadow play, puppetry, painting, dancing, music, ceramics, construction, and writing (Rinaldi, 2001). The plethora of resources in the classroom is testimony to the importance placed on this area of child development.

### **Rationale of the Study**

As a nation we have lost our sense of wonder of childhood and of the importance of nurturing the creative forces in every child. Rather we create kindergartens that are highly academic and value children according to how many letters they recognize and how many words they can read and write. We hurry young children

into what was once a first grade curriculum and then wonder why they are stressed.

—Sharifa Oppenheimer, 2007

Public kindergartens are now full day programs and many mandate a daily schedule for students of 90 minutes of language arts, 60 minutes of math, 30 minutes of science, 30 minutes of social studies, and one 25 minutes recess (Almon, 2007). No time is allocated for child-initiated indoor creative play, formally a mainstay of kindergarten. Increasingly, the national goal in early childhood education (Selg, 2010) is to get children reading as early as possible and long-term consequences are of little concern (Oppenheimer, 2007). Accountability agitated education in George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Almon, 2007), and it is believed to be the most misguided education legislation ever passed as NCLB requires testing for kindergarten, along with academic expectations and teaching via predetermined scripts (Oppenheimer, 2007). The result was the worst practice for elementary grades—rote teaching to mainly silent and still children—and was pushed into kindergarten (Oppenheimer, 2007). Unfortunately, NCLB was tied to such massive federal funding for public schools that few systems were willing to disregard the regulations, even when exemplary teachers were driven away and instruction tainted by teachers teaching to the test resulted in sacrificing understanding for right answers (Sacks, 1999).

As a result of the demand on the part of politicians calling for increased teaching of academic subjects and the imposition of standardized testing, kindergarten has especially been subject to these pressures. However, kindergarten is, in many cases, not understood as a place of development in which children acquire the essential, vital, basic skills needed as a foundation for future school learning (Lang, 2003). Kindergarten used

to be the place where a child could imagine what they wanted, create something based on that idea, play with their creation, share it with others, and reflect on their experience. This cycle would then be repeated over and over again allowing the child to become an imaginative and creative thinker (Resnick, 2009).

According to Carolyn Pope Edwards (2002), professor of psychology and family and consumer sciences at the University of Nebraska and one who has done extensive writing on Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten, policy makers have been asking for studies that are more in-depth. This means, studies that encompass the use of observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys as well as ethnographic, narrative, and case study techniques. These methods could be used in order to investigate the practices of teachers, children, and families of both Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergartens in ways that would inform a new kind of kindergarten as well as provide a level of information in order to validate three things: (1) the effectiveness of each approach; (2) the analysis of their specific and unique strengths and weaknesses; and (3) the reasons that children often thrive in this environment and why parents support these two types of kindergartens (Edwards, 2002).

I believe that Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten are incredibly strong and vibrant approaches that exist as a counter image to the prevailing norms in kindergarten education. Both of these approaches need to continue to be open to the world, share their insights and riches freely, and learn from the challenges and experiences of others.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten as two progressive art-based

alternatives for kindergarten education. It is not my intention to compare and contrast these two approaches, but only to respond to my research questions. Additionally, this study seeks to understand the experiences of the children in these kindergarten approaches and determine what may be learned from such pedagogical practices.

There are five questions that guide this study, and they are detailed below.

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
2. What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice?
3. What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments?
4. What perspectives do parents have of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
5. What are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?

**Question One: What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

Question one addresses the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. As the researcher in these environments, I am interested in how the teacher intentions are realized in the classroom environments, for example, what intentions are shared and what are particular to individual teachers? Question one zeros in on the intentional dimension of Eisner's ecology of schooling (1998). The intentional dimension helps us understand the aims and goals that provide insight into the nature of



the educational experience offered in both the Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten.

**Question Two: What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice?**

Question two addresses the everyday lives of teachers in Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten settings. What do the classrooms look like in practice? How is the day organized? What types of activities, interactions, and situations do the teachers offer the children in the classroom environments of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten? The descriptions of Mrs. Schmidt, Teacher Gloria, Ms. Teri, Ms. Paula, and Ms. Jenna<sup>1</sup> as Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers work to uncover what qualities define these classrooms as exemplary in the field. The reader will begin to imagine what the whole experience is like for Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten children.

**Question Three: What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments?**

Question three addresses what opportunities the children are given to learn as a result of the activities occurring in the Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten environments. It is important to thoroughly understand the received curriculum. I did not formally interview any children, however, during many instances I had interaction with them and was often drawn into classroom conversations and activities. I interpret my observations and artifacts, including student work and documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all teachers have been changed in accordance with IRB.

#### **Question Four: What perspectives do parents have of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

Question four addresses perspectives of the parents of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. Why do they send their child to a Waldorf or Reggio-inspired school? Why this particular school? What attracted them to each approach? How do they assess what the strengths and weaknesses are of their child's Waldorf kindergarten classroom or their child's Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom?

#### **Question Five: What are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

Question five addresses importance more loosely and concentrates on the conclusions drawn from this study on Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. As a researcher, I realize that not all kindergarten approaches are predetermined to be Waldorf and Reggio-inspired, but they may want to take advantage of the conclusions created from this study. Hence, this final research question explores the wider impact that Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten could have on kindergartens across the nation.

### **Overview of Methodology**

In order to describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions and operations of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten, I chose the qualitative research method of educational connoisseurship and criticism. Two Waldorf kindergartens were selected from two different Waldorf schools and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens were selected from two different Reggio-inspired schools. I spent one week at each school. Chapter Three further details my methodology.

## **Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism**

Educational connoisseurship and criticism was developed by Elliot Eisner (1998) as a method of qualitative inquiry intended to improve education. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation and criticism the art of disclosure (Eisner, 1998). In other words, the art of connoisseurship requires that the researcher have enough educational knowledge to be able to observe the subtleties in a classroom, while the criticism gives the data a public audience and illuminates the connoisseur's perception with the intention of educational improvement. Eisner (1998) makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but it leads to constructive results.

## **Selection of Schools and Participants**

For this study, two Waldorf schools, one in Florida and one in California, and two Reggio-inspired schools, one in Oregon and one in Missouri, were selected. The schools chosen have exemplary reputations and embrace the Waldorf and Reggio-inspired philosophies, respectively. The schools have agreed to be named by pseudonyms.

I contacted the director/administrator of each school and explained my research agenda pertaining to Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. After numerous emails back and forth and discussion within each schools' early childhood departments, I was met with enthusiastic support and gained access to my top four schools.

Selection of the kindergarten teachers at each of the four sites was made by the directors/administrator. All kindergarten teachers at each school were made aware of my study and were informed that participation was strictly voluntary. As a result of this selection process, two kindergarten teachers accepted from two Waldorf schools and

three kindergarten teachers from the two Reggio-inspired schools accepted. I had never worked in any capacity in the four schools studied and had never met the teacher participants or school personnel prior to scheduling and gaining permissions for my study.

### **Data Collection**

To answer my research questions, several data collection strategies were implemented. I engaged in direct observation of the teachers in their kindergarten classrooms. I spent one week in each of the four schools not only attending to the practices of the kindergarten teacher and the interaction with the children but also to the physical environment as well. This included roaming the halls and exploring the outdoor surroundings.

My observations were recorded in the form of field notes, and I included specific details of what I was observing and notes regarding my thoughts about what I was seeing. At the end of each day, I typed my handwritten notes, which gave me the opportunity to add any details that I might have missed or to elaborate more on a particular issue.

I conducted formal interviews with each of the participating teachers, the director/administrator of each school, and parents from each classroom. These interviews took place at each school site and allowed me to better understand their individual experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences.

Finally, I gathered artifacts related to the curriculum and pedagogy taking place in each classroom. Samples of kindergarten curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, projects, children's work, children's artwork, portfolios, and any other pertinent documents were collected and further aided my understanding of the full extent of the engagement and

situations teachers were offering their students in Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten.

### **Data Analysis**

During the analysis of my data, I provide a detailed illustration of each kindergarten classroom. I also individually interpret those illustrations drawing from an array of related literature. As well, I used the conceptual framework of the six dimensions that contribute to the ecology of schooling to assist in my data analysis. The six dimensions of schooling include the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998), and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). It must be noted that when analyzing my data, I was open to the data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that nothing of significance was overlooked.

### **Conclusion**

The stories I tell are only a piece of the puzzle into Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. However, I believe that these two types of kindergartens are unyielding educational arts-based choices to traditional kindergarten education. The rest of this dissertation responds to this assertion.

Chapter Two explores Waldorf education and Waldorf kindergarten as well as Reggio-Emilia education and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. It also provides an overview of three desirable components that contribute to the quality of a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten: play, creativity, and imagination. Chapter Three explains the methodology of this study and offers background on Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism. Chapter Four depicts the stories of the Waldorf kindergarten classroom and includes an interpretation and evaluation of their practices. Chapter Five depicts the

stories of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten classrooms and includes an interpretation and evaluation of their practices. Finally, Chapter Six responds to the research questions and offers implications and limitations of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER TWO  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND A REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT  
LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of Waldorf education and kindergarten, Reggio-Emilia education and Reggio-inspired kindergarten as well as three desirable components that contribute to the quality of a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten: play, creativity, and imagination.

**Waldorf Education**

In 1919, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the Austrian philosopher, scientist, and artist, was invited to give a series of lectures to the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. As a result of Steiner's influential words, the factory's owner, Emil Molt, asked him to establish and lead a school for the children of the factory's employees. Steiner agreed based upon four criteria: (1) the school would be open to all the children; (2) the school would be co-educational; (3) the school would be a twelve-year school; and (4) the teachers would be the primary control agents of the school with little influence from the government. Emil Molt agreed to Steiner's conditions, and after a training period for perspective teachers, "The Free Waldorf School" was officially opened on September 7, 1919 (McDermott, 1984).

According to the website, Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), there are currently over 1000 independent schools worldwide with

approximately 150 of them in North America. In addition, the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education has a membership of 20 public Waldorf methods schools in the United States, and there are also 102 Waldorf kindergartens that are members of WECAN (Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America).

Waldorf education honors and protects the wonder of childhood. A consistent philosophy of child development underlies the curriculum and all subjects are introduced in age appropriate fashion. The AWSNA website lists the following as the primary characteristics and main themes of Waldorf education:

- Waldorf schools are characterized by an integration of academics, the arts, and hands-on learning. They aim to teach the child on all levels: “head, heart, and hands.” Each subject studied is approached in many different ways from painting, movement, poetry, drama, music, writing, and so on in order to teach children as whole individuals.
- Programs strive to meet each child at their appropriate developmental stages. Children will keep the continuity of the same teacher or class guardian, during these key periods. Curriculum and pedagogical approaches are also tailored to each stage.
- Waldorf teachers, like Waldorf schools, are autonomous, and they have the freedom to set their own lessons plans, curriculum, and activities.
- Waldorf education strives to teach, to know, and to love the world emphasizing human and ecological values. The goal is not just to transfer information and skills, but to develop a secure, meaningful individual.
- A typical Waldorf school day aims to coincide with a child’s natural rhythms. Teachers usually structure the main lesson at the beginning of the day when minds are fresh, focusing on social and physical activities in the afternoons when students tend to feel more sluggish.

Many of the ideas behind Steiner’s educational philosophy can be traced to theories of several well-known educational philosophers, including Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel.

As was previously mentioned, Steiner (1997) believed that education should be in an understanding of child development, which begins with imitation, proceeds through



imagination, and culminates in the intellect. According to Mary Goral (2009), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1798) believed as Steiner (1997) did that education should promote and encourage qualities such as cheerfulness, spontaneity, and the inquisitiveness associated with childhood. Rousseau also believed that education should be developmentally appropriate and that young children should not be instructed in academic subjects at an early age (Goral, 2009).

Educator Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) built upon Rousseau's ideas. He and Steiner believed that education was based upon sensory impressions and children would reach their natural potential through proper sensory impressions. According to Goral (2009), in her article, "Transformational Teaching," both Steiner and Pestalozzi believed in a balanced education of head, heart, and hands. Pestalozzi was critical of traditional education that separated thinking and doing.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), better remembered as the "father of kindergarten," believed that teachers should learn with children and learning should be adapted to the individual needs of each child (Froebel Institute, 2011). Both he and Steiner saw nature as a prime source for learning and felt that manual work was ennobling. Froebel actually attended one of Pestalozzi's educational institutes that stressed, "through education the human being's divine essence is brought forth" (Froebel, 1887). Steiner took from Froebel the idea of "unfolding" (Curtis & Carter, 2003). This concept focused on the educator's role as observer: observing the natural unfolding of children and providing activities enabling them to learn when they are ready to learn. In addition to academic subjects, Steiner and Froebel believed that children should plant and work a garden as

well as experience painting, weaving, modeling with clay, knitting, signing, movement, and so on (Froebel Institute, 2011).

Many of the theories and philosophers of education cited here can be found throughout Waldorf education, from the belief in the importance of children's developmental stages to the idea that children need to be respected as spiritual beings and whose highest potential should always be kept in mind.

### **Waldorf Kindergarten**

Waldorf kindergarten teaches to the whole child: heart, hands, and head (Steiner, 2007). According to Eugene Schwartz (1996) in his book, *Playing and Thinking: How the Kindergarten Provides the Basis for Scientific Understanding*, Waldorf kindergarten children learn through imitation and doing. He also emphasizes that imaginary play is considered the most important "work" of the young child and the activity through which the child grows physically, intellectually, and emotionally (Schwartz, 1996). The educational focus is on constructive and creative play, oral language, story, and song (Edwards, 2002). Children may sing songs, paint with water colors, color with beeswax crayons, prepare their snack, hear a story told with puppets, go on a nature walk, work in the garden, build with wooden blocks, dance, or make houses using wooden play stands and cotton or silk cloth. According to Sharifa Oppenheimer (2007), master Waldorf kindergarten teacher and instructor at Rudolf Steiner College in California, through these types of activities, the Waldorf kindergarten child becomes deeply engaged and develops the powers of concentration and motivation. Rhythm and the balance of energetic and restful play must not be forgotten, for their importance leads the teacher to follow a

cyclical schedule of yearly, weekly, and daily activities including festivals and foods (Edwards, 2002).

### **Reggio-Emilia Education**

The Reggio-Emilia school began modestly after World War II, when the Italian government gave each town a small amount of money to use as they pleased to help restore the sense of community lost during the war (Wurm, 2005). Many towns built community centers to offer citizens a place to gather. However, in Villa Cella, a tiny working class village, just outside the center of Reggio-Emilia, the community members decided to build a school for their children as an investment for their future: the School of the People (Wurm, 2005).

During the week, women would gather bricks from bombed buildings, and on the weekends, the men would build (Wurm, 2005). They named the school “April 25<sup>th</sup> School” after the day of liberation from the Nazis (Wurm, 2005). Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994), known as the father of the Reggio approach to education, heard about the project at Villa Cella and thought it impossible (Wurm, 2005). According to Reggio education historians, Gandini, Etheredge, & Hill (2004), when Malaguzzi arrived at Villa Cella, he discovered that the rumors were true and the citizens were indeed building a school brick-by-brick. Malaguzzi went on to become the driving force behind the approach to education embodied in the Reggio schools, which have developed over sixty years since the first school opened (Rinaldi, 2006).

Several well-known educational theorists influenced the Reggio-Emilia philosophy, for example, the importance that is placed on the individual child constructing his own knowledge base was part of Piaget’s theory of intellectual

development (Lewin-Benham, 2008). As well, Vygostky's teaching influenced Reggio-Emilia education especially in regard to the importance placed on the social construction of learning. One of the fundamental aspects of the Reggio-Emilia approach is the co-construction of knowledge between children and children, children and teachers, children and parents, and children and the community, which according to Malaguzzi (1993) is another way that Vygostky's theory influenced Reggio-Emilia's approach (p. 8). Gardener's multiple intelligences—visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, logical-mathematical, and naturalist learner—are accommodated in the investigative classroom as well (Lewin-Benham, 2008).

The Reggio-Emilia teacher, according to Rinaldi (2001), describes her role as more hands-on and interactive in the learning process. In the classroom, children may be hard at work on a project, but are hard at work, in a group, collaborating. Reggio-Emilia educators recognize that children express what they learn in many ways that are not always easily recognized by adults. They refer to this as the one hundred languages of children (Edwards, Candini, & Forman, 1998). The child's knowledge is often expressed through their increasing ability to engage in many forms of expression. Close attention is paid to a child's natural infinities and energetically plays off them with song, games, and creative play (Gandini, 1998).

The negotiated curriculum used by Reggio-Emilia educators takes into account that the child is their co-constructor of knowledge (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). They view children as the directors of their own learning through an innate desire for growth and knowledge of the world (Edwards, 2002). "Children have the right to be, to

learn, to express themselves in a fertile ground, in a place for building knowledge as opposed to delivering or consuming knowledge” (Lewin-Benham, 2008, p. 59).

Reggio-Emilia education uses a thoughtfully organized classroom, but it moves further outside the box by allowing children to choose the direction of the curriculum according to their interests. Teachers guide the children in learning and use the beautiful environment as a pedagogical tool (Wurm, 2005). They assist in creating connections between ideas and the environment. Through this approach teachers help the children understand the meaning of their experiences more completely through the documentation of their work, observations, and continuous teacher dialogue (Kinney & Wharton, 2008). In addition, Reggio-Emilia education guides children’s ideas with provocations, not pre-determined curricula (Malaguzzi, 1993).

### **Reggio-Inspired Kindergarten**

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten is grounded in the belief that education opens opportunities for all children to participate in creating and shaping their own lives and to contributing to the quality of life around them (Kinney & Wharton, 2008). The teachers in the classroom value imagination, creativity, interests, ideas, and questions from the children. The teachers practice listening, observing, inquiring, staying attentive, and reflecting together with children and families. The role of the arts and sciences as languages for thinking, expressing ideas, and communicating stories is also valued in the Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom (Katz & Cesarone, 1994).

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten strives to keep the classroom a place where the instructional approach is based on listening and relationships. Their guiding principals are

inspired and influenced by the early childhood schools of the Reggio-Emilia research in the field of neuroscience and constructivist practice in the United States and beyond.

One of the most interesting elements within Reggio-inspired kindergarten is the central importance given to the arts as a vehicle for learning. Detailed drawing activities are a daily occurrence, and the outstanding standard of work produced by the children has become widely acknowledged (Rinaldi, 2006). Children are also encouraged to participate in a variety of expressive activities such as sculpture, dramatic play, shadow play, puppetry, painting, dancing, music, ceramics, construction, and writing (Rinaldi, 2001). The plethora of resources in the classroom is testimony to the importance placed on this area of child development. Within the school environment is a designated and well-structured art studio referred to as the Atelier directed by a qualified and experienced visual arts specialist called the Atelierista. The purpose of this space and its specialist is to offer the children the space and the opportunity to express their innate creativity as another language of communication (Morrison, 2006).

Consistent with the work on multiple intelligences by American psychologist Howard Gardner, Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers are fully aware of the importance of developing all areas of learning and understanding, not only the logical and linguistic (Rinaldi, 2001). While literacy and numeracy activities undoubtedly have their place in the daily experiences of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten classrooms, teachers believe strongly in the central role that the arts have to play for many reasons. These reasons are as follows:

- They acknowledge the fact that kindergarteners are extremely expressive with an enormous capacity for sharing feelings and emotions and that imagination plays a key role in the child's search for knowledge and understanding.

- They are convinced of the overriding importance of the learning process rather than the final product. Involvement in the arts allows the children to revisit subjects of interest over and over again through many different media to gain multiple perspectives and a higher level of understanding.
- They are aware that by concentrating too much on the development of the child's verbal and literacy skills, teachers can covertly devalue the child's skilled use of their many non-verbal languages. Reggio-inspired kindergartener's capacity to communicate through gestures, storytelling, emotions, dance, music, sculpture, painting, scribed stories, and many more is therefore greatly valued, and the teachers strive to develop these.
- They believe strongly that the arts can give children the opportunity to look at and experience their world in different ways. The children are encouraged to use all of their senses to seek a greater understanding through observation, analysis, and piecing together what they experienced, they dismantle and reassemble the original creating a new and individual whole. Synesthetic activities such as encouraging children to make pictorial representations of smell or noise are a dominant feature and seek to give children a fuller understanding of the world. "It is through the process of transformation that we become closer to the very essence of life." (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 12)

### **Play**

Play is one of the most desirable components that contribute to the quality of Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. Children's play represents the best way in which developmental requirements can be met. Play is a dynamic, ever-changing process that is multisensory, interactive, creative, and imaginative. When children play, they have their whole brain stimulated, not just specific areas related to formal academic skills (Almon, 2010). Play facilitates physical and sensorimotor development, provides social learning, emotional growth, and cognitive development (Barnes, 1991). Joan Almon (2002), from the U.S. Alliance for Childhood, believes that the children who are the most active players in kindergarten are also the most active players in elementary school. This is supported by a study done in the 1970s in Germany, at a time when many kindergartens were being transformed into academic rather than play-based environments. The study compared 50 play-based kindergartens with 50 academically

based kindergartens. These children were followed until the fourth grade. At this point, the children from the play-based group excelled past the academically based group in every measured area of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Especially striking were the results among lower income children, who clearly benefited from a play-based approach. The overall compelling results of this study convinced Germany to switch all of its kindergartens back to play-based (DerSpiegel, 1977). Of course, like the United States today, Germany is rethinking this. In order to prepare children for a globalized economy they must get a jump-start on literacy, numeracy, and other academic subjects.

Dorothy and Jerome Singer, psychologists previously at Yale University, have devoted their lives to the subject of children's play (Singer & Singer, 2007). They summarize their experiences in this way:

Over many years of observing children in free-play, we have found that those who engage in make-believe, what Piaget calls symbolic play, are more joyful and smile and laugh more often than those who seem to be at odds with themselves—the children who wander aimlessly around the nursery school or daycare center looking for something to do, who play in a preservative way with a few blocks, or who annoy their peers by teasing them or interrupting their games. (Singer & Singer, 2007, p. 64)

Sara Smilansky (1990), a researcher from Israel, did a study of children at play in Israel and the United States. Her definition of dramatic play is play taking place when a child pretends to be someone else and socio-dramatic play as those times when two or more children cooperate in such role-playing. Smilansky (1990) believes that dramatic play and socio-dramatic play are strong mediums for the development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, which in turn affects a child's success in school.



Three theorists with similar views on play are: (1) Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852); (2) Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934); and (3) David Elkind (1931-present).

Froebel (1887), a German educationist, and the founding father of kindergarten, believed that “play [was] the mirror of life, leading to self-discipline and respect of law and order.” He set the stage for systematic play allowing children to learn to discriminate, analyze, share, and solve problems. Believing that play was the engine that drives learning and not idle behavior, he supported the idea that play was a biological imperative to discover how things work (Froebel Institute, 2011). It was happy work but with purpose. Froebel sought to harness this impulse and focus child’s play energy on specific activities designed to lead them to create meaning from their experiences (Froebel Institute, 2011).

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, continually assessed play in the life of a young child. He believed that children were active partners in their interactions with play constructing knowledge, skills and attitudes, and not just mirroring the world around them (Schwartz, 1996). He believed that a child’s greatest achievements were possible in play: achievements that tomorrow would become his basic level of real action (Vygotsky, 1929). Vygotsky believed that in play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior, and in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.

David Elkind (2001), a professor Emeritus of Child Development at Tufts University, believes that play is a fundamental mode of learning. It is a way to learn about self and the world through self-created experiences (p. 85). He goes on to say,

child initiated play is so important, and it shouldn’t be replaced either by adult-organized sports or by academic activities disguised by games. When we appreciate the importance role-play serves in a child’s learning about self and

world, we give children the time and opportunity to engage in the self-initiated play that is the surest way for them to fully use all of their intellectual, emotional, and social potential. (Elkind, 2001, p. 85)

Elkind suggests that parents should allow children to be children not just because it should be fun to be a child but also because denying youth's unfetter joys keeps children from developing into inquisitive, creative creatures. There is thought that a child who has had a rich exposure to play experiences will be more likely to become an adult who can manage unpredictable social situations (Elkind, 2001). Elkind warns, "Play has to be reframed and seen not as an opposite to work but rather as a compliment. Curiosity, imagination, and creativity are like muscles...if you don't use them, you lose them" (2001, p.86).

These three theorists helped lay the groundwork for how and what play means for children, and their work is pivotal in understanding play.

Children start to display their imaginary characters, their individual visions of pleasure and pain, of strength and weakness, and of love and loss at a very early age (Stacy, 2009). Once they reach kindergarten, they are ready to build complex worlds in which friendship and fairness are inalienable rights, and every child has a secure place in an intimate community (Stacy, 2009). In kindergarten, play should still be the primary reality for its small members. Play contains the only set of circumstances children understand from beginning to end: "I can do this well," the kindergartners seem to say. "I can be this. I understand what is happening to me and to the other children" (Gussin Paley 2009, p. 61). Vivian Gussin Paley in *The Alliance for Childhoods: Crisis in Kindergarten* states,

in a kindergarten where children play, the teacher has an opportunity to study each child's individual style and story and to introduce all manner of new material into a functioning social community. In a kindergarten where children play, children learn to focus their imaginations in ever more complex ways, and in the enlivened environment, and are ready to conquer new programs (2009, p. 61).

Play is the most natural learning tool of our kindergartens.

### **Creativity**

The creative process involves a number of components, most commonly: imagination, originality, productivity, problem solving, and the ability to produce an outcome of worth and value. Creativity in young children is described as every child can be considered to have creative potential and to be capable of creative expression (Ogletree, 1996).

Again, Froebel comes to the forefront, as creativity was one of his major principles for kindergarten. He believed that the intent was to treat children as creative, productive human beings and to foster their desire for practical usefulness. Froebel believed in, hands-on learning which engages in self-directed activities and leads to creative expression (The Froebel Foundation, 2008). In looking at ways for creativity to suit young children, teachers must put the emphasis on the creative process, rather than judge the quality of their products. Craft (2003) makes this clear because young children may not have developed all the skills they need to achieve a successful creative outcome. A similar point was made by Malaguzzi (1998) in *The Hundred Languages of Children*: "Creativity becomes more visible when adults try to be more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results they achieve in various fields of doing and understanding" (p. 77). In order for creativity to be present in kindergarten classrooms, the environment must be physically appealing, but it also needs to be positive and

supportive emotionally, where mistakes are encouraged and experimentation highly valued. An atmosphere of joy and playfulness should be present at all times (Schwartz, 1996).

In order to consider the other ways in which creativity can be fostered in early childhood educational settings, it may be helpful to identify some of the components of creativity in young children:

- Creativity is closely bound up with an individual's personality and emotional life: there is more involved than just thinking skills (Russ, 1996).
- In order for children to express creativity, they need to be adaptable and flexible of thought (Russ, 1996).
- Independence and control of the creative process need to be in the hands of the child (Russ, 1996).

According to Almon (2002), although some children already have the necessary components, others may still require help, encouragement, and skill development in order to engage in creative experiences.

Most kindergarten teachers would agree that creativity just might be the freest form of self-expression. There is nothing more satisfying and fulfilling to children than to be able to express themselves openly and without judgment (Schwartz, 1996). According to Schwartz, children need plenty of opportunities for creative thinking. This can be accomplished by providing activities that are based on their interests and ideas (Schwartz, 1996). Part of the creative process is to allow children to have the time to be creative in the moment. Often we hurry them, not giving them the appropriate time to talk, plan, design, construct, experiment, and revise (Schwartz, 1996).

While there are many components of creative thinking, the three most central for thinking in children are:

1. Playful exploration: ways of playing, especially with open-ended materials—either alone or with others—that allow for creative expression and spontaneous discovery.
2. Fluent Ideation: the ability to generate multiple ideas, including unusual ones, across multiple categories for a single image, object, or situation.
3. Novel Combination: the ability to generate original thoughts and ideas by making connections between or among concepts that the child previously saw as separate or unrelated (Parents Newsletter, PBS, July 2013).

## **Imagination**

Imagination is the ability to see “what can be” from “what is.” Galileo’s famous experiment of falling objects most likely took place in the laboratory of his mind, not from the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Einstein’s theory of general relativity was probably rooted in a thought experiment at age 16 where he imagined chasing a beam of light, and as some would have you believe, his final breakthrough came during a daydream, lying on a country hill in 1915 (Lewis, 2013). As this great scientist said, “knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world” (Lewis, 2013).

Imagination creates a new event, details, or image within our brains, which might not have occurred in the physical world. There is the belief that imagination is rooted in reality. You cannot imagine without previous input from one or more of the five senses (Lewis, 2013).

A person born without the ability to hear cannot imagine music, since no reality of sound exists as a basis. There is no such thing as a “new” thought, only variations of data we already have in our memories. For example, composers can create new music, and artists can paint new scenes, but each is just a novel variation of sounds or sights harvested from memories. (Lewis, 2013, p. 2)

Dr. Alan Leslie (2002), professor of psychology and cognitive science at Rutgers University and one of the pioneers in the study of the process of imagination, explains while participating in a panel called, “The Infinite Mind: Imagination,”

Imagination is the deconstruction and recycling of memories where individual details are added, subtracted, and altered, often multiple times. It is the foundation of human progress, allowing us to grow from prehistoric creatures to astronauts on the lunar surface. It is the basis for social interaction and communication, and process by which we put ourselves in another person's shoes to communicate and learn empathy. (Leslie, 2002)

In the world of child development, phrases like critical thinking and creative problem-solving abilities are used when referring to goals for a child's cognitive development.

What is really being talked about is imagination. In order to create children with imaginations, they need exposure to making a mess, exploring the woods, splashing in a puddle, experimenting with the visual arts, playing with costumes, pretending to be a bird gliding through the sky, and so on and so forth (Lewis, 2013).

Today, children spend hours sitting at a computer, watching television, or playing video games on an ipad, iphone, or Xbox. They become passive participants being fed someone else's stories instead of having the time and the space to dream up their own. Soccer, ballet, T-ball, karate, and gymnastics are just examples of all the wonderful extracurricular opportunities to develop children's skills, however, piling these all on top of each other every week leaves little or no opportunity for children to use their creativity and imagination to decide: how to use their free time; what fantasy to explore; what part of their world they'd like to discover more about at their own pace, in their own way (Mandell, 2008).

According to the article, "The Importance of Imagination," by The Children's Courtyard (2013), current child development theory and research indicates children today desperately need time and space in order to develop their creative imaginations, free from adult agendas. There is new respect for daydreaming, a need for free time in which to do

nothing, and for the freedom to let the imagination—perhaps our most powerful tool—soar (The Children’s Courtyard, 2013).

In Sherri Mandell’s article, “Nurturing Imagination,” she cites Alan Flashman, MD., child psychiatrist from Albert Einstein Medical School saying that a child can express his real self in imagination because the imagination is unmediated by anybody else’s expectations or demands. It is not imposed on him. It comes from within his inner life. Imagination is important because it integrates a child’s feelings and dreams and actions. It’s a place where a child can experiment and feel power and control. We, as the adults, should respect the integrity and freedom of the experience rather than try to qualify it as a unitarian activity (Mandell, 2008).

Children who use their imagination reap a host of benefits, according to Dorothy Singer (1992), co-author of the book, *The House of Make Believe: Children’s Play and the Developing Imagination*. Several benefits contributing to imagination are:

- Imagination helps school-age children solve problems by helping them think through different outcomes to various situations and role playing ways to cope with difficult or new circumstances.
- Imagination allows children to practice real-life skills. From shopping at a pretend grocery store to assuming roles and dialogue for dolls and puppets, children’s’ pretend play helps them practice and apply new learning and better understanding of how those skills are used in the real world.
- Imagination encourages a rich vocabulary. Telling and hearing real or made-up stories, reading books, and pretend play help children learn and retain new words.
- Imagination helps children grow up to be adults who are creative thinkers. Adults who were imaginative children often become problem solvers, innovators, and creative thinkers (Singer, 1992).

In a question and answer roundtable titled, “Imagination, Possibility, and Wide-Awakens,” (2012), Maxine Greene, well-known educational philosopher, expressed:

Without imagination, you live in a small room with windows closed. Imagination

opens the windows and shows us landscapes, horizons that we would not otherwise perceive...I want education to empower people to see possibility. Imagination is the capacity to think of things as if they could be otherwise. It is habit! I am obsessed with the idea of imagination, and I try to infect others with the same obsession. (2012)

Imagination is an important kindergarten readiness skill. Imagining exercises the brain, making new pathways and more complex connections. Imagination is a skill that can be taught and applied. The world will not change if we simply imagine it to change; it is necessary to know how to translate our imagination into action (Stacy, 2011, p. 68).

### **Conclusion**

I have provided an overview of Waldorf education and Reggio Emilia education two arts-based approaches seen as unyielding educational choices to traditional education. In addition, I have provided an overview of Waldorf kindergarten as well as Reggio-inspired kindergarten giving the reader a foundational understanding about what each approach has to offer in the field of alternative kindergarten sections.

Play, creativity, and imagination have been discussed as three desirable components of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten each contributing to the quality of these two approaches. I have provided a definition of each component and what their purpose is within the kindergarten experience as they each relate to the developmental stages and growth of 4, 5, and 6 year old and their acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Qualitative Research

This study is based on qualitative research using educational connoisseurship and criticism as the method to study Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. There are several reasons that this type of research was most appropriate for this study. First, qualitative research encompasses the human activity and interaction that occurs in the educational setting as well as incorporating other areas that are significant in recreating the setting of educational activities—resources, building, objects, etc. (Eisner, 1998, p. 5). A qualitative approach can best capture, describe, and interpret the setting, the program, the individuals involved, and the activities that occur during the implementation of the philosophies of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten (Eisner, 1998). Second, qualitative research is established within the educational community as it “participates in a general universe of discourse in education” (Eisner, 1991, pp. 5-6). Last, qualitative research relates to the arts: “the arts are paradigm cases of qualitative intelligence in action” (Eisner, 1998, p. 6). Since this study was of an educational nature and “teaching is a form of qualitative inquiry,” it is only appropriate that this study be qualitative in nature (Eisner, 1998, p. 6).

#### **Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism**

Educational connoisseurship and criticism is a qualitative arts-based research method devised by Elliot Eisner (1998). To carry out educational connoisseurship and criticism is to concentrate on seeing, describing, interpreting, and making judgments about what occurs in educational settings (Eisner, 1998).

Educational connoisseurship and criticism has an established record at the University of Denver (Bryza, 2005; Austin, 2004; Smith, 2003) and has a strong presence of dissertation topics such as Reggio-inspired arts studios (Ganus, 2010), teacher artistry (Trousas, 2009), bullying (Bennett, 2008), outdoor education (Kime, 2008), well-being in education (Cloninger, 2008), ecologically minded educators (Moroye, 2007), the experiences of Columbine parents (Mears, 2005), and charter schools (Kim, 2003). Eisner's method is a useful and revealing approach to qualitative inquiry as it has the ability to make fine-tuned assessments of educational settings.

Educational connoisseurship is the art of appreciation (Eisner, 1998). It is a matter of noticing, interpreting, and making fine grain discriminations among situations, characters, objects, performances, and educational practices (Eisner, 1998). It relies on perceptivity, which is the ability to experience and differentiate qualitative relationships (Eisner, 1998). According to Eisner, "classrooms are probably one of the most complex subjects of connoisseurship" (1998, p. 66). It requires the understanding of the classroom, the curriculum, the educational process, the student-teacher relationships, the student-student relationships, the parent-teacher relationships, and the parent-student relationships (Eisner, 1998). It is the perception and interpretation of these events that establishes validity about what is important in educational settings (Eisner, 1998).

### **Elements of Educational Criticism**

Through the process of observations, theories are established. It is the process of perception that provides a tool for assessing information (Eisner, 1998). “Labels and theories,” says Jerome Bruner (1964), “are among the most useful technologies of the mind” (as cited in Eisner, 1991, p. 67). Awareness through observation allows knowledge to be secured, “knowledge...includes awareness of an array of qualities...connoisseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (Eisner, 1998, p. 68).

While connoisseurship is a private act of appreciation, criticism makes the act public (Eisner, 1998). Educational criticism is designed to transform the qualities of a learning environment into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and evaluates the qualities that have been experienced (Eisner, 1998). Educational criticism includes the dimensions of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematic (Eisner, 1998).

Through description, the readers have an opportunity to visualize and vicariously experience what is taking place in the classroom. In the case of this study, it was within two Waldorf kindergarten classrooms and two Reggio-inspired classrooms. A narrative description not only allows the reader to see with the mind’s eye, but it also allows him to feel the emotions associated with risk-taking, self-discovery, and curricular connections (Eisner, 1991). Description is the traditional means through which qualitative researchers introduce their studies and are encouraged to “tell the story...then tell what happened to be the way you told it” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 16).

Interpretation in educational criticism explores the meaning of the events described and illuminates the potential consequences of what has been observed as well

as provides reasons that account for what has been seen (Eisner, 1998). To help interpret the data I was collecting, I used Eisner's (2002) three questions as a guide: "What does the situation mean to those involved? How does this classroom operate? What ideas, concepts, or theories can be used to explain its major features?" (p. 229).

The evaluation dimension requires appraising the kinds of experiences had by the individual participants in the study and evaluating the effectiveness of the educational setting. Evaluation speaks to Eisner's belief that educational criticism should contribute to the improvement of the educational enterprise (Eisner, 1998). This study uses this dimension in response to the descriptions of events observed in person, formal and informal interviews of administrators, teachers, and parents, and a collection of written documents and artistic products.

Thematics is employed in order to identify reoccurring themes and to summarize the essential features of the study (Thorsen, 2010). Themes provide the reader with guidance for anticipating what may be found in other similar context (Uhrmacher, 1993). This study looked for reoccurring themes among the data collected in Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten observational settings, in formal and informal interview sessions, and in written materials and artifacts. The themes that arise out of the investigations of school settings can offer insight, strategy, and inspiration for change in alternate settings (Trousas, 2009).

Together, the four dimensions of educational connoisseurship and criticism discussed—description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics—support the structure of this methodology.

## **The Sites**

I was aware from my extensive reading in preparation for this study that there were many Waldorf kindergartens across the country to choose from; however, choices for Reggio-inspired kindergartens were going to be limited since traditional Reggio-Emilia schools typically include six weeks to pre-school age children. Two Waldorf schools were selected: a small private pre-school through eighth grade in Florida and a private pre-school through twelfth grade in California. As well, two Reggio-inspired schools were selected: a charter school kindergarten through fifth grade in Oregon and a private pre-school through eighth grade in Missouri.

In order to secure these four research sites, I contacted each of the directors/administrators. After months of back and forth exchanges of questions and answers, I received written permission from all four accepting my study and me into one of their kindergarten classrooms. The Westcoast Waldorf School and Waldorf School of California<sup>2</sup> have exemplar reputations each embracing the Waldorf approach and its philosophy. Joy Charter School and The Experiential School not only embrace the Reggio-inspired approach and philosophy, but they are considered pioneers of taking Reggio education to the next level within the United States past pre-school.

The Westcoast Waldorf School is a private coeducational nonsectarian institution located on the west side of Florida and includes children from preschool through eighth grade. Westcoast Waldorf embraces diversity as it serves families from a wide range of religious, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds that sense the value and richness of Waldorf's approach to education. Its professional affiliation is with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA).

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<sup>2</sup> The names of the schools have been changed in accordance with IRB.

Waldorf School of California is a private coeducational nonsectarian school as well. It is located in the Bay area and includes children from preschool through twelfth grade. Waldorf School of California is supported by a diverse, progressively minded community of parents. It is fully accredited by AWSNA and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Joy Charter School is a publicly funded charter school located within a Children’s Museum in northern Oregon. Dependent upon an annual lottery, it includes children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. It is bound by the standards and procedures of the public charter schools of Oregon.

The Experiential School located in the state of Missouri is an independent coeducational school that includes children from preschool through eighth grade. They actively promote opportunities and activities for their students, faculty, and community to engage in meaningful dialogue based on diverse perspectives. The Experiential School is accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACCS) and by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS).

School	Enrolled Students	Teacher Student Ratio	Caucasian Students	African-American Students	Hispanic/Latino Students	Asian Students	Male Female
Westcoast Waldorf School	125	1:8	75%	0%	18%	1%	48% 52%
Waldorf School of California	320	1:13	80%	2%	2%	15%	50% 50%
Joy Charter School	80	1:16	74%	8%	8%	5%	51% 49%
The Experiential School	270	2:24	75%	25% **Reported as Students of Color, includes African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian			52% 48%

Table 1: Demographics of School Systems

## **Participants**

In order to secure participants for this study, I depended upon the director/administrator of each school. They were already on board with interest, enthusiasm, and excitement. All kindergarten teachers were made aware of my study and knew that their participation was strictly voluntary. As a result of this process, Mrs. Schmidt from Westcoast Waldorf, Teacher Gloria from Waldorf School of California, Ms. Teri from Joy Charter School, and Ms. Paula and Ms. Jenna from The Experiential School volunteered to participate.

Mrs. Schmidt, at the Westcoast Waldorf School, is a veteran early childhood teacher with over 35 years of teaching at the time of my observations. She is committed to the kindergarten philosophies of Waldorf education. Teacher Gloria, at the Waldorf School of California, is also a veteran early childhood teacher with over 25 years of experience. Before coming to Waldorf School of California in 1990, Teacher Gloria taught kindergarten in public and private schools to culturally diverse populations. She has Waldorf teacher certification from Rudolf Steiner College. Ms. Teri, at Joy Charter School, has been teaching kindergarten there for 5 years and embraces the Reggio-inspired approach to kindergarten. Ms. Paula came to The Experiential School in 2003. Her first 9 years were spent teaching preschool and third grade. At the time of this study, Ms. Paula joined Ms. Jenna in kindergarten and expressed her enthusiasm to be back in the early childhood environment. She is committed to an experiential way of teaching and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten approach. Last, Ms. Jenna is the other half of the

kindergarten teaching team at The Experiential School. Joining the school staff in 2001, Ms. Jenna has spent the last 12 years immersed in the school’s philosophies and kindergarten approaches. I have included a breakdown of teacher information in Table Two below.

Teacher	School	Years Teaching	Date of Observation
Mrs. Schmidt	Westcoast Waldorf	35 years (not all in Waldorf)	January 21-25, 2013
Teacher Gloria	Waldorf School of California	25 years (23 years of Waldorf experience)	January 28-February 1, 2013
Ms. Teri	Joy Charter School	5 years	February 4-8, 2013
Ms. Paula Ms. Jenna	The Experiential School	10 years 12 years	February 11-15, 2013

Table 2: Teacher Participants

### Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The collection of data in this study included three principle actions. First, I engaged in observation of classroom environments. I spent 5 days in each of the four classrooms that participated in this part of the dissertation process. In addition, I observed what took place in the school; this included walking the halls, stepping into classrooms, and exploring the outside surroundings. Hubbard and Power (2003) recommend including unstructured and semi-structured observations, which allowed me the flexibility to attend to other events or activities that occurred simultaneously in the classroom. I was also able to engage in brief, but intense periods of observation and note taking (Hubbard and Power, 2003). I found the unstructured observation style of data collection more “free flowing” enabling me to switch gears from one event to another as new, and



perhaps more interesting events arose (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). My observations were recorded using field notes kept in separate notebooks for each class studied. I made the decision early on to simply stop thinking and just write what I saw. It became clear to me that I would undoubtedly begin to focus on the important or interesting issues as I began to observe and record. I divided each page into two columns using the left column for recording my actual observations and the right column for noting my preliminary interpretations of what I had observed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to these interpretations as “observer’s comments” and insist that they will shed light on emerging patterns from their observational data. I found that my “observer comments” or “analytic notes” allowed me to record my reflective thoughts on what I had observed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My intent was to carefully watch and systematically record the interactions between the teacher and her students.

Second, I conducted formal and informal interviews. Formal interview participants included the classroom teachers, director/administrator of each site, and parents from each classroom. The interviews were audiotaped, and in accordance with IRB, interviewees signed a consent form. The questions included in the interview protocol were structured specifically for Waldorf kindergarten teachers, directors/administrators, and parents as well as for Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers, directors/administrators, and parents (see Appendices A-F). I had no initial contact with the parents included in the interview process; however, I did give each school dates and times and hoped for at least four parents from each class. The classroom teacher or the schools’ director/administrator contacted the parents either in a classroom newsletter or a school notice asking for volunteers from the parents to participate in formal interviews

with this doctoral researcher. When I arrived at each school, parents had already signed up. Each office administrative assistant made reminder calls to each parent so that they would not forget their voluntary commitment.

My first concern was to make sure all individuals participating in the formal interviews felt comfortable with this process and me. I believe that one of my strengths is in creating a comfortable environment for appropriate communication to take place. There were no difficulties that occurred. Although the guide questions were structured, flexibility was important as well, as often other questions emerged depending on the participant and the direction taken from their original answers. These formal interviews gave me the opportunity to probe further and ask for clarification in a participant's response to a given question. The length of the interviews ranged from ten minutes to almost an hour depending upon who was being interviewed and their interest. In all, twenty-eight interviews were conducted and transcribed. Informal interviews included spontaneous conversations that took place throughout the data collection and were typically part of my daily interactions with the children in the classroom and school environment. No child was specifically identified.

Below is a chart showing all 28 interviews that were conducted.

<b>Voluntary Interview Participant</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Length of Interview</b>	<b>Other</b>
Mrs. Schmidt	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	59m 4s	
Teacher Gloria	Waldorf School of California	Female	44m 25s	
Ms. Teri	Joy Charter School	Female	n/a	Ms. Teri emailed her interview questions.
Ms. Paula	The Experiential School	Female	30m 8s	
Ms. Jenna	The Experiential School	Female	32m 20s	
Director/Administrator	Westcoast Waldorf	Male	20m 29s	
Director/Administrator	Waldorf School of California	Female	37m 21s	
Director/Administrator	Joy Charter School	Female	27m 28s	
Director/Administrator	The Experiential	Female	35m 41s	

	School			
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	10m 16s	
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	10m 56s	
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	11m 30s	
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Male	19m 3s	
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	25m 19s	
Parent	Westcoast Waldorf	Female	13m 19s	
Parent	Waldorf School of California	Female	27m 43ss	
Parent	Waldorf School of California	Male	20m 53s	
Parent	Waldorf School of California	Male	10m 50s	
Parent	Waldorf School of California	Female	25m 52s	
Parent	Waldorf School of California	Male	15m 52s	
Parent	Joy Charter School	Female	12m 24s	
Parent	Joy Charter School	Female	14m 9s	
Parent	Joy Charter School	Female	10m 30s	
Parent	Joy Charter School	Female	29m 22s	
Parent	The Experiential School	Female	12m 8s	
Parent	The Experiential School	Female	16m 53s	
Parent	The Experiential School	Female	10m 51s	
Parent	The Experiential School	Female	16m 3s	

Table 3: Interviews Conducted

Finally, artifact collection contributed to a better understanding of what was occurring in the classrooms and the schools. Artifacts included such items as school publications, kindergarten curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, student work, artwork, student handwork, student portfolios, photographs, and any other written or visual sources of data pertinent to happenings within the classroom and school.

I used several strategies in order to analyze the data collected. First, I have been a person who journals since my teenage years. It has allowed me the luxury of self-reflection during all of the moments in my life that were important. This dissertation process was one of those moments. Wolcott (2009) calls it “free-writing.” This free-writing allows the researcher time to reflect on what was observed, inspires new questions or new frames of reference to use as observations progress, keeps the writer

engaged in the material, and helps in making connections between what is observed and the theories that could be used to make useful interpretations (Wolcott, 2009). I kept a journal throughout the entire process of this study. My self-reflections have allowed me to make improvements toward the analysis of this project. Second, I typed my field notes on a daily basis, which enabled me to contemplate the day's work and fill in any gaps left as a result of my hurried note taking. As I eventually looked for themes and connections within the data, I used a labeling or a coding system for themes that reoccurred in the different settings. Although my interviews were professionally transcribed after the data collection was completed, I listened to each interview at least once, sometimes twice, as yet another way of interacting with the data.

Finally, I relied on Eisner's (1998) conceptual framework concentrating on the five dimensions that contribute to the ecology of schooling (intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative) as well as Uhrmacher's (1991) sixth dimension (aesthetic). This conceptual framework served as a structure for my observations, interpretations, analysis, and helped guide the development of my questions I asked the participants in the interview process. However, I remained open to the data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that nothing of significance was overlooked.

### **Validity**

The educational critic can support the validity of his or her study in three ways: (1) structural corroboration; (2) consensual validation; and (3) referential adequacy. Structural corroboration, like triangulation, is a means through which multiple types of data are related to one another to either support or contradict the validity of one's findings (Eisner, 1998). These data come from direct observations of the setting,

interviews, and the analysis of artifacts. Educational critics seek the convergence of evidence that establishes credibility and allows the researcher to feel confident about their observations, interpretations, and conclusions.

Even though structural corroboration allows the researcher to compare data from multiple sources in their study, one might interpret the same event differently from the other. Therefore, consensual validation as Eisner (1998) explains is

not secured by seeking consensus among critics, but by considering the reason critics give the descriptions they provide, the cogency of their arguments, the incisiveness of their observations, the coherence of the case, and undoubtedly, the elegance of the language. (p. 112)

For this purpose transcriptions and descriptions were shared with the classroom teachers as a way of member checking. Member checking allows the individual from where the data originated to be able to check their interview transcriptions and the researcher's tentative interpretations in order to make sure that descriptions are plausible and if what they have expressed is how they want to leave their interview transcriptions.

Finally, referential adequacy as Eisner (1998) explains, "an educational critic's work is referentially adequate when the readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic's observations" (p.114). In addition, after reading an educational criticism, the reader should be able to enter similar contexts and expect to see aspects of what the critic has portrayed.

### **Research Questions**

This dissertation is not about comparing these two approaches to arts-based schools or to each other. Rather it is about developing the rich descriptions that come from this type of research as a way to examine my five research questions. I leave the

possibility of a compare/contrast study open for future research. However, I believe that arts-based schools have a particular orientation towards education, which includes an emphasis on the senses and an emphasis on imagination and other artistic sensibilities; thus, from this point of view, my research questions not only support this, so does my chosen method.

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
2. What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice?
3. What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments?
4. What perspectives do parents have of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
5. What are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?

### **The Ecology of the Classroom**

The conceptual framework used in this study is based on the six dimensions of schooling proposed by Eisner (1998, 2002) including the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical, the evaluative, and the aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991).

As Eisner explains, “the intentional dimension focuses on goals and aims that are formulated for the school or a classroom” (1998, p. 73). In order to meet the curriculum goals that are intended, these goals guide the activities and learning structures in the classroom. According to Uhrmacher (1991), intentions may both limit and create

possibilities for educational experiences. Understanding the aims and goals provides insight into the nature of the educational experience offered in both the Waldorf kindergarten and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten classrooms. Eisner (1998) points out that there is often discrepancy between what educators say they want to achieve and what they actual do achieve.

The structural dimension investigates the blocks of time and how they are arranged for class instruction (Eisner, 1998). The blocks of time, the arrangement of the class instruction, and what is being taught during what time may influence the experiences within the classroom. Situations can be created and organized in such a way that they create student and teacher effectiveness (Eisner, 1998). This study attempted to describe and interpret the decisions that create the structure of the Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten classrooms, the resulting conditions, and how they have limited or expanded possibilities for educational experiences.

The curricular dimension refers to the kind and quality of content provided in the classroom and the nature of the activities in which students engage (Uhrmacher, 1991). It was especially intriguing to oversee the kindergarten curriculums of both Waldorf and Reggio-inspired in order to notice how each teacher reinterprets it in the classroom. According to Eisner (1998), decisions about the curriculum teach students many important things beside the content. The intended curriculum, teaching practices, dissemination of information, and the evaluation of these techniques contribute to the importance of these aspects of educational connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998).

The pedagogical dimension refers to the specific act of teaching and the connection between teachers and the intended curriculum (Eisner, 1998). The teachers'

decision-making abilities in regard to what is important to teach and what is important to dismiss will have a great affect on the nature of the students' educational experiences (Eisner, 1998). This guides the process in the classroom. In this study, the role of the teacher is a critical component of the pedagogical dimension. Why have the Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers selected to teach the material they have and what is the impact and relevance that they hope to make upon their students?

The evaluative dimension is the process of assessing the information that teachers have disseminated and students have processed (Eisner, 1998). In other words, the ways in which the teachers assess student learning. This study described, interpreted, and appraised the evaluation processes of the Waldorf kindergarten teachers and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers.

The aesthetic dimension refers to the attributes of the materials used in the classrooms, choices made by the teachers in terms of creating an arts-based learning environment, and choices made by the students as they create (Uhrmacher, 1991). Both Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten are arts-based approaches, and this study provides an in-depth description, interpretation, and analysis of this dimension.

Together, these six dimensions have guided my observations and analysis and offered a framework for seeing what Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice. For the purposes of this study, I visually placed Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten in the center and the dimensions of schooling connected to another surrounding these two approaches as seen below in Figure 1.



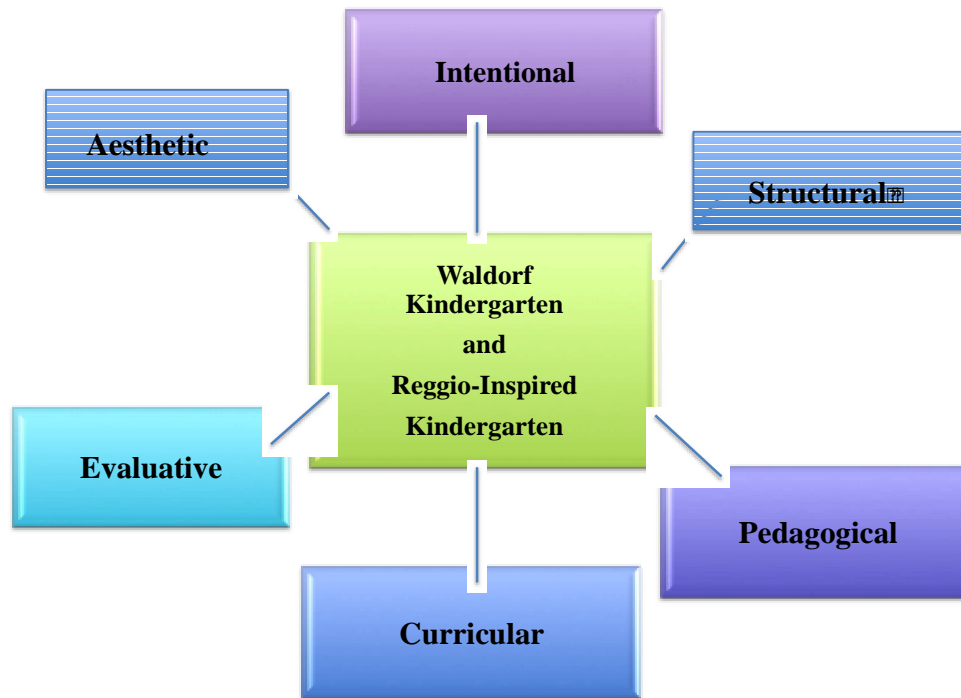


Figure 1: Six Dimensions of Schooling and the Ecology of the Classroom

### About the Researcher

I have had many opportunities to evaluate and analyze a 39-year career of working with children, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and other professionals from all different walks of life. Concentrating on where it all began with education, I surmise that I am an educator because I want every child to know that they are exceptional and deserve to have their academic, social, and emotional needs met according to what is in their individual best interests. I believe that all children are capable of learning if given the appropriate learning environment. It is the educator's responsibility to figure out how each child does learn and incorporate those findings into

the day-to-day happenings within the classroom. This also means being a great listener and providing children with fantastic communication skills.

I am an educator, so that I may provide a safe learning environment for all children. It is vital to create an atmosphere that promotes the respect of one another in the classroom—unity in working together—as well as individuality with regard to accepting differences in one another. The ability to care should always be at the forefront of any classroom environment.

I am an educator because I believe in each and every child and have always-established high, but attainable expectations according to the individual learning styles. I continue to strive to reassess expectations so that when deemed necessary new goals may be established. I believe that learning is a constant process that requires continual evaluation.

I am an educator in order to promote life-long or continued learning. I concentrate on making sure that children acquire the skills necessary to lead productive lives and happily function in their own communities and the world.

I choose to cultivate a well-rounded individual child by encouraging them to express themselves with thought, explored in a variety of ways, and develop their learning strengths using whatever forms of representation that are applicable and necessary. The integration of the arts into curriculum has always been and remains my passion for each and every child to experience. The classroom is a stage, and we are all contributing to its success in the creation of outstanding individuals.

It is important for the educator to be the facilitator and not the dictator. The educator must create a positive environment. I am an educator because I want to make

sure that each child is provided with the appropriate tools while modeling appropriate behaviors, and I want to watch as they move “full-speed-ahead” with me, discussing and discovering, together.

I am an educator in order to provide a caring, enthusiastic atmosphere allowing each child to learn in his or her own way. I educate because I am able to give hands-on experiences in order to stretch imaginations and abilities to create and discover without a fear of making mistakes. I believe that we, as educators, must utilize our children’s past experiences so that they will be able to apply those experiences to their continued new ones. The possibilities are truly endless.

I am an educator because I am passionate about what I do and flexible enough to inspire children to learn, create, and discover. I educate because I believe in the power of connections. This is why family and community are such important pieces of the puzzle of learning. It takes commitment of hard work and perseverance over and over again. Is there such a thing as the perfect classroom? No; however, it is the constant desire to touch lives and make a difference that continues to keep a dream alive and well. If given the opportunity would I choose to do the exact same thing over again? Absolutely. The mistakes and all.

My despair with the changes in kindergarten curriculum from play-based to academically based had been agitating me for quite sometime. Thus when deciding on a dissertation topic, I was led directly to Waldorf education/kindergarten and Reggio-inspired education/kindergarten. These two approaches exemplify everything that I, as an educator, believe in. It is my hope that the stories within this dissertation help to solidify,

each in their own way, that every 4, 5, and 6 year old deserves these kinds of experiences in their kindergarten environments.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE WALDORF KINDERGARTENS

This is an experience that should not be viewed as leading to a finished form, but rather should be assessed as an experience that leads to abilities that can be transformed throughout a child's life.

—Freya Jaffke, Germany, International Waldorf Kindergarten Association

#### **Mrs. Schimdt's Waldorf Kindergarten Classroom: Westcoast Waldorf School**

Westcoast Waldorf School, housed off a busy main street, is nestled between an assisted living facility and commercial business. Yet once making the turn into the entrance, it is as though I had just entered a nature preserve. My eyes couldn't help but travel toward the old live oaks and the wide-open space they surrounded.

I truly never noticed the two separate buildings of the campus until I backed into a parking space, turned off the ignition, and looked up and forward. On the right, there is the main building as distinguished by the school sign and on the left there is another building. A skyway appears to connect one building to the other. Stunning landscape of native Florida flowers and shrubs prove to be a mainstay of the entire campus. As I get out of my car and grab my briefcase, I take a moment to look back at this naturally beautiful setting. A game of chase is taking place between both boys and girls with their laughter echoing among the trees. There are three picnic tables covered with students chatting as they wait to enter school. Some parents are dropping off their children while

others are walking theirs in, there is not an unfriendly face or voice as I make my way to the main entrance of the school. As I start to walk in, I notice the play area to my right, and I pause to digest what I am seeing. From the parking lot, a green chain link fence about the height of a baseball backstop surrounds the play area. As the sidewalk begins, a natural wooden picket fence with a gate takes over until stopping at the school building. There is a sign “Westcoast Kinderhaus.” The play area is a place for kindergarteners to call their own: tire swing, sand with a couple of Adirondack chairs, mulch, long picnic table, huge wooden climbing structure with an attached slide, couple of oaks with climbing trunks, low standing balance beam, and lush landscape conducive to the rest of the outside environment. I hesitate thinking who wouldn’t want to play there? As I continue to take in the surroundings, there is a mixture of the children’s voices as they chase, climb, swing, visit with each other, and say goodbye to parents. So far, I am not disappointed and am anticipating what awaits me inside the main-entrance door.

Walking into the opened door, I am immediately greeted by the young woman behind the counter. I introduce myself and sign in. Mrs. Schmidt expects me, and I proceed to the second classroom door on my right. Since I am trying to pay attention to all of the details, I notice a very small waiting area behind me with a small couch, a side table and a low-lit lamp. The hallway is narrow, however, brightened by children’s watercolor artwork. This is a remarkable sight to see.

### **Foundations of Westcoast Waldorf School**

Westcoast Waldorf School is a small private school affiliated with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA). It resides in a little community in Florida where its doors opened in 1998 in a rented space, and then, in 2006 the school

purchased a new location, which is where they are currently located. There are approximately 125 students in grades pre-school through eighth grade. Westcoast Waldorf School is the only Waldorf institution within a large three city, two county area. The student population consists of 75% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 0% African American.

As is customary in Waldorf schools, Westcoast Waldorf School is governed by a three-fold structure: (1) the Board of Trustees, responsible for fiduciary, policy, and legal matters; (2) the faculty, responsible for pedagogical matters; and (3) the administration, responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. They also have an active Parent Council representing the interests of the parents and nature of a greater sense of community. A variety of school committees also serve to carry out school objectives.

It is important to note that the faculty of Westcoast Waldorf School is responsible for setting the school curriculum and is the guardian of the school's vision and mission. They make decisions regarding teacher staffing and program offerings as well as hold weekly staff meetings and work through any issues collaboratively. Decisions are made by consensus.

Based on the philosophy and pedagogical principles of Rudolf Steiner, the Westcoast Waldorf School provides a comprehensive education in response to the needs of the child at each stage of development promoting creativity, critical thinking, social responsibility and life-long love of learning.

### **A Child's Haven: The Westcoast Waldorf School Classroom**

I knock on the door and no answer. I knock, again. I turn the doorknob and enter a place that is a haven for children. This kindergarten room is an inviting place. Its floors

are clean and polished with a thick red carpet covering the larger open area in the rear of the classroom. The warm color of the walls and curtains give a rosy hue to the room. It is bathed in natural light and filled with natural, open-ended playthings such as cut rounds of branches, polished stones, curvy branches and baskets of shells. On the windowsill in the back of the room are pinecones, colored stones, crystals, seashells, and gnomes methodically placed on top of and throughout draped rose colored silk fabric. At the back entrance of the room, against the farthest wall, is a row of tidy wooden cubbies holding rain boots and rain gear, slippers, and shoes as well as a change of clothes. Each child's name appears on a designated cubby. To the left of the red carpet is a wooden play kitchen and doll corner. There are no rows of desks. As I look to the front of the classroom toward the door I entered, three six sided small tables have been place together with small wooden chairs around them. To my left of the tables is a compact kitchen area complete with sink and counter space and a stepstool for children to use when washing their hands or helping with dishes. A refrigerator, wooden hutch, and storage space hidden with a red cotton cloth on a curtain rod are directly to the right of the entrance door into the classroom. On top of the refrigerator is a handcrafted angel tree. To the right of the tables, more wooden cabinetry with baskets, marble games, supplies, all neatly placed. There is absolutely no clutter. In a glass vase, on the center table, are several flower bulbs that have sprouted the green stems with flowers ready to bloom any day now. Considering the limited space, Mrs. Schmidt has done an excellent job in creating this inviting space. However, the children's work is not highlighted within the classroom environment nor are there bulletin boards, charts, or room rules displayed. All of the children's work is put into their portfolios. This information is used in assessing and



evaluating the children's progress throughout the year. As this classroom demonstrates, a Waldorf classroom is decorated to illuminate a lack of clutter of space, and therefore, the mind.

Mrs. Schmidt responds to the environment of her classroom:

I would like my classroom to be bigger...we need more room. But we're working in our space. I like the tables, they're not so rectangular, and they have some shape to them. That's healing, if we don't have all these sharp corners, the squareness. I have those over here in the kitchen part, where the sink is. This is where we do our painting and our cooking and crayoning and special projects that we do in this area. Then I have a rug, and red is the color for me. I tell everything, "Unh-uhn, I'm having red." This is where they do their creative play. We take our shoes off so that they don't bring dirt in. They know to take their shoes off before they come in. This is where we have our story. This is where we have our rest...all on this red rug. It's a very special place. When people come in, I say, "if you don't want to take off your shoes at the door, you may walk around on the tile part, but please don't walk on the rug with your shoes on because this is where the children lie down and rest, and we want to keep it clean and beautiful." This rug has been there for a long time. That's our sanctuary, so to speak. This is where we do creative things but no shoes. No dirt from the outside. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

The back door opens and Mrs. Schmidt enters followed by her thirteen kindergarteners and her assistant. We immediately approach one another. I extend my hand and introduce myself and Mrs. Schmidt's hands meets mine. As the children are

hanging up coats, taking off shoes, and using the restroom, she instructs them in an ever-so-soft voice to move to the carpet for Circle. Miss Amanda, the assistant, oversees this morning ritual, but she manages to introduce herself. I do not want to interrupt the rhythm of the day that has already begun and assure Mrs. Schmidt that for today I will sit over by the red drape. The children begin to settle in, and Mrs. Schmidt introduces me. They want to ask questions, but she informs them that I will be visiting all week, and there will be plenty of time to visit later.

In her interview, Mrs. Schmidt explains the importance of the materials within the classroom:

There are crayons and paper and mats where they color on to make it softer, so it's not just a hard table. They can get that at any time. We have scissors. A lot of times they want to cut, and I have strips where I have cut paper, I'll let them doodle on that, cut that, whatever they would like to do. The painting is a process. I haven't involved the children just because of time, but I was reminded by one of my colleagues that first grade-ready children should be pouring those paints and setting them out, and I said, "you know, you're right." So I'm thinking that maybe next week I will set it up the night before, where they can put the paint in the jars during the daytime, and I can set it up there on the shelf until it's time. I want to involve them more in setting up the classroom for what we're doing. And then they have cloths. I have red cloths up there today that they were building with. I can get them down. I've found if I just leave them, there is just a pile on the floor. But if they ask, they've got something in mind they're going to use them for.

There are capes they can use at any time to dress up and play. The dolls have kind

of taken a back seat. The younger ones will take them out. The older ones are more into other things now. They'll come back to that and play house. [One child] loves to clean up over there. She has everything in order today, A-number one in the sink area. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

### **Mrs. Schmidt: The Westcoast Waldorf Kindergarten Teacher**

Mrs. Schmidt is a slender, petite woman with honey-wheat colored hair in a short shag cut. I discover she is warm and compassionate with a calming nature. It is late January in Florida and the temperature is in the fifties, unusually cold than it normally should be. Mrs. Schmidt is smartly dressed befitting to today's weather: a dark skirt, blouse, and sweater to which she added a full-length yellow apron. She has taken off her stylish boots and replaces them with her inside, ballerina slippers. She stands with certitude as she gracefully and elegantly begins the movements and verse of morning Circle. For me, Mrs. Schmidt's slender fingers convey an artistic quality. She is joyful, enthusiastic, and friendly displaying an experienced knowledge that is soon apparent throughout my observations of her work as a veteran Waldorf kindergarten teacher.

When my observations took place, Mrs. Schmidt was in her fifteenth year of teaching at Westcoast Waldorf School with a total of thirty-five years overall. She has always tried to create a balance for the children between imaginative creative play and group activities:

When we are playing in imagination, it is for the future thinking. They can think up all of these things, and nobody says, "No that's not the right way to do it." We can see them in their play, where they may be using a long branch or something, and they're moving it across, or a little log, and that's their car. That's wonderful

because we don't want to have a lot of cars with wheels. They've lost something if—at times—if they can live into their play in their imagination, this is the future. They can think, “everything's possible. Let's try this!” (Personal communication, January 25, 2013).

Mrs. Schmidt realizes that there is much work to be done in Waldorf kindergarten. As the calm and steady focal point, the teacher places herself in the center of the activity, projecting an attitude of purpose and enthusiasm for her work. Preparing the food, dusting, polishing, repairing toys, folding the laundry, washing the dishes, setting the table, sewing, and mending are all jobs the children can learn to accomplish.

In all aspects, an important requirement of a Waldorf kindergarten teacher is that her actions be worthy of imitation and filled with purposeful joy. The care with which an item is placed on a shelf, a door closed, or a chair moved is noticed and replicated by the children. The teacher must be consciously aware of the quality of their movements, for whether they like it or not, they see the children mirror what they have presented to them as it emerges in their actions and play. As Mrs. Schmidt says, “It's important that they see us doing the right thing, and when we're doing a circle game or something, not the right thing, but how we are moving our arms and what we're doing. All these things help them with their coordination” (Personal communication, January 25, 2013).

I asked Mrs. Schmidt to give another example of imitation expressing that I noticed everything she does, she repeats, especially in morning Circle. She explains what this does for the children:

They know that I'm waiting for them to do it, I'm not saying, “All right, we're going to keep doing this until you get it right.” [Singing] “Good morning, dear

earth, good morning dear earth,” we’re down here, we’re up here. The rhythm, what’s going on with our connection, it’s there, and they’re able to follow it and come along. There are some we have to work with more. “We’ll do that after while.” And I’ll go back and say, “Now are you ready?” It’s important that they know there is this structure, this loving structure that is expected, and we all do it together. And they love doing it. Sometimes there is that resistance, but we lovingly bring them along, and sometimes they will sit and watch. “You watch and see how we do it, and tomorrow you’ll be able to do it with us. I’m sure you will.” So we work with them that way, with the imitation. And we have to make sure as teachers that we’re doing the right thing. When we’re using a knife, how we’re cutting. We have to be very conscious of how we are around the children. When we’re wiping the tables, we don’t just scrub, scrub, scrub. We’re doing it in a way that’s very meaningful and we’re getting it done. The same way with washing your hands. In the beginning of the year we would sing about “wash hands, wash,” and I would say, “over the rivers and through the woods, this his how we clean between our fingers.” And “you forgot over the rivers and through the woods.” So they’ll do that. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

She continues,

We are their example. I pray every day that we are worthy of being the example in front of them. How we speak to our fellow colleagues and how we speak to each other, to the children, “you must have forgotten. We are holding hands now to say our verse. Remember how we do that? Thank you.” And if they’re singing it silly, “Oh, dear, let’s try again with our own voices.” And then we’ll do it again.

“Oh, dear, we have to do it again.” And if it keeps happening, “We will do it after everybody goes and you and I can do it together.” That loving way and really meaning it. We want them to learn it. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Steiner observed that until age seven the child is basically a child of will and moment (Howard, 2006). The best way for the kindergarten teacher to provide meaningful support for the child is to comprehend this developmental first phase fully and to bring age appropriate content to the children that nourishes healthy growth (Howard, 2006). Mrs. Schmidt has a mixed kindergarten class, which includes three and a half year olds to six year olds. In most Waldorf kindergarten classrooms, the three and four year olds are engaged according to their age and abilities while imitating the mood, gestures, and work of the teacher and their older friends. The five and six year olds develop the independence and sense of responsibility necessary to become leaders in the class. In the loving and creative atmosphere of the Waldorf kindergarten, these young children acquire the confidence and discipline they will need for their future grade work. Mrs. Schmidt shares:

Having a mixed kindergarten, it pertains to a lot of different areas. We don't expect as much from the young ones, the three and half year olds. They play and we will help them fold the silks, “Butterfly up, butterfly down, wings together, friends forever and ever,” until they've done their work...that's all they can do that point. And then they watch the other ones and see what they're doing and then they can do the same thing. We always have these older ones and the mixed age groups, and they come and help the little ones. “I'll help you fold that.” They

like to do it with them because they're teaching them. Not that they are saying, "I'm teaching you." They're doing it because it's the joy of what the little child brings into the classroom. If you had all kindergarten children, it would be a different dynamic...but to have those little ones is a breath of fresh air. You help them with their shoes; with the placemat [etc.] it's a wonderful experience for them to do that, too. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Children in the Westcoast kindergarten are not taught directly academic skills. However, Mrs. Schmidt engages the children in activities that aide in developmental capacities that prepare them for a broad range of cognitive, social, and linguistic skills. Below they have been categorized and charted.

In being able to teach to the whole child and their individuality, their various learning styles need to be addressed. Mrs. Schmidt adds,

After I've had most of them for three years, I see where they need help. I know that I can say, "Ok, how about doing this?" And then there will be some, where I'll say, "you see the silks over there? Can you put those in rainbow order?" That catches them, but it's not saying, "Do this, do that." I don't do that much anyway. They know how things go in the room, but some children need to be brought to me and I'll say, "What would you like to do today? Where would you like to work? In the kitchen to put things away? I bet you would like to put the babies in the cradle." Just seeing where they are. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Social Skills	Physical Skills	Emotional Skills	Artistic Training	Language Skills	Mathematical Skills	Science Skills
Manners Gratitude Respect Care of others Listening Skills Self-control Flexible thinking	Fine Motor Gross Motor Coordination Self-care Competence	Wander Good Habits Rhythm Empathy Aesthetic Appreciation Confidence	Water coloring Music Singing Coloring Simple Dramatization Clay modeling Beeswax Modeling	Imagination Vocabulary Story Structure (beginning-middle-end) Recitation Flexible Thinking	One-on-One Correspondence Counting Sorting Planning Sequencing	Observational Skills Sensory Stimulation Snack Preparation Nature Walks Care of Environment

Table 4: Academic Skills

The Westcoast Waldorf kindergarten experience is rich in storytelling, puppetry, song, poetry, cooking, and artistic activities. Toys, art materials, and classroom aesthetics emphasize natural, simple materials, encouraging the children’s imaginations. All of these different hands-on experiences allow each child, individually, to choose how they each will participate.

Steiner (2007) believes that the art of education is the art of living. The teacher is the artist in how she perceives and relates to the children and to the activities of their daily classroom activities. She orchestrates and choreographs each and every activity and experience every day. Mrs. Schmidt shares one of these experiences:

The first one would be the painting. We start out with doing the primary colors, the red, the yellow, the blue, and from those we can make all the colors of the rainbow. But we don’t show them that. I tell them the story of how yellow was playing and having such a good time and then he gets bored and he wants to have red come over because he’s so exciting. He does lots of things. So red comes over, and I tell that story, and I’m painting yellow in part of my paper, and then



red come over and first he's in the corner, and then he starts to fill up half the page, and then he knocks at the door, and that's where it stops, those two colors. They don't touch. And then the door opens and yellow says, "Come on." And finds there's someone else there. See if you can find who it was. And there they have it. There's orange there. We do that with all the colors...and sometimes they say, "Look! I made purple!" And this week they came to the point that they knew that red and blue will make purple, so they made all those colors on their paper. That came from them. I'm not even demonstrating any more. I haven't done that in a while. They know how to dip their brush in, wipe it on the jar, put the paint on, and then they rinse their brushes, and we go, "Dip and squeeze, dip and squeeze," and then we dry it off on the towel before we go into our colors, and it keeps them clean. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Mrs. Schmidt truly strives to transform the education taking place in her classroom into an art that educates the whole child. She constantly considers the three levels of learning that take place within each activity. First, there is the cognitive level at which creative, critical, and independent thinking is developed in a manner in harmony with the developmental phases of the children. Second, the affective level at which more subjective, feeling-based learning is possible allowing the child to relate to the activity, the teacher, and the other children through sensitive interaction. Third, the child is engaged on a motivational and psychomotor level at which the active, engaging will of the child is stimulated and developed. Always in the back of Mrs. Schmidt's mind is that she is contributing to her children's developing the necessary capabilities in their thinking, feeling, and willing. She states,

I want them to be as well rounded as they can be in terms of the stories they hear, the way that things happen in the story, the way that they can do things when you're talking to them about how they ride a horse, there's a different way that gentlemen and ladies and farmers ride a horse. To experience all of these kinds of things in their imagination. Hands-on everything so they can experience it, get their hands-so what if it's a mess on the table? They're experiencing life, and that's what's important. It's the movement, it's learning to jump rope, it's being physically fit, going across the monkey bars, all these things are first grade readiness. To be able to be in a play and sometimes the older ones say their own parts, the little ones we say it for them. It's giving them the self-confidence that they need to take into the world. Jumping rope is very important, doing circle games where they cross the midline. Being able to be in a group. Being open. "These are my friends," instead of little groups here and there. Making them this universal human being. These are the important things. The gifts that we can give them. If we can give them those gifts, and the self-confidence that they feel, "I can do that," and the freedom that they have to explore, that's what's important. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

### **Rhythm of the Day**

The three “Rs” of the Waldorf kindergarten classroom are rhythm, reverence, and repetition. Rhythm occurs in the daily, weekly, and seasonal flow of activities in the classroom and brings stability, dependability and security to the children. The quality of reverence can be found in the natural beauty and simplicity of the classroom and the care for all that it contains. Reverence is also experienced in the verse before snack time,

which expresses gratitude. Repetition is found in the experience of songs, verses, and stories presented over an extended period of time, allowing the children the joy of familiarity and of full participation. The comfort of repetition also appears in the recurrence of daily and weekly activities dependably occurring each day at the same time in the daily flow or on the same day of the week's rhythm.

The teachers at Westcoast Waldorf begin their rhythm of day first thing in the morning before children arrive. Mrs. Schmidt invites me to join them. As I enter the room, several teachers are already taking their places on the carpet area of Mrs. Rose's (the other kindergarten teacher) sanctuary. The mood is calm and friendly. Teachers are greeting one another with good mornings and hugs. I am as well greeted in this manner. Not every one has arrived, but Mrs. Schmidt explains that if they do not get started then they all will not be in their appropriate areas to greet their children.

Mrs. Rose lights the candle in the center of the circle that has been formed by the teachers and myself. We all join hands. In unison, the verse is recited with reverence and sincerity:

May there reign here  
Spirit, strength in love  
May their work here, spirit—light  
In goodness;  
Born from certainty of heart,  
And from steadfastness of soul,  
So that we may bring to young human beings  
Bodily strength for work

Inwardness of soul

And clarity of spirit.

May this place be consecrated to such a task.

May young minds and hearts here find

Servers of the light

Endowed with strength

Who will guide and cherish them.

Those who are here

Lay the stone as a sign

Will thinking their hearts

Of the spirit

That should reign in this place

So that the foundation may be formed

Upon which there shall live

And weave our work.

At this point going around the circle, teachers' names that are not present are mentioned. Everyone continues,

Wisdom that bestows freedom

Strengthening spirit and power

All revealing spirit—life

This we wish to affirm

With pure intent

And with goodwill.

Mrs. Rose carefully lifts the candle in its holder and blows it out. She walks slowly over to me and wishes me a wonderful experience at Westcoast today. I am feeling calm and reverent and ready to begin my day. It feels unbelievably satisfying to be back in a school with teachers and children.

Mrs. Schmidt and I head out to the kindergarten playground while her assistant, Miss Amanda, stays behind in the classroom to prepare a few things for this morning's rhythm. Children arrive in intervals. The hustle and bustle of the day begins. This free play morning rhythm allows the children to make fairy dens, climb trees, dig and build, run, visit, and swing. This reflects how the children play in and with the beautiful, natural, and peaceful environment.

It is evident that all children in the "butterfly" kindergarten class have arrived. Mrs. Schmidt double checks her sign in sheet and begins singing: "Walking, Walking, Walking, Walking." Most children immediately stop and line up at the back gate. The few stragglers are encouraged to take their places in line. It takes a few "Butterflies line up, please" but after a few moments, all Butterflies are in their order. Calmly and with soft voices, Mrs. Schmidt and the children begin to sing and move in accordance with the song:

Walking, walking, walking

Hop, hop, hop; hop, hop, hop

Skipping, skipping, skipping; skipping, skipping, skipping

Now we stop, now we stop.

As they reach the back door of the classroom, they remove their soiled shoes and properly place them in the outside cubby. As they quietly enter the room, they may or

may not put on slippers or inside shoes from their individual cubbies, and they hang up all outside gear, making their way to sit on their bottoms on the red carpet, ready for morning Circle.

Sharifa Oppenheimer (2007) offers an overview of the rhythm of the day that I embark on in the Westcoast Butterfly kindergarten classroom:

Baking, washing, sweeping, mending, singing, painting! Imagine the scent of break baking, the warm sudsy water for washing, the muscle power of sweeping, the fine eye-hand coordination of mending and sewing. Imagine the visual education in the dancing watercolors. And if you have had the pleasure of sitting in the midst of children's creative, imaginative play, you will know the happy sound at the heart of this beehive of activity. (p. 31)

Oppenheimer's quote summarizes the Butterfly classroom: all this beauty given to these children is nutritional. Their senses are stimulated and through free movement and imitation of the teacher, the experience is digested. It then becomes their nourishing growth toward freedom.

Miss Amanda slips me the Butterfly Class Rhythm of the Day. I am seated in the corner by the red drape covering the storage area, however, I am able to see Mrs. Schmidt and the children seated in a circle just fine.

#### Butterfly Class Rhythm

8:30-9:00	Inside/Morning Circle
9:00-10:00	Creative Play
10:00-10:30	Clean Up/Story
10:30-11:00	Snack
11:00-12:30	Outside Play
12:30	Go Home

## Morning Circle

Mrs. Schmidt says, “Please stand. All of our bodies are standing strong and our circle is nice and round, nice and round.” She continues, “The earth is firm beneath my feet. The stars shine high above. And here I stand so straight and strong. All things to know and love.” As I look around the room, I notice that Miss Amanda has transformed the room into an obstacle course. This journey that they are about to embark uses a jogging trampoline, a large wooden hula-hoop, a wooden bridge (transformed bookshelf), and a long wooden rod. Their verse brings my attention back to their circle:

Good morning, dear earth.

Good morning, dear sun.

Good morning, dear stones.

And the flowers everyone.

Good morning, dear beast,

And the birds in the tree.

Good morning, to you,

And good morning to me.

Arm and body movements accompany each line. The leaders know the verse and the movements and are looking directly at Mrs. Schmidt. Others, not quite sure of everything, fixate their eyes on the child next to them. This may cause them to be a count or movement behind, but they are in the moment of what they are able to do.

Today’s journey is the “Mother Goose Movement Journey,” which will be repeated everyday for a couple weeks depending on how well the children continue to enjoy it. Mrs. Schmidt makes the transition from verse to song without a catch and the

children follow. “Old Mother Goose, when she wanted to wander...” This is a rather lengthy song with intricate and involved gestures and movements. The children remain in their circle as they complete the first part of the journey. “There was an old woman tossed up in a basket, nineteen times as high as the moon...” The children transition from the circle to a single line as they each approach the trampoline and jump 6-8 times. I find that as the others are waiting their turn, they jump in place while “there was an old woman,” is repeated and repeated until all of have jumped. Mrs. Schmidt is standing close by the trampoline sometimes holding onto a child who feels the need to soar into the air. I find myself joining in the nursery rhymes as they remind me not only of my own kindergarten experience but teaching them to my son at that age. “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon...” Moving quickly, each child jumps over the rod that is being held off the ground about a foot by Mrs. Schmidt and Miss Amanda. As the children each clear the moon, they take their place, back in the “Circle” on the red carpet. Mrs. Schmidt takes the lead and begins, “This is the way the ladies ride, tri, tre, tre, tree!” Emphasizing balance, the children lift their knees high coming down on a pointed toe with their heads held high. As the song progresses they gallop like a gentleman would ride and hobble like a farmer would ride. The children have to be present or they will miss the next transition as they are coming one after the other. “Jack and Jill went up the hill, to fetch a pail of water...” As each child makes their way up and over the bridge, they end up landing back onto the carpet. Some voices are more distinct than others. It is difficult to participate in all of this movement and remember all of the words. As Mrs. Schmidt and Miss Amanda guide, they continue to give words of encouraging. “Ding, dong, dell! Pussy’s in the well!” The wooden hula-hoop is being



placed about 6 inches off the floor and held by Mrs. Schmidt and Miss Amanda. Each child jumps into the well on one side and out of the well on the other side. They continue to repeat the verse until all children have jumped in and out. Next, the children are now seated on their bottoms as they begin to recite, “This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home...” Mrs. Schmidt leads right into “Wee Willie Winkie calls us all to bed...” as she goes around placing imaginary sleeping caps on each child’s head. They are using finger and hand movements for both rhymes. “Are the children in their beds? For now it’s eight o’clock!” The children stretch in sleepy gesture and then lie down. It is so very quiet; I could hear a pin drop.

Life’s fundamentals are experienced during morning Circle: the variety and function of different rhythms and moods, the guiding force of music, the language of gesture, the power of spoken language, the love as the foundation of discipline, and most essential, the nature of learning through imitation and the role of the modeling adult (Oppenheimer, 2007).

Many different skills are shaped during morning Circle, all accomplished through the gift of the child’s ability to imitate. According to Oppenheimer (2007), based upon Steiner’s original philosophies, we are able to see three essentials of learning:

1. **Sensory Input:** the child’s senses are delighted with song and music as well as the visual pleasure of each other’s participation and the tactile satisfaction of clapping, tapping, wiggling (p. 31).
2. **Responsive Movement:** the child’s natural imperative to respond through movement is encouraged through the different moods and tempers of movement introduced by the teacher (p. 31).
3. **Imitation of the Adult Model:** the child will imitate not only the words and gestures of the teacher, but he/she will also imitate the teacher’s inner mood (p. 31).

All three of these essentials should be woven together with grace and joy.

### **Creative Play**

“Today is rice day,” announces Mrs. Schmidt, “who would like to assist Miss Amanda? She needs four volunteers.” Four children make their way over to the sink to wash their hands. The others find their niche. They waste no time. A trio dons silk capes and crowns as the leader declares, “I’m the king, you’re the knight, and you’re the bishop!” And, they are off to slay dragons.

Another group pulls out two wooden play stands and begin draping them with silks and play clothes, fastening them with big chunky wooden clips to create a cozy little home. A pair turns the bridge into a boat and imagines they are fishing in a huge lake. Another child is putting away the trampoline until it is needed tomorrow.

The four children preparing for snack are chopping or cutting carrots as Miss Amanda is mixing the dry rice and liquid for the rice cooker. “Depending on what knife you are using, remember back and forth or up and down,” instructs Miss Amanda. Once they complete their task, wash their knife and cutting board and wipe down the table, they are able to join in with the rest of the group in feeding their imaginations through creative play.

An altercation is occurring between two of the boys. One hurts the other. “Oh, your friend is hurt,” says Mrs. Schmidt. “He’s not my friend!” Mrs. Schmidt sends the boy to the office for an icepack. “I’d like to hear kind words in our classroom,” exclaims Miss Amanda. Mrs. Schmidt handles the two boys quietly and with kindness. The icepack is the sign of peace and apology.

During creative playtime all are in motion and an air of “you may” pervades the room. Oppenheimer (2007) says that a healthy child naturally perceives the objects in the room as his property; they are tools for creation (p. 14). A piece of wood becomes a doll, a disk cut from a tree limb becomes bread, and a piece of carved wood to suggest a house serves nonetheless as a chimney with wool as smoke.

Creative play encourages imagination. Mrs. Schmidt reinforces this every minute of this hour.

### **Clean-Up/Story**

Tick Tock goes the clock, what does it have to say? Time to put the toys away,  
play again another day.

—Westcoast Waldorf kindergarten

All the children have to do is hear the words of this song. They gradually transition from their play, as they begin to fold silks, hang cottons, put shells and stones back in baskets, and move the play stands back to their places. Two students are helping Miss Amanda set the table for snack: cloth napkins, placemats, glass cups with handles, ceramic bowls, and metal spoons. It’s rice and carrot day, so spoons are needed. Two pitchers of water are placed at each end of the table. Fresh flowers are placed in the middle.

As each child finishes their part of clean up, they place their personal towel around their neck and proceed to wash their hands. Finally, all are lying on the red carpet. Mrs. Schmidt turns out the lights and strums her kinder lyre. The soothing notes of it pentatonic scale help create a restful mood. As I think that this might be a rest time, Mrs. Schmidt takes her place on the red carpet as Miss Amanda passes out their individual

hairbrushes. Every child and Mrs. Schmidt and Miss Amanda brush their hair. Brushes are put back into their individual bags, which are collected into a basket. The children are ready now for a story. They form their human circle, again, sitting on their bottoms with their legs crossed. As with Circle, the same story is told for approximately two weeks. Throughout the year, the children hear a variety of fairy tales, folk tales, and nature stories (sometimes with puppets).

Mrs. Schmidt begins, “Once upon a time, there was a king and queen who wanted a child...” The story is told by heart with hand, head, and arm gestures accompanying. Time is limited so the story is kept short. Most children are attentive, however, a few are fidgeting and not paying attention.

The children are learning the ability to sit and listen to Mrs. Schmidt for a sustained period of time. They are also being exposed to the beauty of language, which supports literacy skills and builds the person-to-person relationship between teacher and child.

### **Snack Time**

There are five different snacks, one for each day of the week with each prepared by the children and teacher using wholesome ingredients. At Westcoast Waldorf, their snack schedule is as follows:

Monday: Rice and Carrots

Tuesday: Summer Salad or Winter Soup

Wednesday: Millet and Apples

Thursday: Homemade Bread, Rye Crackers, Raisins, and Cream Cheese

Friday: Muffins and Buttered Bread

The children take their places at the table. Each napkin is in a felt pouch with their name on the outside. Mrs. Schmidt made the pouches. Before eating, a reverent mood is set as Mrs. Schmidt lights a small candle and places it on the table in front of her. I am sitting at the table as well. Everyone joins hands as they recite:

Earth who gave us all this food.

Sun who made it ripe and good.

Dearest earth and dearest sun,

We'll not forget what you have done. Blessings on our meal.

These are times of social learning experiences for children. They are learning to sit properly in their chairs with their feet on the floor, to use good table manners, and to have appropriate conversation with their classmates that are seated around them. Their napkins are on their laps. Each child pours their own water as the pitcher is passed to them. Miss Amanda dishes out the rice and carrots. The bowl is too hot and too heavy for their small hands. I notice that Mrs. Schmidt is going around with a small spray bottle. I believe it is soy sauce—no—it is liquid aminos, but I must say it does have a similar taste to soy sauce.

I visit with the children around me. They are curious as to why I am sitting in the corner and writing. Mrs. Schmidt responds explaining to them that I am in college and I am going to share what goes on in their “Butterfly” kindergarten with my university. The child sitting to my left notices my pipe cleaner and multi-colored bead bracelet. “Who gave you your bracelet?” he asks. “My son made it for me,” I respond. “Wow! Will he be going to first grade next year?” he asks. “Oh, no he graduated from college and is in the Police Academy,” I explain. “He’s going to be a cop?” he questioned. “Yes, and make

sure everyone follows the law,” I insist. “He sure makes a cool bracelet!” “Thank you, I will tell him,” I respond.

Very respectful chit-chat takes place. Mrs. Schmidt blows out the candle. As the children finish, they place their napkins back into the pouches and one child volunteers to collect them. Others clear the dishes, spoons, and cups, followed by the placemats. One child puts an apron on and pushes the step stool up to the sink and begins to wash. Another dries. Miss Amanda supervises this clean up team, and they are doing an incredible job. Mrs. Schmidt makes sure that the others use the restrooms and put on their shoes and jackets. It is time for outside play and the children are busting with energy and enthusiasm to make their way outside to the playground. The clean up team and Miss Amanda joins when their tasks are complete.

### **Outside Play**

The children freely run around, use their imaginations, and experience the outdoor world in every season. This is the last hour and a half before they are picked up. Mrs. Schmidt has the jump rope in her apron pocket. I am at one end; she is at the other. One at a time, two at a time, running through, jumping, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, “Oh, no! I wanted to make it to twenty!” exclaims one child. Mrs. Schmidt encourages her to try again, but the others have to have a turn. They love to jump rope. It gives me a satisfying feeling to look at the children’s flushed smiling faces, as they are happy and excited about jumping rope.

Coordination and well-developed senses are the foundation for intellectual development. Children love to explore what their bodies are capable of: swinging in a tree, balancing on a beam, jumping rope, mastering the monkey bars, and so on.

Unstructured, creative outside physical play lets children burn calories and develops all kinds of strengths, such as learning how the world works. In outside creative play, the children choose the games, make the rules, learn to negotiate, and release stress. Outside play often involves imagination and fantasy. A child in Mrs. Schmidt's class is obviously imagining that he is a fireman. He is using a long branch and making sounds as if water is gushing out of a fire hose. He lays that down and is running around the perimeter of the playground using his voice to create the sound of the fire truck siren. This child has transformed himself into the fire truck.

Three little girls are having a tea party at one end of the picnic table. There are no cups and saucers, no small plates, or a teapot; instead, their imaginations are transforming leaves, rocks, mulch, and sticks into the necessary tea party items. In the sand area are several children constructing a mountain, a castle, a lake (minus the water), and a road. What began as individual creations is now a group effort in molding and pressing a kingdom. They are sharing joy, laughter, and fun. This, I believe, will strengthen their bonding as classmates and give them a sense of working as a community. This is positive socialization.

Miss Amanda and the clean up team join us. Before they settle in, they make their way to the compost bin. This is an everyday ritual after snack and clean up. The compost benefits the garden of the upper grades. As they return to the playground area, Miss Amanda and Mrs. Schmidt begin to swing the jump rope. Most of the children leave what they are doing to join in. Once some of them have reached their own personal goal, they return to their original activity.

Laughter, happiness, high energy, negotiation, and individuality are words

coming to mind at this moment. Not one of these children is bored. Not one of them needs an iPad, a Gameboy, or any other piece of technology to stimulate their enthusiasm, creativity, or imagination. They are in the moment of their childhood!

As outside play comes to a close, parents, again, come in and out of the gate, express hellos, sign their child out, and, after much coaxing, manage to get them to leave. Tomorrow, this "Rhythm of the Day" begins all over again.

### **Waldorf Aesthetic**

What is the Waldorf aesthetic? It is the construction and blending of beautiful creations as raw and natural as they can be. The simplicity of the design in order to allow, to the greatest extent possible, the child to supply the imaginative details that will turn the carved wood into a car or animal, the acorns into dinner, and the knotted cloth into a baby. Many of the children's beautiful creations reflect sensitivity and reverence toward seasonal change. The Waldorf child-centered modes of creation yield particular aesthetic qualities—the beauty of the exposed stitch, the imperfect perfection of a wobbly row of stitches—all parts of the loveliness of this approach. There are lawns, gardens, patches of woodland, trees, and flowers, rather than bleak stretches of asphalt that pass for playgrounds. The aesthetics allow a mental breathing space for the adults as well and allow a child's imagination to flow.

As Mrs. Schmidt and I talk, I ask her about the aesthetic environment of her classroom. I comment on the colors and the materials that were selected as being pleasing to the eye and very soothing. Some pop out at you as well. She responds,

I wanted to create warmth, to be soothing to the children. It's very important that the toys are put away the same way every day. I will go to the end of the day, and



if there's something out of place, it's put away because that way they know where they are and they know where they go under...sometimes we may have to move something when we get a new piece. That tractor goes up on top of the bridge. It's very important for the children to know where they go and it's the same place. They're able to do this and that because they know where to go. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

I, then, ask her about the natural materials, the yarns, dolls with no face, and the like. She states,

It's so important that things are real to the children. What comes from a sheep's wool? That's from a real living being. Synthetic even feels funny. These are so warm and nurturing to the children. They don't take it in as nurturing, but is just real stuff. Everything is wood. We have very, very few plastic things, nothing in the room that's plastic. We do have the plastic buckets outside because the metal ones rust so much. Everything natural cotton, silk, wood, felt. All those things that they can touch. These are all sensory things. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Aesthetic conditions enhance a child's appreciation of beauty and sensuality (Uhrmacher, 1993). The materials, the space, the "Rhythm of the Day" all provided by the teacher allow each child to then have their own experience. This is really the intent: to provide day-to-day situations that become meaningful experiences over and over again.

### **Child Assessment and Evaluation**

Mrs. Schmidt teaches a mixed age kindergarten (ages 3.5 to 6 year olds), therefore, she remains with the same group of children for three years. She cultivates a

relationship in which she knows their learning styles and their developmental needs in a comprehensive manner. Mrs. Schmidt uses a portfolio style approach that includes drawings, paintings, finger knitting, faculty of movements, and oral skills of each child as well as parent conferences throughout the year. She has the opportunity to have an involved and loving relationship with each and every student in her class. She explains:

We're always looking to see where the children are. Can they jump rope? That's one of our higher expectations. How are they with small things? Can they finger knit? We're looking at how are they walking? How do they stand? How do they move their hands? How do they move their whole body? Can they touch their toes? A lot times, I'll say, "And away across the river, and he went back the other way" just to see where their growth is. When we have the parent conference, we have this form that we have put together we give the parents. "What is it that you are looking for?" And there are different questions for them. That helps us to see where their questions are. We tell them what they can do. We show them their artwork from the beginning of the year until now and how they have moved along. First, they start with scribbling and that's ok for the three and young four. Then we want to see, by the time they're five and six, houses, and towards the end of the year, we'll give them a piece of paper and make up a little story, or we'll say, "I would like to see a house and a person and a tree." And we'll let it go at that and they we'll see, do they put grass? Does it touch the ground Are there birds in the sky? Are there apples on the tree? And I have seen where there's a ladder up to the tree. That's very significant. When they start to make ladders on their paper that usual pertains to their teeth. We look to see; "ok they should be

losing their teeth before they go to first grade.” If they don’t that’s not the sole things we look at. We want to see how many areas they are developed in and how many they’re not and see where they are, where the rest of them are, and who the teacher is and can you work with this? We’re always like a mother hen, waiting to see the first grade teacher. “Are they going to be able to that for Johnny?” This one needs to sit differently in his chair sometimes. Maybe if he had one of those cushions you can move on that would be good. Those will be things we will look to see the development and where we can help. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013).

It is important to note that the teachers in a Waldorf school system, where the individual school is faculty administered, do not have to answer to school boards or, in the case of Westcoast Waldorf, to a director/administrator. Instead, they answer to the child and the parent.

The success of this qualitative evaluation method depends totally on the support of the parents and how much trust and faith they have in the classroom teacher. It is important that the parents are kept in the loop with open communication and educated by the teacher in the process and reasons for assessment and evaluation within her classroom. After all, the teacher/parent relationship is one of the truly important components of an effective educational approach.

### **Teacher Assessment and Evaluation**

Although the AWSNA has clear established procedures for evaluating teachers, I find that at Westcoast Waldorf they have a very diluted interpretation of what these are. According to Mrs. Schmidt,

We do evaluations. We do it for each other. We have people come in from the outside and evaluate our classes and tell us things that they see and things we might want to look at to improve. And then we talk about where these differences are and how we can bring that into our classroom if that needs to be done. We have made lots of strides in that. (Personal communication, January 25, 2013)

The administrator, when I ask him about the evaluation process of the teachers, gives a very short response. I do feel that he is uncomfortable answering the question, as he is not responsible for anything that has to do with the teachers. He says,

There is a self-evaluation process, a series of questions that they are given to answer for themselves. That's done annually. Additionally, there is observation and evaluation done in-house on an ongoing basis. The teachers sit and observe other teachers and say, "I notice that you did this but you didn't do this." There's that ongoing dialogue and evaluation there. And then every three years, as a requirement of AWSNA, there's an external observation and evaluation. That rotates so it's not that everyone's done one year and then three years later. I honestly really can't speak to the criteria. It's not in my world. It's not what I do.

### **Summary**

This serves as a journey into one Waldorf kindergarten classroom teacher's work in creating a creative and imaginative environment for her children.

First, Mrs. Schmidt creates a warm and loving environment, which is protective and secure. She provides surroundings that are accessible to the child's understanding, feelings, and active will and experiences in touch, balance, lively and joyful moments and inward listening. Second, Mrs. Schmidt works at nurturing the children's power of

creativity and imagination by telling carefully selected stories and by encouraging creative play. She engages her children in domestic, practical, and artistic activities. Third, Mrs. Schmidt places herself in the center of all classroom activity, projecting an attitude of purpose and enthusiasm for her work. She is the calm and steady force. Fourth, her gestures and actions are worthy of imitation and filled with purposeful joy. She is consciously aware of the quality of her movements as well as the choice of her words and her tone of voice. Fifth, she shapes the temporal environment as well as the spatial. Through “Rhythm of the Day” in which the same thing happens at the same time on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, Mrs. Schmidt allows for the child to constantly gain self-confidence and security. And finally, Mrs. Schmidt’s aim is to develop balanced creative children who will carry a love for learning throughout their lives.

And so ends the journey of one.

### **Teacher Gloria’s Waldorf Kindergarten Classroom**

#### **The Waldorf School of California**

I am in rush hour traffic on a California highway, and as I exit, make a right turn, follow it with a left; I am suddenly driving on the street of a quiet, rural neighborhood in the foothills. The roads twist and turn with stop signs every few blocks. As I cross a small bridge and look to my right, I discover The Waldorf School of California nestled in the middle of this natural country environment.

Parents drop off their children at the circle as others park and escort their children into the school. I park in the community lot, grab my things, and begin to make my way to the upper field where I am suppose to meet Teacher Gloria. I pause for moment to take in the beauty of the campus. It is an outside campus with no hallways. Every room is

entered from the outdoors. To my right is a large garden and behind it an asphalt play area. Children play hopscotch, basketball, others form small groups and participate in conversations. The lush natural landscape is pleasing to the eye. Teacher Gloria is standing under a large tree, children on either side of her holding both hands. I extend my hand and introduce myself and Teacher Gloria returns the introduction. As she holds my hand, she introduces me as Teacher Daria a visitor for a week.

It is a rather cool morning and jackets are definitely a must. Parents continue to drop off their children, and if they want to engage in brief conversation with Teacher Gloria, they temporarily park and come inside the gated chain-link fence to chat. Before I realize it, a child comes up and introduces herself.

Teacher John, the other kindergarten teacher, begins singing, “Follow, follow, follow me, come and follow, follow me!” He and his class are holding hands as they begin to make their way to the back of campus. This song is repeated until they reach their destination. Teacher Gloria explains that his class goes to the back corner play area, and she stays in the upper field. “This time gives the children a chance to let go of whatever might have happened in the car ride, be it any conversations or just the fact they are sitting still and in a car seat” (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013). She turns and begins to lead her children in the same verse and movements and then they are on their own for some free play. So far I have only been able to make mental notes because I have not been able to remove my tablet and pencil from my briefcase.

### **Foundations of the Waldorf School of California**

The Waldorf School of California opened its doors in 1984 with a pre-school, kindergarten, and grades one through four. In 1995, they moved to their present location

with an approximate two and half acre campus servicing grades pre-school through eighth grade. In 2007, a separate campus opened and sixth grade through eighth grade were moved and grades nine through twelve were added. Today, there are 320 students coming from all over the Bay Area. The Waldorf School of California is fully accredited with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North American (AWSNA) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The student population consists of 80% Caucasian, 15% Asian, 2% African-American, and 2% Hispanic.

Jill Duncan, one of the school administrators, discusses the pre-K through fifth grade campus:

Oh my goodness! There are photographs over there in a filing cabinet. This used to be a public school. All the way behind where there's houses now was all outdoor space. It must have been fabulous. We have not because we lease it from the county still, and we can buy it for a dollar in a few years time, and we'll be very happy about that, we have three wings. This wing is administration and after-care. Then because we moved the middle school off, we have the wing at the back, which just has fifth grade and a music room and the kindergartens and the nursery. The middle wing has four, three, two, and one. We're in the process of figuring out now that we've been at the other side for middle school and high school for a year, what we're going to do with this space because there's a lot of potential. We have the old fifth grade room that's now the movement room and then there are a couple of offices. We used to have the middle school down the back, but they were inside the kindergarten. That was not the best scenario. So it's

a little bit of a, we're constantly trying to figure out the best use of it, and we can't really change it much either. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

The Waldorf School of California provides their students with a holistic education that address the heart and will as well as the mind. Their whole child approach maintains the philosophy and pedagogical principles of Rudolf Steiner in allowing each child to grow as their physical, moral, emotional, and cognitive capacities unfold. The Waldorf School of California prepares its students for a joyful, successful, and purposeful life.

### **Teacher Gloria**

“Follow, follow, follow me, come and follow, follow me!” Teacher Gloria leads her children in song, which is the cue for everyone to take hands and slowly make our way down and around the grassy areas of campus toward the restrooms. The children's sweet voices, without them realizing it, are trying to slide up and down until the pitch is right. After a few go arounds of the song, they have it. Without instruction, the girls line up at one open door and the boys at the other. Two at a time are allowed to go into the separate restrooms. Teacher Gloria explains to me what will be happening once we get to the room.

Teacher Gloria is an average size woman with short sandy colored hair with strands of gray throughout. This chilly February morning proves to be why she is wearing a warm and comfy three quarter coat with her tea length skirt popping through the bottom. When I ask her why she does what she does, she explains, “Oh, I love it, I love it! I really feel like I am truly helping them grow and develop like I am helping reach their heart and their minds and their hands, and it just brings me great joy to see them growing and developing. I love it” (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)



The children line up in a single file line in anticipation of continuing onto their classroom. “Follow, follow, follow me, come and follow, follow me!” Outside the classroom door are coat hooks and several long wooden benches. There are no long cubbies. The children hang up coats, hats and gloves, and place their outside shoes neatly under the bench.

Twenty-three years ago before she came to this school, Teacher Gloria taught kindergarten in a public school. She incorporated learning centers into her curriculum and included the arts, domestic work, practical activities, and (a lot of) movement. Teacher Gloria had to include numbers and letters as mandated by the school system she was teaching in. She further explains, “I tried to make it fun and something that would have meaning. So, for instance, when we were doing number blocks, I might have a garage sale that kind of thing. For learning letters, we might bake something in a certain shape or beginning with a certain sound.” After being introduced to the Waldorf philosophy, she realized that in public school kindergarten she was teaching curriculum more appropriate to a Waldorf first grade. When she researched Waldorf kindergarten principles, she was hooked. “This is it! This is what is really speaking to the needs of the young child in order to assist with their growth and development.” This was her a-ha! moment. She received her Waldorf teaching certification in 1990.

The Waldorf kindergarten teacher seeks to provide daily, weekly, and seasonal activities for their children and know that imitation is a child’s special gift and natural way of learning. Their homelike environments are harmonious, beautiful, warm, and nurturing. Imagination and creativity flourish through the participation of the children in meaningful tasks that develop coordination, cooperative social skills, as well as bringing

to the surface their creative and imaginative capacities. Teacher Gloria stresses that she is “laying the foundation for her children’s success in later academics” (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013).

Imagination allows the child to have no limits. Children who actively use their imagination create new images, new stories, and most importantly, new ideas. Teacher Gloria nurtures the power of imagination in her children through telling carefully selected stories and by encouraging free and creative play in which children act out scenarios of their own creation. These opportunities allow her children to problem solve, explore, experiment, and discover.

The Waldorf kindergarten teacher strives to transform education into an art that educates the whole child, heart, and hands, as well as the head. Teacher Gloria creates a love of learning in each child, and she respects his or her developmental stages. This is vital for educational success. She also strives to make all that children do worthy of imitation. Rudolf Steiner (2000) believed that the task of the kindergarten teacher was to adapt the practical activities of daily life so that they are suitable for the child’s imitation through play. Kindergarten activities should drive from life itself rather than be “thought out” by the intellectualized culture of adults. The most important thing is to give children the opportunity to directly imitate life itself. Teacher Gloria shares her ideas on what example and imitation look like in her classroom:

When you see the circle and you see them imitating me, they’re just following me. They’re just doing what I’m doing. If I try to be a model worthy of respect and worthy of imitation then they will go along with that. It’s funny because there’s one new verse that I put in there for the second part of the year, there’s

that one part where I find myself sinking into it, and I feel the children sinking into it. It's just wonderful. So you have that at circle time, and you have that with activities. If I'm making something, repairing something for the little ones' clothes, they'll come over and a lot of times they'll just want to watch. "What is she doing?" or what is another child doing who's doing an activity, cooking, or baking or whatever that it...we give children the opportunity to be able to take in the world around them and then give it forth in a very imitative way, but then you see them branching out and you see that flexibility of thought that comes.

(Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

Rudolf Steiner's (1997) philosophy stresses that a child gradually learns to be a social being and that the development of the young child in the social realm is as important as anything else the teacher does. Teacher Gloria has the role of orchestrating how this happens through modeling good social behavior with her children, through joining together in movement activities, singing, or games, and to develop group consciousness by helping children humanistically work through disagreements. She explains,

I'm there to help facilitate the children's growth and development. I attempt to provide the best environment that I can for them. [pause] I strive to be a model worthy of imitation, and I provide opportunities for their sensory integration or their movement in general for developing a sense of awe and reverence for the world and for each other and for themselves, providing an environment that is full of warmth and joy and caring and has materials that are more natural and free-form to allow their imagination and creativity to flourish and to provide

opportunities for artistic and domestic activities [pause] and to be able to help in any way that I can to help lessen or remove any hindrances that might be happening for a child (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

Teacher Gloria recognizes that reading must be grounded in a field rich with oral learning and meaning. Her children are not taught the ABCs. They are not given worksheets, nor do they practice reading from a book. She knows that the children’s language skills are being built through the repetition of the stories, songs, and verses. Teacher Gloria’s preparing them to read and write through the spoken word. I notice this through the children’s advanced verbal abilities, their phenomenal vocabulary, and the library of poems and stories they can recite by heart. Teacher Gloria continues,

In a Waldorf kindergarten, we’re not about learning numbers or letters. We do lots of reading readiness activities and math readiness activities, all through play and the domestic and practical activities that we do, and through the circles that we do. This period of time, to be able to develop their imagination and creativity without having to sit at a desk and to do numbers or letters or a certain curriculum I feel is most important. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

The chart below provides Waldorf of California kindergarten preparation for school. The information gathered is based upon Teacher Gloria’s classroom.

<b>Artistic Training</b>	<b>Foundations of Language Arts</b>	<b>Foundations of Mathematics</b>	<b>Work Habits</b>
Modeling Painting Coloring Felting Music Singing Drama	Working, listening, and speaking skills including, singing, rhymes, poems, and listening to stories. **All of the above provide vocabulary enrichment.	Gross Motor Activity Agile graceful movements through balancing. Spatial Orientation Dexterity in fingers and limbs.	Complete tasks. Work within gentle structure provided by daily rhythms of similar activities and in larger rhythms throughout the year. Putting things away after using them.

Table 5: Waldorf School of California Preparation for School

I, too, remove my outdoor shoes and place them under the bench, grab my black ballerina slippers out of my briefcase, and enter Teacher Gloria's classroom.

### **A Child's Haven: The Waldorf School of California Kindergarten Classroom**

As I enter the classroom, its warm and inviting beauty mesmerizes me. To my left, shelves of neatly placed baskets containing rocks, stones, multi-colored yarn, pine cones, gnomes, balls, as well as a jump rope and birdhouses, wooden figures, houses, cotton clothes, and more. To my right is the nature table covered with brown cloth to the floor. From there begins a free form naturally constructed "tree house in a room" where sheepskin rugs, a child-size kitchen complete with table and cloth, chairs, hutch with ceramic cups and dishes, and neatly stacked frames all make their home. My eyes stop at Teacher Gloria's glider chair covered with a pastel multicolored throw. Behind the glider chair are additional wooden shelves with more baskets containing odds and ends, Noah's ark, and a collection of wooden cars and trucks. I am drawn to the wooden angel and candle resting on top of a piece of bright green cloth. Below her hang Teacher Gloria's collection of aprons. Three-quarter coat off and color of the day apron on. Teacher Gloria approaches me with an apron. Before politely asking me to hang my coat in the closet, she introduces me to her assistant, Teacher Usuko, a small-framed woman whose jet-black hair is pulled back into a ponytail. She is soft spoken with kind eyes and a welcoming smile. I find that there is plenty of room in the closet for not only my coat but also my briefcase. I take out my tablet and pencil, lay it on the island, and proceed to put my apron on.

The closet is directly next to a full kitchen complete with cooktop and stove, sink, refrigerator, cabinetry, and island. On the other side of the kitchen is the back door.

Teacher Gloria explains that this door leads to a small kindergarten garden growing kale, parsley, and lettuce. To the backside of the island is a large child-size wooden table and chairs. A fresh flower arrangement is in the center. The children's small cubed cubbies are stacked under two large picture windows draped in rosy red silk curtains. A fresh plant, a dried flower arrangement, small trinkets, china plates with angel scenes, and baskets adorn the tops of the two sections of cubbies. As I turn toward the front door, to my left, on the far wall is a section of wooden wall hooks housing different colored capes, crowns, and the children's aprons. All of this surrounds the large dusty rose carpet area covering approximately three quarters of the room. The walls are lazzured in a pinkish peach color. This is a Waldorf painting technique involving one main color with a wash of another color applied with a large sponge. The purpose is to give more depth to the walls. The classroom space is designed with thought and purpose. Teacher Gloria gives the children the most floor space possible for movement, creative play, and safety. This classroom is a place of beauty. Truly a place where the children are able to illuminate clutter of the mind.

### **Rhythm of the Day**

Waldorf kindergarten lays a strong foundation for each aspect of the child—physical, intellectual, social, moral, and creative—to develop in harmony because each developmental stage is met appropriately by the curriculum. Teacher Gloria's "Rhythm of the Day" is carefully planned and carried out with the needs of her children in mind.

Rhythm

Outdoor Play

Morning Circle

Creative Play

Clean-up/Story/Rest

Outdoor Free Play

Prepare to Go Home

Teacher Gloria gives a quick synopsis of their Rhythm of the Day:

A typical day would then be going as a group to the bathroom, and then coming in and doing Circle. The first part of the Circle is seasonal or has to do with a festival or celebration. This would go on for a few weeks. This Circle has a lot of movement to it. Then we would have the next part of the Circle that would be the part, which stays the same throughout the year and has a little less movement. And then the last, and then they would go into real play. This creative playtime indoors is about an hour. Then there is cleanup and when they clean up they even make that a game with using their vest to secure the clothespins to or to use the trucks to move things around to put them away. Then we have a time where we rest and we have a time to then go to the group bathroom. We have our snack time. We have our outdoor playtime of 45 minutes to an hour, and then it is time to go home. Our kindergarten day is 8:10 to 12:30. After care is provided for those who have a need for that. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

### **Morning Circle**

Morning Circle provides a social experience in which children develop an awareness of being an individual within a community. The songs and poems are carefully selected so that the children experience the beauty, magic, power, and humor of oral language. These seasonal Circles assist the children to become more aware of nature and

their surroundings and strengthen their skills in observation and their capacity to describe the world around them. Morning Circle helps build in the children the power to memorize, a skill that will come in handy when performing a play or learning the periodic table in future school endeavors. Morning Circle builds the child's attention span, vocabulary, speech, and language skills as well as listening, comprehension, imagination, morality, and empathy.

The children form a morning circle. They are as quiet as church mice. Teacher Gloria lights a tall candle in a carved wooden angel holder. It looks as though the angel is holding the candle in both hands. She joins the circle, turns to the child to her left, and recites, "Our guardian angel is shining bright." The child lifts their arms up and around the candle and receives the angel from Teacher Gloria. This child turns to his neighbor at his left and repeats, "Our guardian angel shining bright." Arms are raised high and circle the candle. This child also received the angel. This imitation continues until each child receives the angel with calm and reverence. Teacher Gloria explains:

I have done that to be able to bring another sense to that reverence. It's also a little sensory motor type of activity. It's also a very quiet activity...to go inward.

Children rarely get to have an opportunity to be around fire. These things all play into that. And it's just to help bring that sense of reverence and awe. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

Teacher Gloria is the last to receive the candle-baring angel. She gently blows out the candle and returns it to its special shelf behind her glider chair.



Teacher Usuko and Teacher Gloria spread a large white silk circle into the center of the carpet area. The children take their places around the white silk cloth. Grasping the edge everyone says as they raise the circle up and down, up and down, up and down, “King Winter calls the snow, King Winter calls the snow, King Winter calls the snow!” Teacher Usuko gather’s the cloth into her arms and folds and puts it away.

Teacher Gloria leads the children through the rest of the verse and song. Some children know all of the words, some know part of the words, but they all know the very detailed gestures and movements.

The North Wind shall blow

And we shall have snow.

And what will the robin do then, poor thing?

And what will the field mouse do then, poor thing?

And what will the bear do then, poor thing?

And what will the squirrel do then, poor thing?

Now comes winter.

Come little snowflakes!

Come little snowflakes! Come.

This is done slowly and methodically with the words exaggerated as well as the gestures and movements.

This example of imitation and movement helps children with many important skills, which Oppenheimer (2007) details:

1. The child’s motor skills are honed through the varied large and small gestures, and through the various rhythms that are introduced. Because this movement is

- led by the teacher, and is not free, as it is during outdoor play or indoor creative play, this can expand a child's natural movement tendencies (p. 32).
2. The child's language skills are enriched by the choice of poems, rhymes, finger games, and songs (p. 32).
  3. The body-based memory is strengthened by the way gesture is used as the underpinning of language (p. 32).
  4. The child's social skills are refined. It takes a clear sense of boundary to play these games with many little friends close by and not lose the thread or descend into silliness. This strengthens the sense of self-discipline as the child follows with love (p. 32).

### **Creative Play**

In any Waldorf kindergarten, there is plenty of time for creative play. It allows for the development of the child's imagination and creativity, which is the basis for reading comprehension and learning abstract concepts in the grades to come. Artistic activities that take place during creative play encourage a sense of beauty and wonder. The practical tasks strengthen the child's will and resolve while providing valuable life experiences on which to build as they grow.

At the table are a watercolor station, a felting station, and a vegetable chopping station. It is the end of January and the children are going to create a watercolor and felt heart to present to their grandparents on Valentine's Day. As well, it is soup day, and the vegetables that the children brought in this morning must be cut and added to the broth.

Children disperse to various areas for creative play. Several girls are climbing up to the kitchen playhouse area. They begin to set the table with the ceramic dishes and prepare an imaginary meal fit for royalty. Within minutes the wooden stands and clips are out and the various colored silks are unfolded and clipped as this creation is evolving into a hospital. Capes and crowns turn other children into kings and queens. Working together, a boy and girl pull from the shelf wooden animals and houses planning their

strategies for their adventure. The noise level rises with chatter in the different areas of the room. As I listen closely, I make out several comments:

“I have a stomach ache and need to see the doctor.”

“The roast and vegetables are simply delicious!”

“Please, lower your voice, my little one is sleeping.”

“Oh, no, the car has a flat tire!”

Teacher Gloria begins to sing, “Quiet, quiet, quite, please May I have volunteers for preparation of the soup today?” Two students rush to put on their aprons and join me at the table. We chop the veggies. Orange carrots, yellow carrots, purples ones, too. Broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini, yellow squash. Brussels spouts, cabbage, string beans, and more. “Oh, my our chopping hand is going to be tired when we are done!” insists the child to my right. There is not time for conversation; we have two big bowls to fill in a very short amount of time.

In front of Teacher Gloria at the table are three heart shaped tins, every color imaginable of felt that is fluffed, a spray bottle of hot soapy water and a spray bottle of warm water. Quietly, she summons three children to join her. They imitate her steps as they begin to create their individual masterpieces. Carefully choosing one color at a time, “pressing, pressing carefully into the heart shaped tin. It needs to flow over the top before you stop,” directs one of the children. Next, spraying and saturating it with soapy hot water, the children press with their small, pliable fingers. “Oh, this is very hot!” exclaims one child. Teacher Usuko makes her way over to assist with this part of the process. Turning it over and repeating, they finish with clean hot water: pressing, pressing,

draining, flipping, pressing, pressing, draining. The heart is put to dry on a piece of paper towel over by the windows.

The two boys water coloring need no example as this process of wet-on-wet painting is a staple at any Waldorf kindergarten. There is a lot going on and no one bats an eye. They are in the moment of whatever it is they are doing, and even in the constant flurry of activities, the children remain respectful of one another murmuring please and thank you.

Teacher Usuko brings Teacher Gloria and me a cup of herbal tea. “I hope you like lemon and honey. This will help your scratchy throat,” she says as she places it to my left. I am taken back by the kind act.

In the middle of all this learning, class leader of the day passes out a handful of natural whole almonds to each child. He does not need reminding that this is his responsibility; he simply does it. This is a small snack. Its purpose is to satisfy their tummies until formal snack time.

As quickly as we fill the bowls with vegetables of all shapes and sizes, Teacher Usuko whisks them away and adds them to the broth cooking on the stove. “We are almost done!” “Teacher Daria, you are doing a good job!” “Thank you, and so are you,” I respond. If time permits, once the vegetables are cut, others join in the participation of water coloring and felting.

The water colorists wet their sturdy white paper with a large, flat paintbrush. Three primary colors present themselves in front of each child—red, yellow, and blue—and they dip their smaller brush into a color and create with deliberate strokes. They rinse their brush each time they use a different color and dab the excess liquid onto a folded

paper towel before emerging the brush into the color again. Muted, beautiful colors begin to emerge. Each is a work of art. I believe the grandparents will be thrilled.

### **Clean up, Rest, Story**

Clean up in this kindergarten involves teamwork, responsibility, and logic. How can they work as a team and put their room back together again? The benefit of all of this is the joy and sense of accomplishment that comes from completing a task that at first glance, appears to be overwhelming.

Teacher Gloria helps the team work together singing, “Tick, tock goes the clock, what does it have to say? Time for us to pick up our things and put them all away.” The children make a smooth transition and attack the clean up with purpose. The hospital dismantling occurs in a matter of minutes. Folding the silks, collecting the clips, securing the wooden forms: teamwork is clear. The playhouse area is in order. Plates, cups, silverware all in their place. Wooden animals, small wooden houses, cars, and trucks all in their rightful areas. Watercolor jars and paintbrushes are clean as is the work area. The children’s pieces are outside drying. Pretty multi-colored felt hearts dry on top of the cubbies in front of the windows. Felt, tins, and spray bottles make their way to their appropriate space. The hustle and bustle winds down. Each child grabs a sheepskin and maybe their little one and settles down on the carpet area. Teacher Gloria, lyre in hand, sits in her glider as she begins to quietly strum the strings. Clean up is complete, and the children transition into rest and story.

A child sits on Teacher Gloria’s lap and helps strum the lyre. This creates a restful mood. No sound comes from the children even though this is not naptime. The purpose is for them to transition into a calm state in preparation for their story. About five minutes

goes by, just by the change in the notes on the lyre, the children know it is time to sit up, on their bottoms, with legs crossed.

The child sitting on Teacher Gloria's lap joins the other children. "Mother Hulle," a Grimm's fairy tale, is told everyday for about two weeks, starting with the simple telling of the story and culminating in the children acting it out as a play with Teacher Gloria narrating. "Once upon a time, there was a maiden..." she begins. Teacher Gloria tells the story by heart, never from a book, with arm, hand, and head gestures. There is expression in her voice and emotion on her face. As with most four, five, and six year olds, most engage in the story, however, there are a few who do not. As the story progresses, a few children mouth the words verbatim. From Teacher Gloria's lips to theirs.

The Waldorf School of California, much like the Westcoast Waldorf, follows Steiner's philosophy by exposing the children to the beauty of language in support of literacy skills and builds on the person-to-person relationship between teacher and child.

### **Snack Time**

There are five different snacks, one for each day of the week in Teacher Gloria's kindergarten classroom. The children help to prepare them each day. The kindergarten schedule follows:

Monday: Soup Day

Tuesday: Oatmeal Day

Wednesday: Rice Day

Thursday: Bread Day

Friday: Pasta Day

Before snack, the children take a group bathroom break.

The table is set with placemats, cloth napkins, spoons, bowls, and small cups with no handles (two children prepared the table during clean up). Flowers adorn the center of the table. Two small pitchers of water sit at each end. The children make their way to their seats. I sit on one side of the table while Teacher Gloria is at one end and Teacher Usuko at the other. Teacher Gloria lights the small candle in front of her. We clasp hands and recite:

Earth who gave us all this food.

Dearest earth and dearest sun,

We'll not forget what you have done.

Blessings on our meal.

The candle is blown out.

Snack time teaches the children important skills. At snack, here in Teacher Gloria's kindergarten, children remain at the table for an attention span lengthening time of around thirty minutes. It takes tremendous concentration to stay in their chairs, feet on the floor, napkins and hands on the lap, and to engage in appropriate conversation with the classmates around them. Teacher Usuko dishes out the soup with a ladle from a large ceramic bowl. Soup Day is popular. "May I please have seconds," asks a child. "This is delicious!" declares another. Again, Teacher Usuko places a mug of hot tea with lemon and honey to my left and to Teacher Gloria's right. She, then, carries a ceramic teapot from child to child asking if they care for some tea. The "pleases and thanks yous" are abundant as each child takes her up on the offer. One cup of tea for each child and then they switch to water. There is quiet conversation happening around the table. The children enjoy the social interaction. When everyone is done, each child clears his or her

own place including returning the placemat and napkin to the counter. Today in this classroom the children are not responsible for washing and drying.

As they complete their clearing, they begin to walk outside pulling on hats, jackets, and shoes and lining up in a single file. It is time for outside play they are all ready.

### **Outside Play**

Outside play is a regular part of the Waldorf kindergarten program regardless of the season, which fosters an appreciation for the natural world. Teacher Gloria leads us out to the lower grade play area. Aside from the swings and wooden jungle gym this is a protected natural play space with trees and bushes. A chain-link fence separates the play area from the property next door.

Teacher Gloria ties one end of the jump rope to the fence. “Children, Teacher Daria is going to swing the jump for you,” she announces. Immediately, there is a line of very anxious jumpers. “Picking up seashells by the sea, how many seashells will there be” the children begin to chant. The first child jumps into and over the jump rope. “Picking up seashells by the sea, how many seashells will there be. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,11, 12.” This child jumps twelve times and the ear-to-ear grin on his face is proof of how proud he is of himself.

Teacher Gloria sits on the bench finger knitting with a child. A group of children play chase, others swing, some climb a tree, and still others sit on top of a boulder making plans. I continue to swing the jump rope.

Outside play is critical for the healthy development of young children. They need to develop large motor and small motor skills and cardiovascular endurance. Outside play



enables the child to learn about the world. How does mud feel? Can sticks stand in sand? What does a tomatoes smell and taste like? Outside play allows children to release pent-up energy. Children need the opportunity to explore the unknown , the unpredictable, and the adventurous. They also need to be able to wonder at nature, from the worm gliding through the newly turned dirt in the garden to the monarch butterfly emerging out of the chrysalis and gracefully fluttering away in the summer breeze.

The outdoors has something more to offer than just physical benefits. Cognitive and social/emotional development are impacted also. Outside, children are more likely to invent games. As they do, they are able to better express themselves. They feel safe and in control, which promotes autonomy, decision-making, and organizational skills. Inventing rules for games promotes an understanding of why rules are necessary. If the children jump roping had not come up with a plan and rules there would have been utter chaos. According to Jack Petrash (2002), writer of *Understanding Waldorf Education*, children are learning: communication and vocabulary as they invent, modify, and enforce rules; number relationships as they count; and social customs as they learn to play together and cooperate (p. 42).

Teacher Gloria begins to sing, “Follow, follow, follow me, come and follow, follow me!” Everyone stops what they are doing, including me. I untie the jump rope from the fence, roll it up, and put it over my shoulder. My right arm and shoulder are extremely tired, and I am sure they will be sore tomorrow. A line is not necessary, but quite voices are. We make our way back to the classroom to collect any items that need to go home. Teacher Gloria and the children join hands and being to slowly walk to the upper field for pick-up. As they wave to me, they are singing:

Dear friends, goodbye.

Dear friends, goodbye.

Now is the time of day

When we all go our way.

Dear friends, goodbye.

Dear friends, goodbye.

My heart is filled with joy and happiness. I will carry the image of their smiling faces and the sound of their angelic voices with me.

### **Classroom Aesthetics**

Emphasizing holistic education, the aesthetic special arrangement of Waldorf schools mirror and support the growth and development of the child. There is constant reflection regarding the fit between the children and their age-specific needs and education. Waldorf education is designed to bring out the best of the individual child by developing their creativity and imagination.

It is common knowledge that the school environment that surrounds a child has a great effect on what they are as individuals. The effect of the aesthetics on their psyche can be profound. Many studies have shown the effect of color on children. For example, a study done on pre-school age children in 1989 by Hamid and Newport found that the children in the pink-colored room demonstrated more of a positive mood and more physical strength than the children in a blue-colored room.

Waldorf kindergarten teachers, such as Teacher Gloria, take their lead from Steiner, himself, who was immensely interested in color and aesthetics and brought this

interest into the classroom. It is mandatory to create a classroom that develops the sense with a place to rest and grow.

According to Teacher Gloria, the following are specific aspects of the Waldorf kindergarten aesthetics:

1. Materials should be as raw and natural as possible. This allows different materials to blend naturally together (i.e. wood, felt, beeswax instead of plastic or synthetic fabrics).
2. Colors used should be found in nature and not artificial.
3. Curved and natural formations rather than straight or hard lines.
4. Designs should be kept simple—this is beautiful in itself, but also allows the child to develop their imagination by filling in the details.
5. Children should be involved in the production of creations used in the classroom.
6. The season and nature rhythms are honored within the classroom (flowers, leaves, sticks, etc.).

### **Child Assessment and Evaluation**

Four, five, and six year olds make up Teacher Gloria mixed age kindergarten. They remain in her classroom for two years. She knows their individual development needs as well as their individual styles in order to prepare them for first grade. She continually assesses each child's visual, auditory, and hands-on experiences. Are they watching to imitate her, the other children and learning from them? Are they able to recite the verses, songs, and stories, and have meaningful conversations not only with her but their classmates as well?

“In the Waldorf kindergarten, we tend to have more soft voices, but still loud enough for everyone to be heard,” explains Teacher Gloria. I observe that in this particular Waldorf kindergarten, song is the tool that redirects or stimulates a transition. All the while, Teacher Gloria observes and assesses how her children are able to respond to these kinds of situations. She gives an example:

Whatever the song is, song is used a lot so that they are developing, in fact, sometimes when I call their name with speech, they don't hear it, but when I sing it, it cuts across the room through all the play, and they are just so attuned to that. Visually, it's just very important to whatever your activity is to be able to see out and see what is going on. And then I have a child each day that I just observe a little closer than the others. That gives me...I can develop more of a sense of them. With the hands-on, we do so much that is hands-on. It's in the every day, the every day action. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

Teacher Gloria keeps a notebook. In this notebook, she jots down observations and assessments on different children throughout the day. She then does her own inner work. This allows her the time to observe, again, and contemplate how best to meet the needs of the child and children. She then sits down with Teacher Usuko at the end of every week, and they discuss what they are seeing, any difficulties, and create opportunities to help the child or children move through the issue and forward.

There is first grade assessment done with the kindergarteners at The Waldorf School of California. This is done internally by the classroom teacher and by the assessment team of the school. Teacher Gloria maintains notes on each child pertaining to

their physical, social, auditory, and visual growth. This is more informal of an assessment.

The formal assessment takes place through play. The team is simply observing the child through play. Does the child have difficulty with balance, running, jumping, skipping, jump roping? Does the child find it difficult to interact with other classmates in conversation and in play? Does the child have difficulty remembering transition within the Rhythm of the Day? Does the child have difficulties with retained reflections? Once this information is assessed and compiled, it is shared with the teacher. The teacher then shares it with the parents and a plan of action is put into place. This way the teacher and the parents are on the same page, working together to strengthen the child's weaknesses for the smoother transition into first grade.

### **Teacher Assessment and Evaluation**

The teachers at The Waldorf School of California are assessed and evaluated by an outside Waldorf school, their peers, and possibly a mentor if they have been teaching three years or less. This usually takes place every three, five, or seven years, and every teacher is not on the same schedule. The outside school evaluation looks specifically at how the teacher is teaching the curriculum and how the students are digesting and able to use the information.

In regard to the kindergarten teacher, they are looking for very specific information. The tone of the voice, the hand gestures, the movements, the expression or lack of expression on the face are all important attributes of the kindergarten teacher. Clear feedback is shared from "and his hair needs to be cut" to "you need to be making more deliberate eye contact with your children." Whatever the assessment and evaluation

process they use, it appears they are attempting to evaluate anyone from becoming stagnant in the classroom or feeling uncomfortable with constructive feedback.

Teacher Gloria's evaluation takes place every seven years. She was just evaluated. It is a three day process, and the results are shared and kept in the teacher' file at school.

### **Summary**

First, Teacher Gloria creates a warm, loving, safe environment for her children. She provides an atmosphere that feeds the child's perception, affection and strong desire with encounters in listening, touch, movement, and balance. Second, Teacher Gloria encourages the continued growth of creativity and imagination in her children by providing them with hands-on artistic, domestic, and practical experiences. Third, she executes her teaching strategies with intention and enthusiasm and puts herself at the center of all classroom engagement. She provides balance and serenity to the children. Fourth, she is worthy of imitation and is filled with purposeful joy. She is mindful of the quality of her gestures and movements as well as her choice of words and tone of her voice. Fifth, Teacher Gloria through the Rhythm of the Day with its daily, weekly, or seasonal activities happening at the same time shapes an environment that promotes self-confidence and security in her children. And finally, Teacher Gloria's intention is always to develop balanced, creative, imaginative children who will carry a lifelong love of learning. In essence, Teacher Gloria fulfills the expectations set forth by Steiner.

And so ends the journey of two Waldorf kindergartens and the teachers working within them, both at two opposite ends of the country working to create a loving, nurturing and positive environment for their children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE REGGIO-INSPIRED KINDERGARTENS

Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known.

—Loris Malaguzzi

#### **Ms. Teri’s Reggio-Inspired Kindergarten Classroom: Joy Charter School**

Joy Charter School is tucked into the back of a children’s museum. The Children’s Museum is part of 400 acres of an “oasis of green space.” Fifteen miles of trails, playgrounds, gardens, and trees make up one of the oldest and best loved spaces in northern Oregon.

Parking my car in the parking lot across from the museum, I find that it is a neighbor to the Oregon Zoo, the Japanese Garden’s, International Rose Test Garden, the World Forestry Center Discovery Museum, and the Hoyt Arboretum. This is truly an amazing menagerie of resources for children. As I make my way to the entrance of the museum, I can’t help but notice the contemporary piece of sculpture directly in front of the building. This steel structure is approximately twenty-eight feet high with geometric shapes stacked on top of the other some painted in bright primary colors the rest left in their natural state.

At the door, a young woman with a clipboard greets me; I introduce myself, the clipboard is checked, and I proceed to the front desk of the museum signing in and leaving my driver's license as collateral. My adventure begins as I follow the open spaces of walkway in order to reach my destination, Ms. Teri's kindergarten classroom. I literally am in a maze, one wrong turn and I could be in the middle of Building Bridgetown, Baby's Garden, The Clay Studio, Play it Again Theatre, or Water Works. I am sure there are more areas to this hands-on experiential children's museum, but these are the ones I observe before finally reaching the back stairs. My directions are to proceed down the stairs, which take me directly to the Joy Charter School. Coming out of the stairwell, I see an open classroom door and on the side glass panel, a sign that reads "Joy 1." I am in the right place.

### **Foundations of Joy Charter School**

Joy Charter School is a public charter elementary school serving grades kindergarten through fifth grade. It is one of eight elementary charter schools governed and sponsored by the Board of Education of the city. There are approximately 80 students who come from all over the city and its quadrants. The student population is 74% Caucasian, 8% African-American, 8% Hispanic, and 5% Asian. The families of Joy Charter School are diverse in their socioeconomic levels. They are unique in that, unlike other districts where the majority of the children live in the neighborhood of the school, all families of Joy Charter travel to get there.

Based on the philosophy and pedagogical principles of Reggio-inspired education, Joy Charter School believes in strengthening public education by provoking fresh ideas concerning environments where creativity, imagination, and the wonder of learning



thrive. They also serve as a resource for educators from all over the country coming to learn about and/or see the Reggio-inspired teaching approach in practice.

### **A Child's World: Joy Charter School Kindergarten Classroom**

I enter the world of the Reggio-inspired, Joy Charter School kindergarten. Lights are on, however, as I am saying, "hello, hello" no one is there. I stand for several moments taking in the image of this wonderland for kindergarten children. One of the guiding principles of Reggio-inspired education is the environment of the classroom serves as the third teacher. It has the potential to communicate to the children a strong image of what the teacher believes they are capable of and how they might use a space. This is an inviting classroom.

To the immediate left of the entrance is a small room housing wooden coat hooks and small cubbies nesting on the floor underneath. There are an abundance of spaces and materials to digest. My first reaction is this classroom is set up with learning centers. Science, sand, building, nature, art, reading, playhouse, and an aquarium are all present. As I walk a little further, I realize that these are learning spaces that become whatever they need to be at the moment of an experience. Each space contains an array of natural and synthetic materials for children to explore. Clay, India ink, pens, pencils, colored-pencils, crayons, tempera paints, watercolors, wire, linker cubes, pattern blocks, glue and glue sticks, scissors, markers, colored paper, rocks, multi-colored glass bobbles, yarn, bows, ribbon, cotton, and any other kind of media one can think of. All of these materials are organized in glass jars, baskets, and plastic containers. The order of the materials and the organization of their storage is evident as I make my way through the open center space. Clusters of small natural wood tables and chairs to either side of me are already

prepared with materials for a particular purpose. They are materials rich in possibility to create hands on experiences for the children.

As I proceed to the back of the classroom there are two large painting easels in the center of the small open space. To the left of these is a carpeted area with built in risers. A flipchart on a stand presents itself in front of them and to the left of the risers is a bookcase filled with books and room rules are displayed above it. Against the back wall and to the right of the risers are a small refrigerator, stepstool and sink. Two empty large plastic containers reading Joy 1 lunch Boxes/Joy 1 snacks sit on top of the refrigerator. To the left of the sink is a tall white open-shelved bookcase serving as a partition between the sink, wastebasket, large paper storage area, and the sand box on legs. Above the sandbox is a display, “Where Do Stories Comes From?” There is a panel of explanation points and a panel of photographs.

The natural light coming from the full outside wall of windows is abundant. I turn to look forward and notice the teacher’s small desk in a corner, laptop open, and papers stacked everywhere. I doubt whether she has time during her day to make use of this space. I realize that this environment of natural colored walls, soft lighting, fresh flowers everywhere, and natural and synthetic materials provide an atmosphere that is more than conducive for children to be inspired to explore, create, and share. These spaces are very intentional, individual, and group workspaces that invite certain kinds of play and different kinds of thinking within this individual classroom.

I take off my coat, lay it over the chair, grab my tablet and pencil, and sit. As I begin writing some of my observations down, Ms. Teri enters the room.

### **Ms. Teri: Joy Charter School's Kindergarten Teacher**

Ms. Teri and I walk toward one another exchanging introductions and hellos. She is a petite young woman her long black hair in a low ponytail wearing casual jeans, a sweater, and Merrill shoes. First impressions tell me that she is a calm and caring teacher with a sincere passion for what she does.

Ms. Teri is in her fifth year as kindergarten teacher at Joy Charter School. She grew up in Japan; she made her way to Oregon for college. She returned to Japan to teach children at the American Embassy. Ms. Teri, I discover, is rather a private person, and this is where her background information ends except to divulge she is married with a pre-school age daughter.

Ms. Teri describes her role as a Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher:

To support a strong image of children and families as their collaborator creating a learning environment and experiences responsive to the children's interests, questions, and thinking that build on their unique strengths. My role is also to bring content and material that is in accordance with state standards and at the same time be listening and paying attention to the emergent interest, struggles, questions of the group as a whole as groundwork or contexts for integrating such work. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Tablet on my lap and mechanical pencil in hand, I am sitting on a student-size wooden chair by the sandbox on legs. I am able to see all areas of the classroom minus the playhouse room now to the right and off of the middle of the area of the main space. It is 8:30 and the children begin to arrive with parents in hand. Ms. Teri is at the door to greet everyone. Goodbyes, kisses and hugs, have a great day are heard and seen as the

children hang up their coats and make their way to the plastic containers, placing their lunches and snacks in the appropriate bins. Some children visit among themselves while others are checking out the spaces and materials.

Ms. Teri is drawn to Reggio-inspired education because it is based on a strong image of children that happens to align to her own beliefs about children and people. “I believe that all children are competent, resourceful, and have unique gifts (competencies and perspectives) that this world needs” (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013). She adds, “It is a never ending journey to get to the heart of what it means to be engaged in a pedagogy of listening and relationships and endless opportunities to dig deeper.” I learn that Ms. Teri is also inspired by the children’s project work. Project work integrates content areas and makes use of the arts as a tool for thinking, problem solving, and storytelling. The project is work done by small groups of children, typically four to six, with the teacher. It is usually stimulated by something a teacher hears in children’s conversations that she believes has potential to develop into significant work. Projects may last hours, days, weeks, or months (Lewin-Benham, 2008, p. 187).

Projects begin by listening. What is truly interesting to the children? What ideas of theirs are rich enough to pursue? Projects also come from notes. Working in small groups allows the teacher to observe and document the children’s interactions closely. Ann Lewin-Benham (2008), whose background is theory and practice of early childhood, suggests taking advantage of the project process by quoting a child to himself as a way to rekindle interest, keep him focused, spur his memory in order to see possibilities for new projects or the continuation of started projects.

Ms. Teri expresses her thoughts on the uniqueness of Reggio-inspired kindergarten and the part it plays in the children's project work:

Is that it is a curriculum upon a pedagogy of listening and relationships. I believe that this as well as starting from a strong image of children is two things that set this project apart. I believe that children experience a strong sense of agency and belonging. Their families and unique life experiences play a central role in their stories, and the contexts through which they play and work. We honor their connections to the world outside the classroom and invite these in. Therefore no two projects from year to year will look the same (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013).

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten is a community and its members are capable and competent and full of skills and ideas that contribute to its success. The Joy Charter School kindergarteners exist in relationship to their community; therefore, have a responsibility to be curious and intentional about their role toward the classroom spaces, materials, people, and ideas. Ms. Teri is creating a daily community that is rich in resources, where learning is happening in working with others and using dialogue, exchange, and discourse to generate ideas in order for her students to learn about themselves and one another. Ms. Teri is passionate about the arts as a means, if children are struggling to inspire them to express an idea or solve a problem. She explains:

The arts are integrated into all we do. Whereas some teachers might ask children to go to a workbook or pen and paper to articulate their idea or thinking, I give a choice of materials, one such example was while you were visiting, I asked the children to consider what agreements our community needed for how we wanted

to be together. I set up a collage, paint, black line pens, watercolor as choices of materials for them to either express their idea or “find their idea.” This same strategy I use for most content areas, whether they are expressing a “Science Talk” theory on how seeds know what they want to become or drafting a story for story workshop. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

In discussing Ms. Teri’s expectations for her children, she reiterates that they are participants in helping create a strong learning community. She is especially speaking to her children as good citizens within the classroom environment.

My expectation is that they are participants in helping to create a strong learning community. I don’t expect them all to become friends, but I expect them to develop a sense of respect for one another and an understanding that we all have a right to feel safe and a sense of belonging. I expect them to help reflect together on their experiences and create agreements for caring for each other, the environment and materials. I expect them to fall short of these agreements use these as opportunities to work their community on developing strategies for repair and reflection. When a child experiences a conflict to learn to ask questions, begin to identify their own emotions and consider the perspectives of others; I expect them to take responsibility in giving clear messages about what they are needing and wanting; and to think about how their actions may or may not have expressed this message successfully. These are a just small sampling of my expectations.

(Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

The curriculum is also driven primarily by the interests of the children and evolves in natural organic ways. It is not established in advance. The teacher expresses

general goals and makes hypotheses about what direction activities and projects might take. On this basis, she makes appropriate preparations. The curriculum emerges in the process of each activity or project and is flexible and adjusted accordingly through continuous dialogue among the teacher and her children. Ms. Teri gives an in-depth account of how curriculum is created within her kindergarten classroom.

It is inspired by several mentor authors such as Ellin Keene, Susan Zimmerman, Rugh Shagoury, Andie Cunningham, *Young Mathematicians at Work*, *Math Their Way*, and a whole host of others on content areas from math, meeting, community building, the arts, sciences, and beyond. It is also rooted in the Oregon state standards, but adapted and presented as contexts for children, which are meaningful and have many entry points for children to access the curriculum according to who they are and the schemas they bring to the work. There is collaboration, we all collaborate together on what it means to bring this work forward and adapt it to reflect a pedagogy of listening and relationships. We bring notes to our meetings for feedback and support. I also plan with a mentor teacher as well as an arts specialist. We meet in team meetings and share our work this way too, our main goal is that we don't work "in silos" or in isolation—that all of our work is shared. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Teaching to the individual child and how they are able to learn best requires the classroom kindergarten teacher to create environments that are conducive to this belief. Loris Malaguzzi (1993), the founding father of Reggio-Emilia education, wrote a poem about the many languages of children, it begins: "The child is made of one hundred. The child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts. A hundred ways of

thinking, of playing, of speaking” (p. 1). The hundred languages Malaguzzi is referring to include drawing, building, modeling, sculpturing, discussing, inventing, discovering, and more. Ms. Teri has her own explanation of the one hundred languages:

Meaning that when you’re engaged in a pedagogy of listening and relationships, listening happens not only through direct speech, children communicate ideas through a variety of “languages” such as movement, drama, paint, clay, collage, abstract/representational design, black line pens, etc. Therefore it is our obligation to offer a wide variety of “languages” for children to express their ideas, as well as ample time and support for learning the basic structure possibilities, or if you will, the alphabet of these languages for future expressions of ideas. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

I see no white board or computers (except for Ms. Teri’s laptop) for the children’s use within the classroom. There is an overhead light projector they may use for dramatic play or other provocations. The possibilities are endless. Ms. Teri admits that she is “not a techie, but strongly utilizes technology at school.” There is a camera for documentation, a computer for research (looking up images) and communication with parents via email, Evernote online portfolios, and an ipad to help record conversations.

Creativity is at the heart of learning in Ms. Teri’s classroom. Creativity is all about encouraging children to think outside the box, by imagining, exploring, and taking chances during activities. Ms. Teri offers her interpretation of creativity and imagination as they relate to her Reggio-inspired kindergarten.

Creativity is the heart of learning. Learning cannot happen without its partner imagination. Therefore, imagination is nurtured heavily especially in the early



years as foundational for learning experiences in the years to come. When children play, it puts their brain in an optimal state of learning, (flow), as much as possible, we design contexts for playful inquiry, for children to dig into deep questions and ideas but through play. Creativity lays at the heart of learning, it is the birthplace of innovation and ideas—we strive to as much as we can, create opportunities for children to imagine and wonder and construct their learning to see the world full of possibly as the open and living system that it is (not limited to facts and figures)—that is full still of mystery and the unknown. What do readers do? How do you know? What do you wonder about reading? What are your theories on reading—how do people learn to read? Do you think it is the same for each person? Are books the only thing that we read? What might it mean to read the world? Etc. Etc. vs. this is how we learn go read. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Joy Charter Schools' parents are active partners in their child's learning. Parental participation is manifested in daily interactions during school hours, in discussions regarding educational and psychological issues, and in special events, field trips, and celebrations. Ms. Teri encourages and invites parents to be involved.

Ms. Teri constantly observes and listens closely to her children in order to know how to plan and proceed with their work. She asks questions and discovers her children's ideas, hypotheses, and theories. She collaboratively discusses what she has observed and recorded, and together, with the children makes flexible plans and preparations. She offers them occasions for discovering and also revisiting and reflecting on their

experiences, since learning in the Reggio-inspired kindergarten is an ongoing process. Ms. Teri is a partner with her children in a continual process of research and learning.

### **Flow of the Day**

This Joy Charter School kindergarten is a full day program for five and six year olds. Ms. Teri stresses that the Flow of the Day represents possibilities for the way their days may unfold.

Arrival

Meeting

Story Workshop and/or Explore

Sharing and Reflection/Snack

Reader's Workshop/Shared Reading

Outdoor Break

Work block (could be: Math/Handwriting/Reader's Workshop)

Lunch

Quiet Reading Time

PE

Read aloud

Explore/Project Work

Closing

Dismissal

### **Morning Meeting**

The children are sitting on the three levels of carpeted risers waiting for Ms. Teri to begin the morning meeting. I determine that there will be no Mrs., Ms., or Teacher in

front of my name as the children are referring to Ms. Teri as Teri. From now on I will also refer to her as Teri. She introduces me to the children, “Joy 1, this is Daria. She is a teacher who will be visiting, taking notes, and pictures.” The children respond with a “hello” almost in unison. I return the greeting and go back to my place.

Morning meeting is the time, every morning that the class comes together as a community to sing songs, discuss classroom issues, read enriching stories or poetry, share their personal stories, and make plans for the morning. Since it is Monday, the children are dictating their weekend announcements. They are actually sharing what experiences they encountered over the last few days off. Not everyone is able to share. It is one of the children’s half birthday. “We will listen to other announcements during Story Workshop,” Teri explains. “It is [this child’s] half birthday because his birthday is in the summer.” The child is currently sitting on Teri’s lap.

He jumps off of Teri’s lap. She picks up a marker and is prepared to write on the large white tablet on the wooden easel. The child is moving around not finding a comfortable spot. “Can you have a seat my friend?” asks Teri. Other children try to encourage him to sit by them or to just sit. “I know you are trying to help him right now, but that’s a confusing message for his body,” insists Teri. “What nice things have we been noticing about [this child] that he shares with us and his community?” asks Teri.

“He likes to play Angry Birds.”

“He likes to chase us.”

“I’ve really been enjoying his imagination!”

“I’ve been enjoying his imagination, too!”

As the children share their ideas, Teri writes them on the large tablet, often adding a simple sketch pertaining to the particular attribute. The child though is still not cooperating and Teri recites, “5, 4, 3, 2, 1.” This technique is used in order to defuse the inappropriate behavior. The child sits down. Teri responds, “ Thank you. Beautiful job.”

“He’s really good at soccer.”

“He loves to play in the sandbox.”

“He loves to build with blocks!”

“He loves to play house.”

“He loves Explore.”

“Today, you guys are like secret agents and when we are participating in Story Workshop, I want you to see what else you notice that [this child] loves to do,” direct Teri.

At this point, Teri is giving the children choices for Story Workshop. They raise their hands one at a time and volunteer for the center of their choice.

### **Story Workshop**

Story Workshop is a time in which the children explore and wonder through the world of stories. This will look different every day. It may include, but is not limited to, reading quality children’s literature, acting out stories, creating new stories and songs, telling their stories using the different languages (dancing, singing, drama, painting, clay, wire, and so), and writing stories as a class.

Today, the children participate in the following centers: drawing and painting, fill the page, the playhouse, string story, collage and building with blocks.

Drawing and Painting invites the children to use paints, colored pencils, crayons, and pencils. Their creation is entirely up to them. It is a beautiful thing to watch a child create art. Their thought process and actions fascinate me. Some have a clear plan that they quickly set out with, others simply make marks on the page and determine what it is as they are working on what they finish. I am curious to see where the groups' creativity and imagination takes them.

Fill the Page requires the child to fill the page. Are they able to determine the sky, grass, tree, houses, and where they fit on the paper? They are able to use whatever medium they wish. Only two children are creating in this Story Workshop. They are both using watercolors to express their intentions. I am inspired by their concentration and ability to fill the page with color, shapes, and imagination.

The Play House is just what it suggests without the house. It is located in a separate room off the main classroom. It is a favorite of the students. Teri limits the number of participants so play does not get out of hand. She asks them to keep the door open although glass windows top to bottom allow the room to be completely visible. I discover that this Play House area creates high levels of stimulation that in turn lead to behavioral issues. Within this community a child is being left out. She comes to Teri with her complaint. Her feelings are hurt and she is on the brink of tears. Teri calls the other three children over. "How would you like it if she treated you this way?" she asks. "You can be our neighbor, but you can't be in our family?" That's all she has to say. The four return to the Play House and continue role-playing mommy, daddy, big brother, and baby sister complete with costumes, gestures, and oral script.

String Story center is minus participants. Teri dismantles it and prepares the space for the next activity. Free Form center includes cut outs of a human being laying on the table. The intent of this activity is to adorn these images with a selection of the materials Teri presents to them: cellophane, gadgets, flowers, beads, pieces of colored glass, and so on. Unfortunately, this center is minus participants as well.

The Collage center is set up with a collection of natural and synthetic materials. White pieces of paper will be the background for this activity. One child contemplates sitting down, however, decides to join the group in the Play House.

Building with Blocks is a collaborative exchange of six children. They are creatively constructing wooden boats using each and every pattern block on the shelves. They are sharing ideas, discussing them, and through group cooperation, their final creations are coming to fruition. This is an incredibly positive interactive and collaborative exchange.

Teri is documenting the children as they finish their individual or collaborative works of creativity and imagination. Documentation consists of transcriptions of children's remarks and discussions, photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking and learning using many media (Lewin-Benham, 2008). According to Lewin-Benham, documentation has many functions:

- Making parents aware of children's experiences and maintaining their involvement.
- Allow teachers to understand children better and to evaluate their own work, thus, promoting professional growth.
- Facilitating communication and exchange of ideas among educators.
- Making children aware that their effort is valued.
- Creating an archive that traces the history of the school and the pleasure of learning by any children and their teachers (pp. 124-125).

### **Clean Up, Sharing and Reflection, Snack**

Teri announces it is clean up time. One child begins to sing, “Everybody, everywhere, clean up, clean up.” Some others join in repeating these same words until all are engaged in the process. Teri lends a hand to the group in the playhouse area as they need some extra assistance in putting away the many materials used.

An older student, quite possibly a fifth grader, enters the classroom with the snack and water bottle bin and places it on top of the refrigerator. The children do not stop what they are doing. They continue to work diligently in cleaning up their areas. “Wow, I see some awesome teamwork here!” exclaims Teri. As she chats with the children, she casually sets up new materials in the different areas.

The children grab their drinks and snacks and find the perfect spot on the carpeted risers. Usually after Story Workshop the children come together and reflect on what occurred during that time, but today, a parent is going to read a story to the group. The mom is reading, *Grumpy Cat*, and as she reads the children are interrupting with questions and comments.

### **Outside Play**

Outside time is very important for physical development. It’s a chance to develop large muscles through hiking, climbing, running, and more. According to Teri, Joy Charter School kindergarteners play outside every day, and on good days, they will go outside twice. The school playground houses a play structure, running area, basketball hoops, rocks and hills for climbing, a garden, and a sandbox. Hoyt Arboretum is their next-door neighbor, and they take advantage of visiting there as often as they can.

The children grab their coats and hats, exit the classroom, and line up at the door leading to the play area. They wait impatiently for Teri as they are ready to release their pent up energy. They run outside quickly scattering in different directions depending upon what choice they make for their outside activity. A soccer game starts between several boys and several girls. I observe from the sidewalk outside the door. Several children are playing chase up on the hill by the garden. Others are in the sandbox shoveling and digging, and the girls playing soccer convince Teri to join their team. It is a brisk and dreary day but it does not interfere with the enthusiasm of the children.

Teri summons the children to line up at the door. It is hard to believe that a half an hour is at an end. It takes repeated coaxing to get all the children to the door. Their faces flushed with disappointment coupled with sighs and disgruntled expressions suggest unhappiness of having to go in so soon.

### **Reader's Workshop**

Reader's Workshop is a time when the children and Teri share many wonderful books and their ideas about them. They use this time to talk about reading comprehension strategies and work toward "reading like writers" and "writing like readers." Reader's Workshop includes read alouds, independent reading or looking at books along or with friends, and playing with letters and other surface structures.

The children hang up their coats and return to the risers. Teri begins reading, *I AM SORRY*. After all of the stimulation out on the play area, it is difficult for some of children to immediately settle down. As Teri is reading, she pauses throughout asking the children, "Do you have a silent story? What are you thinking about?" The questions are



to provoke their thinking and contemplation of ideas. Whenever a child is talking Teri comments, “You are disturbing our community.”

The main idea of the story, *I AM SORRY*, is that unkind words and actions are unacceptable and those who treat others with disrespect should at least be willing to apologize. Upon completion of the story, Teri asks, “What do we do in our community if we have a problem like this.”

“We try to solve it ourselves,” answers one of the boys.

“How?” asks Teri.

“Say you’re sorry,” respond two of the girls.

“I want you all to think about, what ways you want us to treat each other in our community?” Teri asks. She then begins reading, *Mama If You Had a Wish*.

Sensitivity, kindness, friendship, and cooperation are discussed at the end of the second story. Teri requests that each child think of a wish and that wish is going to turn into an agreement. “Do we all make mistakes?” she asks. “Do we learn from our mistakes? You guys are going to be making the rules, so put things into a wish!”

Teri challenges her children into each making their own wish that should happen everyday. She has a stack of notepaper and as each child expresses their wish she writes it on a piece of paper and hands it to them. Teri asks the question again, “What is the way you want our community to be?”

1. Share—be nice!
2. Still be friends even if you’re mad.
3. Solve the problem.
4. Everyone can play.

5. Try to be flexible.
6. Play by asking.
7. Let a friend pick first.
8. Be fair.
9. I want people to listen to one another.
10. Respect each other's work, if someone asks you not to touch something.

Only one child is unable to think of a wish.

Teri explains the activity. The children choose from three different mediums: drawing with India ink, collage, or easel painting. They take their agreement and proceed to their chosen center. Their intention is to create a picture that reflects their agreement.

Three children take their seats at the center providing the India ink and watercolors. They are visiting and have a difficult time getting started. The children at the collage center use natural materials to describe their agreement, however, they do not glue anything down. As Teri checks on the children's progress a completed collage catches her eye, "Wow! Oh my gosh!" she exclaims, "don't put it away, I want to get my camera!" She proceeds to snap a picture of the child's collage.

### **Lunch/Quiet Reading**

"I would like you to pause you're work. We will come back to it another day," announces Teri. Clean up is the name of the game. It is lunchtime. The children in Joy 1 are hungry, and as a result, quickly put all materials in their proper places. They are instructed to use the restroom, wash their hands, and return to the same spot they occupied during collage.

The children's lunches brought from home and school lunches are delivered to the classroom. Two women distribute them. Lunchtime is the time of the day when the children eat a healthy lunch and are able to socialize with their community. Once everyone is done and their individual places have been cleared and wiped down, the soft music will fill the air and the children are invited to look at a book, work in their journals, or be in their own thoughts and daydreams.

Conversations from the different tables serves as background noise to the group I am having lunch with. They are curious as to why I am in their classroom, "really." I explain with a little more detail my presence for the entire week.

They are anxious to see what my lunchbox contains. "I hope you brought a healthy lunch?" one child asks.

"I'm a Vegan."

"What's a Vegan?"

"You don't eat animals or dairy."

"I eat dairy, but I don't eat meat stuff."

"If you eat dairy, you're not a Vegan."

"Hey, have you heard Justin Bieber's new song? It is terrible!"

"Who is Justin Bieber?"

From vegetarian to Justin Bieber, only five and six year olds are able to relate to this thought process. My lunch passed their healthy food test, although I did observe children with chips and cookies. Primarily, though, the sweet part of the lunch is fresh fruit or homemade granola. Moms are in and out helping to monitor this community of

children. I surmise that they are present to keep an eye on things. Teri is using some of this time to return phone calls or to receive them.

Soft music is the reminder that it is time to finish lunch and prepare for quiet time. The children's blankets are passed out and put in specific areas of the classroom. The lights are out, however, there is enough natural light that the children's reading time will not be hindered. There is to be no visiting just quiet individual alone time. The whispers soon subside and all children are engaged in their quiet reading.

### **Physical Education**

"I will be calling friends to get up for P.E." Teri announces. The music stops, but the lights stay off. As each child is called they grab their book, blanket and pillow, and drop them in their appropriate places. Coats are on as they line up at the door. The P.E. teacher whisks them away for more fresh air and outside activity.

Physical Education consists of cooperative games, exercise, and large motor activities. Typically the P.E. instructor begins with an organized game or activity and ends with a short free playtime where they connect with their peers and enjoy the outside environment.

Teri uses this time to set out stations, make observational notes on her computer, and make and return phone calls. She sets up the juice table in the riser area with a pretty tablecloth, cups, and juice. This is for the celebration of the half-birthday. I do not ask, I simply start to help her with the stations. I decide that she is pressed for time and could use an extra hand. She is very appreciative of my gesture. I continue to set materials out (the children will be going back to India ink, collage, and easel work). The children

return from P.E. and know the drill. They take off their coats, hang them up and sprawl out on the risers. They are exhausted.

### **Read Aloud**

*Jane on Her Own*. “Why do you think this book is called (as shows them the cover), *Jane on Her Own*?” asks Teri. The answers are sparse and silly; however, one child does infer that it’s about being lonely. As Teri reads with expression, she pauses intermittently to show pictures and ask questions. I detect that the children are tired and would rather just look and listen than engage in the interaction about the story.

Two young women enter the classroom, glue guns in hand. They are from the museum and are the experts at Studio Work. In a Reggio or Reggio-inspired school the Studio atelier is the art center and the atelierista is the artist/instructor of that domain. These studios are most often separate locations and the children go there from these.

The children will be working on their Summerland Trees. The glue guns will be used to attach material to the twig sculptures such as small leaves, flowers, moss, and so on. One issue, the glue guns do not reach the wall plug. I observe that this causes the two-studio artists frustration as well as Teri. I take my extension chord out of my briefcase and hand it to them. With looks of surprise, as if to say, “Are you kidding me?” they accept it and proceed. Two children at a time present themselves for this activity. Read Aloud time ends, and the children are invited to go back to their Community Work.

### **Community Work**

Community Work, in this particular instance, is designated time within Explore or Studio Workshop. Its time is intentional and the children are given specific provocations. According to Teri,

a provocation is an experience we plan for the children that is open-ended yet challenging. We consider the arts as a language for children to communicate ideas. The intention is not to create art projects, but to make available space for children to share their ideas through different media materials. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

The India Ink group is now ready to wash their drawing with watercolor. The two children at the easels are creating with tempera paints. The collage participants are using both natural and synthetic materials to make their statements. We must remember that their provocations will reflect their community agreements. While all of this is going on, two children at a time are finishing their Summerland Trees with the studio experts from the museum.

I am wandering around observing the children's interaction and meaningful hands-on work. While most are engaged in what they are doing, there are those who insist on disturbing their group or activity. Teri has a moment for conversation and explains to me the reason for the agreements.

I used to be become frustrated with these behaviors and I decided to work on community agreements now instead of at the beginning of the year. It's February and the children know me and I know them. They are comfortable they are testing their boundaries and me. At the beginning of the year, they are timid and want to please. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Everyone completes Summerland Trees and as the others finish with India ink, Collage, and Easel, they clean up their area and congregate on the carpet area and risers. It is time to celebrate the half birthday.

### **Closing and Dismissal**

The birthday boy brought in the book *Star Wars* to share with friends. The children love this. They recognize the characters and the brightly colored pages add to their excitement. This is a classroom with children who love robots. As the sharing of the book comes to an end, Teri requests that the children “pause the Star War button in your brains.”

“You have a big heart and you really care about people,” Teri expresses. The birthday boy draws a name out of the cup. This child will present him with his first wish. He hands her the leaf with the bell on it. As she shakes it she says, “I wish you...” the wish corresponds to what the child had said earlier. It is on his birthday chart. The leaf is passed to the next child whose name is called. This continues until all the wishes have been shared. Everyone then sings the “Birthday Song.” Teri rolls up the “Birthday Poster” wraps a rubber band around it and hands it to the child. The apple juice is poured and the children are served. As they finish, the cups are placed back on the clothed table. Teri picks up her guitar singing “The Goodbye Song” along with the children. During this time, I did not write down my observations, so I did not write down the lyrics to either song, and I wasn’t able to retrieve a copy.

Parents come in, chit-chat with one another a bit, collect their children and leave. The enthusiasm from the morning is not being expressed at the end of this very long day.

## Engaging the Creative Arts

The creative arts are an integral part of the Reggio-inspired approach to kindergarten education. I asked Teri what her expectations were in engaging the creative arts in her classroom:

My expectation is that with formal and informal introduction to a variety of materials and the opportunity to share with one another their discoveries, questions, complications, and connections they have made, the children will develop over time, a strong relationship with these materials. We talk together about how we believe the material should be used and cared for—and make agreements about this—what does it look like, sound like, feel like when working with these materials and/or cleaning them up. We talk about their unique affordances and that we notice about these affordances eventually they will come to understand for themselves which materials is best for articulating a specific idea. Over time, my expectation is that they learn to care for, use, and develop strategies for using the arts as vehicles for thinking and expressing their ideas that some of these strategies include slowing down, zooming in on details, reflecting on their work (does it capture what I'm trying to say? Was the material I used to find my idea helpful or limiting?) asking for help and so on. I expect that they'll be able to use the arts to find and tell stories as well as edit and revise their stories (go back in a different material and zoom in on this part of your story and figure out the details—perhaps the dialogue or descriptive language); they will also be able to use the arts to play with questions such as: how might paint capture the way you feel when you are playing in Colorland (a space in the arboretum), how



would color and line express this emotion? Where does snow come from? How is it made? How might collage materials capture your theories? Etc. Etc. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom approach supports an arts-based environment as languages for learning, expressing ideas, and communicating stories. No principle pertaining to the arts sits in isolation. Each is connected, influenced and shaped into other ideas leading to new avenues of exploration. Eisner (2002) describes ten lessons the arts teach that are invaluable when considering the arts and Reggio-inspired education. The lessons are:

1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.
2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.
3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives.
4. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstances and opportunity.
5. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor number exhaust what we can know.
6. The arts teach children that small differences can have large effects.
7. The arts teach children to think through and within a material.
8. The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.
9. The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.
10. The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important (p. 14).

### **Child Assessment and Evaluation**

The children in the kindergarten at Joy Charter School are continually being assessed through observational note taking, documentation, blogging, and individual Evernote accounts. They struggle in this area because so many of the current evaluation tools in the larger world do not reflect their pedagogy. It has been and continues to be a

challenge for them to find what supports the work they are doing, what helps give the full image of who the child is, and what helps to answer questions that parents want to know. Is my child okay? How does my child compare to other children? Teri offers a positive side:

We have developmental continuum and goals for students' achievement, which I think are helpful markers for understanding what children's strengths and learning edges are throughout the year. We collect formal reading assessment in the fall and again in the winter/spring. We also are collecting work samples 3x per year in all areas as a way to keep current on where they are on the continuum and develop ongoing goals I think evaluation is helpful for me as a way to know what experiences to offer, and how to build on strengths as well as learning edges. In math, for example, I have a "mathematical landscape" which is a continuum for building early number sense as well as Oregon's standards as I plan my lessons and collect work samples, I have time to reflect on where each child falls on the horizon of these landscapes. If one child is strong in numbers in operations and another is still working on numeral recognition and 1-1 correspondence up to 10, I have a better sense of who to pair them with and what context will be open ended enough for each child to explore the question at their level such as creating an inventory context and giving certain children bigger or smaller challenges within the context. I try to keep records of where children are through keeping notes in my journal as well as documenting with a camera and collecting work samples.

(Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

## **Teacher Assessment and Evaluation**

According to the curriculum director at Joy Charter School, the first step in teacher assessment and evaluation is reflecting on their own strengths and learning edges (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013). They are in the classrooms all of the time. I realize that as a charter school, they do not have to follow the same criteria as a regular public school because there is no formal evaluation process regulated by the powers that govern.

Teri shares her perceptions on their assessment and evaluation process: “yes, we are asked to write up a professional action plan, and meet with the supervisor a couple times a year. I feel we are constantly being evaluated by our peers in that we are giving and expected to receive feedback regularly on each other’s work” (Personal Communication, February 8, 2103). Short and to the point. No professional action plan was shared nor did I ask for one. I discover that this is an area that is a work in progress for the school. The peer evaluations are a causal walk into the classroom, sit down or stand, take some notes, and interact with the students. The feedback for teachers does not come from the curriculum director or from the education director; it comes from peers. The teachers seek this out, especially if there is an issue. Dialogue is a constant and they are all collaborators. No one ever works in isolation and this may be why they find no need for the traditional evaluations tools.

### **Summary**

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten at Joy Charter School invites children to be who they are. This arts-based environment is looked at as a place that provokes their thinking and is aesthetically beautiful and pleasing to them. The Reggio-inspired

kindergartener is infinitely capable, creative, and intelligent. The Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher is to support these qualities and challenge their children in appropriate ways so that they are able to develop fully. This is not an approach with set guidelines and procedures to follow. The child is given the opportunity to develop their authentic self as opposed to the voice of a system (Starratt, 2010).

Teri validates her children's work and supports them to go deeper into their perception of the world. She observes and documents the daily life of her classroom environment in order to make learning visible. She uses a variety of documentation methods, such as a camera, digital recorder, ipad, computer, and journal in order to track her children's thoughts and ideas as they play together or work with the multitude of materials available within the classroom. Teri makes tremendous use of the portfolio binder, which includes photographs of their projects, quotes from the child, artwork, and writing samples. She believes in the ability to collaborate not only with fellow teachers and her children but their parents as well.

### **Ms. Paula's and Ms. Jenna's Kindergarten Classroom: The Experiential School**

The Experiential School is located in a charming and historical residential suburb in eastern Missouri. I am in awe at the tree-lined streets and single-family homes as I walk the not quite two blocks from the bed and breakfast I'm staying at for a week. It is a pretty sunny morning, mild for February, but my trench coat is necessary. As I approach the school, I see that the building itself looks like the typical two story brick public school.

It is early, and I am not quite sure which entrance to use. The door is locked but as luck would have it, a parent (with a key) and her child offer me entrance into the school.

There's a friendly exchange of "good mornings" and I thank her. She directs me through the cafeteria, past the kitchen, and up the stairs to the main office. "It will be to the right of the stairs," she says. "Have a great day!" "You, too!" I respond.

Walking into the office, I introduce myself to the pleasant young woman behind the desk and immediately stepping out from one of the back offices another approaches me. "Good morning, you must be Daria," she inquires. "Yes, Good morning!" I reply as we shake hands. Susan is the director's assistant. She offers me a coatrack to hang my coat and a space to keep my personal belongings. I sign in at the front desk and am given a visitor's badge. This will be the routine every morning for the rest of the week.

### **Foundations of The Experiential School**

The Experiential School is an independent school in the state of Missouri. It is accredited by the Independent School Association of the Central States (ISACS) and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). The Experiential School began in 1963 as a laboratory school of a local university where student teachers could try out different teaching techniques and test new educational theories. Despite the success of the program, in 1978, the college officials decided to close the school. Parents and teachers rallied to keep the school open. With several board members putting their personal homes up as collateral this made it possible for The Experiential School to become an independent school. In 1979, they added a middle school. There are 270 students enrolled in preschool through eighth grade. The student population consists of 75% Caucasian and 25% students of color. 22% of the student population receives financial aid.

The Experiential School is a welcoming and inclusive community that cultivates academic excellence, sound character and enthusiastic collaboration to prepare their students for life-long learning, service, and global citizenship. They actively promote opportunities and activities for their students, faculty, and community to engage in meaningful dialogue based on diverse perspectives. The Experiential School provides educational enrichment through listening, discussion, and positive exchange of ideas. Through this creative, respectful, and joyful interchange, the students, teachers, and others gain a better understanding of the world and themselves.

Susan walks with me across the hall to the kindergarten. The team teachers, Paula and Jenna, are outside at kindergarten drop-off exchanging conversation with parents and welcoming the children.

### **The Experiential School Kindergarten Classroom**

I really believe [as] one of the tenets of the Reggio program is teacher as facilitator, and that's what I believe. I'm not the expert who imparts knowledge into their heads, I'm a facilitator.

—Jenna

I enter the classroom, lay my tablet and pencil on a child-size round table and begin to observe the environment of this Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom. It is important to remember that the environment of the classroom and the school is seen as the third educator after the teacher and the parent (Fraser & Gestwick, 2002). This is a two-room kindergarten space. This room is fully carpeted and several distinct areas surround the large open area that is now to my front. To my back is the kitchen pass through that divides the two rooms. To my left is a two-level play area with a bunk bed

ladder for climbing to the top space. There are natural wooden toys and a painting for the children's pleasure. A small open area complete with bookshelves and an overlay round multi-colored carpet is the perfect spot for small group activity or reading. Framed glass partitions serve as dividers into the next space, an abundance of natural materials such as twigs, shells, baskets, man-made blocks, rocks, pebbles, and so on. As I make the turn with my eyes there are two lime green upholstered comfy chairs with cubes serving as side tables. This reminds me of a conversation space in a family room. The far wall displays the room rules, "Our Agreement" and class jobs, "Our Jobs." Child self-portraits with names fill the "Our Jobs." The drawings present detail and color. They are amazing. As my eyes continue to the far right corner well organized supplies take up the space. A white board, Smart board, and bulletin board complete the front wall of this classroom. A small gray table with two chairs and a stool house two computers with accompanying keyboards. Two white open shelved low cases complete the partitioning of this last space in this classroom. Pencils, pens, markers, three-hole punch, world globe, and other school supply odds and ends fill the tops and uneven shelving. The cabinetry is white, the two small round tables and chairs are natural wood and the natural light from the large windows create a wonderful learning environment.

Entering the adjoining room, the kitchen is on my right and full-length cubbies and cabinetry are to my left separated halfway by an entrance door. The combination of white and walnut wood is pleasing to the eye. The Kelly green linoleum floors are clean and shiny. A large island complete with stools and underneath cabinets give dimension to the kitchen area. Behind this is a metal, four shelve, freestanding case that stands between a storage closet and the unisex bathroom. Lush green plants, containers of pencils, pens,

markers, and paint brushers as well as small chalkboards, watercolors, and files fill this space. My attention is drawn to the carefully planned spaces that complete this room. It is free of clutter and ample open spaces allow for freedom of movement between each area. Beginning at the bathroom is a sandbox on legs; however, its cover is on. A small wooden table and four chair set follows and appears to be part of an art center. A two-sided easel stands in front of the first of two large picture windows. Separating the windows is about a ten foot white cabinet. I assume that it holds art material and other hands-on supplies as the children's aprons are on hooks to its right side. There is a desk between the tall white cabinet and a very large lush green plant. This area is carpeted from the desk across to the opposite side of this end of the classroom approximately a 30 ft. across and 10 ft. deep area. A couple of white boards cover the far wall. The alphabet done by the children and their original artwork, the calendar, and other odds and ends of materials and another small table with three sky blue chairs. Legos, folder, scissors, clipboards, Kleenex, books, and other hands on materials fill them. I surmise that these structures are easy to move when wanting to restructure the configuration of the centers. A fresh purple tulips plant sits on one of the metal cases. Tulips in February? Again I notice the natural light that deters my vision from focusing on the lighting in the ceiling of the classroom. I gather that the design of these two classroom spaces encourage creativity, imagination, communication, relationships, and endless possibilities. These are beautiful spaces.

The children's morning chatter as they enter the classroom brings me back to reality. "Hi, are you our visitor, today?" asks a child.

"Yes, I am," I replied. "It is so nice to meet you!"



The children are taking off jackets, hanging them up, using the bathroom, eventually making their way into the other classroom. At the end of this train of children are Paula and Jenna. We make our introductions. They express their positive approval of me being in their classroom for the week. They offer an explanation of the activities taking place before lunch. The three of us follow the last of the children into the other side. I take a seat at the table where my tablet and mechanical pencil are waiting. Paula and Jenna are taking care of morning business, several students are setting chairs in a big circle: enough for all of them.

**Ms. Paula and Ms. Jenna: Team Teachers of the Kindergarten Classroom of The  
Experiential School**

Paula and Jenna are a team both bringing individual talents to the table. I discover that both women are warm and caring individuals with a genuine love for their children. They are both in slacks, long sleeve tops, and comfortable shoes. Their straight posture and happy demeanor provide a comfortable environment for the children.

Paula is in the middle of her tenth year at The Experiential School, but only her first year in the kindergarten classroom. She holds a BA in Speech and Theatre and an MA in Community Arts Management, which is one reason Reggio-inspired environments appeal to her. She is community-oriented and enjoys storytelling, creative dramatics, and creative writing.

Jenna is in the middle of her twelfth year as a kindergarten teacher at The Experiential School. She holds a BA and Certificate in Early childhood Education. Her experience with and love for the performing musical theatre finds her co-leading and

performing in singing groups of The Experiential School children, teachers, and parents. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her children in the creative arts.

In looking at the principles at the heart of the Reggio-inspired approach to kindergarten learning, I refer to Fraser and Gestwick's (2002) synopsis:

- The image of the child: competent, strong, inventive, and full of ideas.
- Environment as the teacher: designing an environment that facilitates learning.
- Relationships include the environment, the people with the environment, and its involvement in co-construction of knowledge.
- Collaboration among teachers, children and teachers, children and parents, children and children, and the larger community.
- Documentation: a verbal and visual trace of the experiences and work and opportunities to revisit, reflect, and interpret.
- Progettazione: making flexible plans for the further investigation of ideas and devising a way to carry them out.
- Provocation: listening closely to children and devising a means for provoking further action and thought.
- One hundred languages of children making symbolic representations of ideas and doing so through a number of different media.
- Transparency: using light as a symbol of openness to ideas and theories from other parts of the world (p. 11).

These principles are at the heart of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten. This is Paula's passion and love. She comments below on her role as a Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher and why she is drawn to the Reggio approach:

I'm in my first year, so seven months. But I was also for two years a Reggio-inspired preschool teacher and then a slightly Reggio-inspired third grade teacher for seven years...my background is in the arts. When I was working on arts integration programs, the Reggio program came to my attention. I thought it was really interesting, so when there was an opening to work with it that was very exciting to me. Because of the hundred languages piece especially, but as I got to

know more about it, it was also helping to follow the children's theories, the fact that the children already have so much in their heads that you just try allow them the opportunities to get that out in whatever ways they can. That's why the hundred languages are so key...although it's hard, I also really appreciate the documentation piece and certainly the environment. I love the Reggio environment and the fact that it's beautiful place for learning, a beautiful place to work in. That was kind of a key thing for me, too. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Jenna also sees herself as a facilitator offering different materials in different languages to the children. One of her intentions is to make sure that their environment is able to be the third teacher (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013).

The role of the teacher is as a collaborator and co-learner, guide and facilitator, researcher and reflective practitioner. Although the child within the Reggio-inspired environment is the active and competent protagonist in his or her learning, the teacher as a result takes on the role of collaborator and co-learner (Edwards & Gandini, 2008). The exchanges between the children and the teacher while constructing knowledge are valued and fostered. Project work demonstrates both child and teacher engaging in the collaborative learning process. Jenna offers her thoughts:

That's a great questions, definition of project. I'm not even sure, I'd probably have to think about it. I would want to say that it's a way to integrate all academic mediums as well as creativity, imagination, and twenty-first century skills all in one spot it's a way for kids to learn all of those things in a way that is interesting

and makes sense to them and is meaningful to them. How do we use it? We have projects that we have some projects are yearlong, some projects maybe happen for a month. It depends on the interest of the teachers and of the kids. The last few years, the kids have been designing a natural play scape, and that's been our project this year the kids are working on a storage for the play scape. That's also our Changes projects. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

The teacher does not control nor dominate the child or his learning, but rather, demonstrates respect for the child's rights through mutual participation and joint action (Gandini, 1997, p. 19).

Even though the teacher is a partner with the child in the process of learning, she also serves as guide and facilitator. According to Carolyn Pope Edwards (1993), the teacher's role "centers on provoking occasions of discovery through a kind of alert, inspired facilitation and stimulation of the children's dialogue, co-action, and co-construction of knowledge" (p. 154). Within this role, the teacher does not sit back and simply observe the child construct his own knowledge, although at times, it maybe be appropriate, rather, she plays an active role in providing the child with provocations and tools necessary to achieve his personal goals and advance his mental function. Referring to what Malaguzzi (1993) offered, "We seek a situation in which the child is about to see what the adult already sees...in such a situation, the adult can and must loan to the children his judgment and knowledge" (p. 80). Paula recounts for me how she guides the children through different expectations throughout the learning process:

[pause] that they treat each other the way they want to be treated. I really, I try to emphasize that, Jenna tries to emphasize that. That concept can be really hard because people will use that term in a situation where it doesn't fit, where it justifies more, "because they did that to me, I'm going to do that back to them," really helping them to understand that. Expectations also, for me personally, it's not so much what kind of academic skills they can get out kindergarten. Maybe it's more an awareness, developing number sense, developing an understanding of the alphabet as something that can be used to get built into words and other things. Do I expect them to read a book? Not necessarily, but to understand that there's a story in there and they could look at the pictures to understand that. I love the idea of kindergarten as a child garden, as a place to grow in so many different ways and to grow as an individual and their ability to then be in a school setting and to get things out to fit, to grow in their ability to listen to one another and participate in discussion. That expectation's a hard one, but I think it's important, and it's definitely one of mine. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

As well Jenna offers her insight into guiding the children in social situations:

I might have to think longer than, let me think about that for a second. I want them to be the best self that they can be, so anything that comes along with that. How do they handle themselves in this situation, in that situation? Learning about themselves, and also others, treating others with respect. How to interact with others, those kinds of things. Seeing themselves as capable, as citizens of today that they can do whatever it is they want to do now. Making sure that, I want them

to be lifelong learners, so I hope that that's something I'm instilling in them. I feel like I could answer that question in a lot of different ways. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Therefore, the teacher's role as guide and facilitator of their children's learning according to their interests, questions, curiosity, and current understandings necessitates that she also take on the role of researcher (Malaguzzi, 1993). This connects to the teachers' role of researcher to the principle of documentation. Paula and Jenna use a number of data including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork in various stages of completion, videos, and transcribed audio recordings. They analyze their data through reflection and discussions.

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher's role is complex and in order to carry out this responsibility, she must engage in constant reflection. Constant questions are asked. The teacher evolves. This reflection and questioning on the part of the teacher must take place within the context of discussion and collaboration with other teachers, parents, and children (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Paula and Jenna are committed to engaging creativity, imagination, and play within the structure of their Reggio-inspired kindergarten. Paula's impression on the importance of these three areas:

It's huge. It's probably one of the most important things that happens in our curriculum, to support that, give them avenues to express that, encourage those who feel like they don't have good ideas, how they can get their ideas, offer as many opportunities as possible, be playful ourselves. Having an atelier also is a huge component of that because Sarah as a practicing artist has so much creativity

at her disposal, so she'll come up with things like their hand-stitched self-portraits which we could not have done in here, but she can with the small group. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Jenna continues agreeing with Paula:

I feel that they are very important. I'm mindful of making sure that it happens and that we have conversations about them and that the kids are aware of it. At the very beginning of school, we have a conversation about what is imagination? How does it help you? Those kinds of things. Like what you saw the last two days, the conversations where we would sit and talk about it, and whenever the next activity was, we'd bring it back up, reflect with their ideas, and I can't even remember now what we connected it to, but it was connected to some part of our curriculum, so it wasn't just a stand alone, "Let's talk about imagination today!" It connected in with something we were doing...So now, as you heard in the last conversation, that was part of, a couple of kids made reference to it, and I feel that was because we had talked a lot about it at the beginning of school. So they're celebrated. We're mindful to have it be a part. There's a lot of research now that shows that play for kids is what they need. We've always known that, but now research is starting to back it up, so whenever it's possible to offer them times to play, and there can be open-ended play, purposeful play. Story workshop is an example of purposeful play, so giving the kids those opportunities as much as we can. I know that as a teacher in this day and age that some of my kids may go to another school, and I want them to be ready for that. I know that I can't, I wish that I could, but I know that I can't give them the whole day for playing, but I also

know that there needs to be a balance, making sure that they do have a lot of time for that. With creativity the same. [laughs] It's important, and we're mindful of it here. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Paula and Jenna strive to nurture and inspire self-confidence in their kindergarteners. They develop and foster in their children cooperation, collaboration, leadership, and responsibility throughout all that they do. They are good examples of what Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers look like in practice.

### **A Day in the Life of a Reggio-inspired Kindergartener**

For a young child having a routine is a good thing, research shows that. So much as we can, we have a routine but within that, we also allow for flexibility for following a squirrel outside the window in a tree...and now we're all interested and maybe we shift around our schedule to accommodate that learning experience.

—Jenna

The Experiential School kindergarten generally has a morning meeting, and then they have a work time, and within these times there is a lot of room for flexibility and for following the wants, needs, and excitement of the children in order to support their learning. Paula shares her feelings on the day in the life of Reggio-inspired kindergarteners:

In our school, we start off with, at the beginning of the year, we taught them about greeting one another and greeting us. There's a greeting as you enter the room. We start off with the morning circle, so there's a time we can gather and all set a common intention for the day. We involve singing in that, usually. Our mornings tend to be some time for specialists, some times that we can devote to core areas of languages arts and math or science, which often comes into our theme time, and afternoons, after lunch and rest, usually is more open and it's center time and



the study or atelier time. However, schedule does not bind us because we need to go with the flow. When we sense that it is a day that kids have been cooped up too long, the weathers' been bad, they haven't been outside, we need to change and add more movement into our schedule. We need to go outside for some recess or take our lesson outside so that we can take advantage of nice weather. For some kids, there's more schedule than they'd like because they would love to keep on playing with LEGOs...for some it takes them a while to settle into it, and then they settle into it and they are on a roll and it's hard for them to break it up and move on. But we're lucky that we don't always have to. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

I discover that one of the constants in these kindergartener's lives is their specialists' class throughout the week. The other constant is time; time to play creatively and imaginatively, time to complete projects, and time to just be in the moment.

#### Kindergarten Specialist Schedule

Monday:	9:30-10:30	Music/Drama (half groups)
	10:30-11:00	PE (whole groups)
	1:10-2:00	Atelier (5 students)
	2:10-3:00	Atelier (5 students)
Tuesday:		
	12:10-1:00	Drama (half group)
	1:10-2:00	Atelier (5 students)
	2:10-3:00	Atelier (5 students)

Wednesday:

9:30-10:00/10:00-10:30 Music (half group)

1:00-2:00 Greenhouse/P.E. (half group)

2:10-3:00 Atelier (5 students)

Thursday:

9:00-10:00 Spanish/P.E.

12:20-1:00 Drama (half group) \*8:30-9:10 during September

1:40-2:10 P.E.

2:10-3:00 Atelier (5 students)

Friday:

1:10-2:00 Atelier (5 students)

2:10-3:00 Atelier (5 students)

### **Morning Meeting**

As the children enter the fully carpeted classroom, they find their personal calendars. They cross off today's date (February 11, 2013) and take their places on the carpet in front of Jenna. She refers to this as the learning carpet. I am introduced to the entire group. I share with them my favorite things about Colorado: the mountains, the skiing, the mild weather, and the constant sun. I return to my space and continue to observe.

“What is your greeting this morning?” Jenna enthusiastically asks.

“Buenos dias!” responds the little girl to Jenna's left. The child turns to her neighbor saying, “Buenos dias, [child's name]!” Then that child turns to his neighbor

greeting them with “Buenos Dias!” This continues until everyone is greeted. To my surprise, they all, in unison, exclaim, “Buenos dias, Daria!” I respond as they did.

Today the children are grouped into twos to discuss their experiences from Story Workshop. Story Workshop is a process that allows the children to use a wide variety of materials to express an idea formed their head, in a book, within a center using specific materials. For example, Jenna says, “I have a story, it’s about a person.” The children respond: “Is it Barack Obama? Is it Jesus?” Jenna says, “No, someone in my family.” The children ask, “Your mom?” And Jenna responds, “Yes, and the coconut tree.” Jenna chooses materials to create this story: India ink, paper, water, paintbrush, and watercolors.

This review spurs the children’s memories and enthusiasm for Story Workshop. In order to make sure they understand their task, Jenna asks a child to grab their Story Workshop painting and join her. The two of them role-play sharing their creations and getting feedback from one another. They return to the learning carpet and share with the rest of the classmates their feedback. Story Workshop is set up on the other side of the room.

“Make new friends, but keep the old...Can someone explain to Daria what exactly is ‘make new friends’ recess?” Jenna asks. A child volunteers as I join the group. He is standing and I am sitting, making eye contact with me, he explains:

“Well, actually, you pick someone you’ve never played with. I pick [child’s name].” The child joins the other one. Again, they face each other, and he asks, “Do you want to come outside with me for ‘make new friends’ recess?” “Yes!” “What do you want to play?” “How about squirrels?” “That sounds good!” “Ok, then, let’s line up for

‘make new friends recess.’” They both go and line up at the door. Jenna reminds them that they are not to react in a negative way if they decide they don’t want to play with the person who chose them.

“What are some of our kind responses?” she asks.

“You don’t cry or whine!”

“You don’t throw a big fit because that would hurt their feelings.”

“We can play your game first.”

“Can someone tell Daria what happens after 15 minutes of ‘make new friends’ recess?” Jenna inquires.

“You ring the bell.”

“We tell our new friend that it’s time to join our old friends.”

“We ask, do you want to join us?”

Everyone lines up with their new friend. As we enter the stairwell in single file line, Paula asks, “What do we call the hallway?” “The whisper well!” “So we whisper when we’re in the stairwell.”

### **Morning Recess**

This play area is breathtaking. There are bigger than life sculptures for the children to climb in a large area of sand. There is a turtle and a snake. Several yellow dump trucks, cut up logs, and a large silver bucket complete this life size sandbox area. There is a grassy area, sidewalks meandering throughout, sturdy climbing apparatus on top of mulch and what looks like a flower garden area with no growing flowers. Some children are climbing, others are playing in the sand, and two little boys are playing squirrels. One chases the other pretending that they are in a huge oak tree. Stopping

quickly then going the other way. Then they switch roles. This goes on for 15 minutes. I hear the whistle, there is not motion for about a minute; everything remains the same.

This is a way of engaging all children and encourages that no one is left out; it teaches communication skills, kindness, friendship, empathy, and more. The interactions between the children are warm-hearted and playful. I am glad to be a part of it.

It is time to return to the classroom. Paula lines her group up first, and they go inside followed several minutes later by Jenna's group. This allows each group to go to the bathroom and avoid confusion and noise.

### **Center Work: Story Workshop**

Each child finds a place at a table or around the large island. They have jars of water, India ink, pens, white paper, and watercolors. Before beginning, Jenna leads them in a little exercise to get the rest of their energy out of their bodies:

Stretch your arms up (pause)

Wiggle your fingers (pause)

Cross your arms (pause)

Stomp your feet (pause)

They repeat this twice. Then they begin their next activity.

Quietly and methodically, Jenna requests, "Find a place where you have a story. After you are done drawing your story, you will watercolor over it. When you watercolor over the picture, the ink won't run because it's permanent. I can't wait to see the places where you can find a story!" I notice that every time Jenna hands something to a child they say, "thank you." She asks if anyone minds if she turns on some music. No one rejects the idea. She walks around making sure each child stays on task. Music from *The*

*Secret Garden* plays in the background. This slows down any hurrying that goes on. The drawings are intricate and as they finish the last stop—watercolor wash—they clean up their space and allow their creation to dry where it sits.

### **Patterns**

Paula has her group learning about patterns. This is a math lessons without being a math lesson. She allows a few moments for the children to quiet.

“Did someone just send me a wish on the wind? Because I don’t feel good. I mean it! Could someone send me a wish on the wind? Thanks, I feel better. Actually, I think I just had some gas!” Paula gives directions: (1) you’re going to put your name on a card and keep that card with you until we get outside; and (2) You are going to make nature patterns and I’m going to photograph them. Paula reads with expression the book, *Patterns in Nature*. It is a picture book with colorful pages and few words enough to get the point across. Rock, leaf, rock, leaf, “what is the alphabet pattern?” Paula asks. Several children respond, “a, b, a, b.” “Fantastic!” Paula exclaims.

We head outside with large pieces of laminated white paper. Single file, we go out into a new area, the Natural Play Scape Area. Another gorgeous play area. This is more natural looking as if in the woods. It is truly an amazing area with rocks, pebbles, trees, mulch, twigs, and other materials one may find in the natural environment of an outside space. The children are to find things from nature and create their own pattern on the white laminated pages. They need to place their card with their name on it somewhere on the page. “Please don’t remove your patterns until I check it and take a picture of it,” she says. The children respond in unison, “okay!”

This is experiential learning in and with nature. With the exception of just a few, all understood the concept. Paula has those who didn't quite get it repeat the activity. They slowly figure it out. This is not a rushed activity. Those that took longer did not feel pressure or stress to complete it faster. No one waited impatiently. Those that finished ahead of the others play elsewhere in the play scape, far enough away not to bother anyone. As Paula photographs, I collect the cards and laminated paper. The children return the pieces of nature back to nature.

### **Lunch/Recess**

The children wash their hands, get their lunches, and line up at the door. Paula and Jenna escort them to the cafeteria and return to the classroom to eat their own meal as they work on documentation, lessons, or correspondence. I did not want to disturb their routine, so I ate and then visited the atelier.

### **Atelier/Atelierista**

I enter the art studio and introduce myself to the art specialist. Elizabeth is a petite young woman with care, concern, and energy for what she gets to do everyday: art with the children. She only has a few minutes before the next group of early childhood students appear, but I am thankful that I get a quick tour. She brings my attention immediately to the kindergarten self-portraits in sculpture. I can't believe what I see: their work is amazing. Elizabeth reminds me that she first receives the kindergarteners when they are in preschool, making this their third year of atelier. I complement her on her ability to pull this kind of creativity and imagination from five and six year olds. As her next group of children enters, I thank her for taking the time to share, and I return to the kindergarten classroom. I am excited at all that I have seen, and ask to interrupt Paula and

Jenna to share my excitement with them. They are pleased that I am pleased. The children return from lunch and recess.

### **First Grade Rest**

“Hi, kids,” greets Penny. “Come in and take your coats off and come over here to the learning carpet to sit.” She begins to read them a story to calm them down a bit and then it will be rest time. As the children walk by me, they say “hi.” They engage in conversation any time that they can. Paula begins to sing “Puff the Magic Dragon.” The children who know the words join in. These activities lead them to First Grade Rest, a newly minted rest time due to a case of head lice in the kindergarten last week. Every blanket, pillow, change of clothes, etc. was bagged in plastic and sent home to be thoroughly cleaned. First Grade Rest allows the children to pick a quiet spot and rest; they can journal, read, draw, or sleep. Most children do not sleep instead drawing in their journals or looking at books. Soft music plays in the background.

After First Grade Rest, the children put their journals and books away. Paula and Jenna ask each child to find a center to explore in. Several choose Legos, others find their way to the Animal Center, while others go to the art center and the natural materials center. The noise level ebbs and flows as the children engage in their different activities.

Next, it is time for snack. Paula and Jenna pass out green grapes and napkins. “There is one Clementine if anyone wants it,” Paula declares. “No thank you” respond all the children. Paula and Jenna make their way around to each center interacting with the children as they go. They give positive reinforcement assisting if necessary and collaborating with those children who are stuck. I put my notebook and pencil down and enjoy the conversation with the children as well.



### **Clean Up/Afternoon Recess**

It is time to clean up center work, use the restroom, wash hands, and gather personal belongings. “Don’t forget your lunchboxes!” directs Jenna. “Why are we going outside now?” inquires one child. “We have decided to have a recess while we wait for your parents to pick you up,” responds Paula. “I’m looking for a quiet line,” Jenna insists. She repeats it. All quiets down.

“See you tomorrow!” I say. “Goodbye Daria, see you tomorrow,” the children respond.

### **An Arts-Based Learning Environment**

The Experiential School kindergarten is filled with the creative arts. The arts are an integral part of the entire learning process within the classroom. If the children are doing project work; are they creating a drawing? Are they acting something out? Are they painting a masterpiece? Paula and Jenna provide the materials and the opportunities for their children. As the child tells a story the opportunities are always there for choices in experiencing hands-on learning through the arts. The arts serve as a tool for communication. They allow the child the ability to explore, collaborate, and problem-solve with their teacher as well as with their peers.

### **Parents**

Parents are an essential resource for their child's learning. They are active partners in the school community at The Experiential School, continually collaborating with teachers and their child. There are many instances when parents participate in the project process offering their ideas and skills as they participate and learn along side their child. Parents are encouraged to be active contributors to their child's activities in the classroom

and in the school. Parental participation is manifested in daily interactions during school hours, in discussions regarding their child's educational and psychological issues, and in special events, field trips, and celebrations. Curricular and administrative decisions involve parent-teacher collaboration, and parents also serve as advocates for the school in community politics. Jenna shares her views on the this topic:

We see a lot of them every day at drop-off and pick-up. We connect with them there. We connect with parents through email. Sometimes phone calls home. and then, depending on the year, depending on what we're studying, we can have parents in with their expertise to help us with a certain area. An example of this is, when we were working on the play scape last year, we had parents who helped us with the native plant committee. They were responsible for that and worked with those kids in the classroom. Another year we had birdhouses built from scratch, so we had parents who cut wood with the kids, who got the hammers and nails out and built those and painted them with the kids. It can be as small as just checking in with them in the morning all the way up to having them help us with a long-term project and anywhere in between, like party planning, how they help us water plants or come with us on field trips, things like that. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

### **Child Assessment and Evaluation**

Formative assessment is very important in allowing Paula and Jenna to adjust lesson plans to either reteach when necessary or move more quickly. Summative assessment is necessary for them when they are writing report cards. Paula and Jenna use a variety of assessment tools prior to parent-teacher conferences and report cards to track

the progress in the children's abilities to write upper and lower case letters, numbers, words, and sentences as well as perform various mathematical tasks. I discover that Paula and Jenna would put less emphasis on the academic portion of their approach, however, many of their children leave The Experiential School for first grade due to the jump in tuition. They cannot in good faith send these children unprepared to first grade in public school. Paula and Jenna gather anecdotal evidence as they relate to the children's social-emotional growth. Jenna shares her feelings on the assessment and/or evaluation process of her kindergarteners:

We start every year with assessments. We find out where they are academically and then we can tailor our lessons to meet those needs. We also take into account who they are, what their learning style is, what they need, and then create activities or lessons that best fit that. For example, in story workshop, today, we had kids who work better on their own to develop a story and other kids who work better in pairs. We might call that introvert-extrovert, you would call it other things. Giving them the opportunity to work in that way as they're developing stories is something we keep in mind. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

### **Teacher Assessment and Evaluation**

The Experiential School assessment and evaluation process for their teachers is straightforward. They are evaluated once a year by the director of the school and sometime by the assistant director. Jenna notes, that "when there was a curriculum coordinator they would also come into the classroom" (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013). It is evident to me that with the Reggio-inspired approach it is

difficult to figure out what the best practice in the assessment and evaluation process for the teachers would be. At The Experiential School there is a twenty-question evaluation tool. A few examples of this are: Are you meeting the needs of your students?; Are you professional?; Are you a good teacher? I never received a complete copy of this instrument, however, it is evident that these example questions are vague. In other words, what are the specific needs?; what does professional constitute?; and what does being a good teacher imply? I find that these assessment and evaluation question are difficult for the teachers to answers. This is an independent school and teachers' keeping their positions is not solely dependent on the outcomes of this specific process.

### **Summary**

The Experiential School kindergarten is another example of how the Reggio-inspired approach to early childhood learning and its key principles guide the teachers in harnessing their young children's natural curiosity and creativity. Paula and Jenna:

- Build on the strengths, competencies, and curiosities of the children.
- Encourage, support, and develop collaborative learning.
- Have less structured rooms, but carefully planned spaces and well organized materials, so that children are free to spend more time
- On projects that interest them and are often able to move between activities at their own pace.
- Offer a wide variety of basic art media including paints, clay construction, drawing, collage, drama, music, and so on.
- Listen to and implement children's ideas for projects on which to work.

- Have displays of children's creations and photographs showing the children at work in the classroom.
- Make a great effort to communicate with parents and help them feel involved in their child's schooling.

## CHAPTER SIX

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Children are beautiful, powerful, intelligent, creative, unique and full of potential. They are whole human beings and come to us with their own ideas, values and opinions about the world. Children deserve joy, peace, and time to develop their own interests and determine their own hypotheses. Children benefit when a high value is placed on free thought, creative intelligence, and constructive strategies: much more so than on the direct transmission of knowledge and skills.

—The Hills School, a Reggio-inspired school

The purpose of this study is to describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten as two progressive arts-based alternatives for kindergarten education. This study seeks to understand the experiences of the children in these kindergarten approaches and determine what might be learned from such pedagogical practices. By describing, interpreting, and appraising the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens, I hope to shed new light on these alternative kindergarten approaches and discuss their importance in early childhood education.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, public kindergartens are now full day programs, mandating that the daily schedule be mainly filled with language arts, math, science, and social studies (Almon, 2007). Recess is reduced to 25 or 30 minutes a day. No time is allocated for child-initiated indoor creative play, formally a mainstay of kindergarten. Increasingly, the national goal in early childhood education (Sellg, 2010) is to get children reading as early as possible and long-term consequences are of little

concern (Oppenheimer, 2007). Accountability agitated education in George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Almon, 2007). NCLB is believed to be the most misguided legislation for education ever to have passed; as it requires testing for kindergarten, along with academic expectations and teaching via predetermined scripts (Oppenheimer, 2007). The result of this mandate is the worst practice for elementary grades because rote teaching to mainly silent and still children was pushed into kindergarten (Oppenheimer, 2007). Unfortunately, NCLB is tied to such massive federal funding for public schools that few systems are/were willing to disregard the regulations, even when exemplary teachers have been driven away and instruction has been tainted by teachers teaching to the test resulting in sacrificing understanding for right answers (Sacks, 1999).

After reviewing the literature, I generated five research questions: (1) What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten? (2) What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice? (3) What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments? (4) What perspectives do parents have of Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten? And (5) what are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?

As mentioned in Chapter One and Two, I chose educational connoisseurship and criticism for my research method in order to describe, interpret, and appraise pedagogical practices of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten. I chose two Waldorf schools and two Reggio-inspired schools containing kindergartens to study. I spent one week observing the teachers and their classrooms as well as interviewing the teachers, directors/administrators, and parents at each site.

Developed by Eisner (1998), educational connoisseurship and criticism is a method of qualitative inquiry intended to improve educational practices. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation and criticism the art of disclosure (Eisner, 1998). In other words, connoisseurship requires that the researcher have enough educational knowledge to be able to observe the subtleties in a classroom while criticism gives the data a public audience and illuminates the connoisseur's perception with the intention of educational improvement. Eisner makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but it leads to constructive results.

There are many schools in the United States that are accredited in the Waldorf education approach and kindergarten is included in their offerings. Although there are many early childhood programs that are inspired by the Reggio-Emilia approach, few go beyond pre-school. For this study, I chose two school sites that fully embrace Waldorf kindergarten education and Reggio-inspired kindergarten education. The two Waldorf sites, Westcoast Waldorf School and The Waldorf School of California, are located in Florida and California respectively. Westcoast Waldorf School has grades preschool through eight grade while The Waldorf School of California has grades preschool through twelfth grade. The two Reggio-inspired sites, Joy Charter School and The Experiential School are located in Oregon and Missouri respectively. The Joy Charter School has kindergarten through fifth grade while The Experiential School has preschool through eight grade. All four schools asked to be named with pseudonyms.

The data collection included observations, formal and informal interviews, and the collection of artifacts. My primary function in all four schools was to attend to the practices of the kindergarten teachers and their interactions with the children as well as



attend to the environment. I conducted formal interviews with each of the participating teachers, the directors/administrators, and some parents from each school. These interviews took place at the school site and allowed me to better understand the individual experiences and the meaning made from them. Informal interviews included spontaneous conversations that took place throughout the data collection and were typically part of my daily interactions with the children and others in the school environment. No child was specifically identified. I gathered artifacts from each of the four schools related to the curriculum and pedagogy taking place in each classroom. Curriculum guides, lesson plans, projects, children's work, children's artwork, portfolios, photographs, and any other important documents were collected.

I used Eisner's conceptual framework of the six dimensions of schooling to help with my data analysis. The six dimensions of schooling are: the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998), and the aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). It must be noted that when analyzing my data, I was open to data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that nothing of significance was left out.

In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed illustration of the two Waldorf kindergartens, and in Chapter Five, I did the same thing with the two Reggio-inspired kindergartens. The application of related literature to my data collection motivated my interpretations. The Waldorf kindergarten stories illustrated only two examples of over 280 Waldorf schools in the United States who remain true to Rudolf Steiner's principles and philosophy. Similarly, the Reggio-inspired kindergartens demonstrated how they implemented principles of the Reggio-Emilia approach. I believe that all four of these stories offer a multitude of ideas for the way in which we think about kindergarten

education and the kindergartener's learning. My goal is that that these stories provoke thinking past what has become the traditional view of the kindergarten classroom. I also want to remind the reader that I am talking about arts-based schools as an abstraction not comparing and contrasting these particular schools.

### **Findings**

Throughout Chapters Four and Five, there were three themes or findings that I kept returning to: (1) in an arts-based kindergarten, children are not only learning knowledge but also learning to be creative and imaginative with knowledge they learn; (2) in order to have a successful arts-based kindergarten approach, the teacher, the child, the parents, the materials, and the environment all need to be involved within the curriculum; and (3) in order to fully evoke the qualities of a Waldorf education and a Reggio-inspired education, the teacher must be able to fully support the philosophies and methods of their perspective approach. These findings are important because they support previous findings as well as suggest what an arts-based kindergarten may offer children.

As we can glean from the analysis of my questions, these findings provide us with evidence that arts-based kindergarten approaches aid in the development of the whole child allowing the child to not only mature in their own time and space but also encouraging the child to build meaningful relationships with other children, the teachers, their parents, and the environment around them. In order to fully understand these findings, I return to my questions supporting the analysis with examples from the data.

**Question #1: What are the intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

This research question focused on the aims and goals of the Waldorf Kindergarten teacher and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher, as the teacher is the determining factor in how a classroom operates and impacts children. I set out to explore this question through the daily observations of the four classrooms paying close attention to the teacher(s) and her interactions with the children, the materials, the environment, and the parents. My hope was to walk away with a full understanding of the inner workings of a Waldorf kindergarten classroom and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom.

**The Waldorf kindergartens.** As we saw in Chapter Four, the intentions of the Waldorf kindergarten teacher are as follows:

- That the child is at the center. They are teaching to the whole child promoting learning experiences that offer domestic, practical, and artistically aesthetic activities.
- That the environment created is warm, inviting, loving, and homelike. That it evokes the senses of the child not only by the natural, manmade aesthetically pleasing materials, but also the calm, joyful, methodical, safe, and secure atmosphere.
- That the child's power of creativity and imagination is nurtured through the telling of stories, music, movement, creative play, singing painting, drawing, felting, and finger knitting.
- That there is a healthy collaboration with parents for the greater good of the child and his education.

The curriculum is carefully designed to strengthen the child's moral purpose, creativity, and intellectual abilities toward a balanced whole (Almon, 2010). Chapter Four shows us that Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria strive to artistically transform concepts in learning to living realities so that the whole child, including their intellect, heart, and their volition, is enhanced (Oppenheimer, 2007). These Waldorf kindergarten teachers aim to develop subject matter through image, rhythm, movement, drawing, song, painting, poetry, drama, and so on (Petras, 2002) as well as involve aesthetics in all that is done throughout the school day (aesthetic conditions) program (Uhrmacher, 1993, p. 89).

According to Steiner (2007), the essential task of the kindergarten teacher is to create the proper physical environment around the children. "Physical environment" must be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around the children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment, everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of the children from the surrounding physical space (p. 125).

Steiner (2007) emphasized the importance of the imagination in childhood. As seen in Chapter Four, each day allowed plenty of time for imaginative creative play, which Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria believe is the key for children becoming creative thinkers later in life. We witnessed in Chapter Four: tea parties in the play kitchens; a hospital constructed out of wooden stands and silk and cotton clothes; and children becoming race cars and dinosaurs, while others became kings and queens. Creativity and imagination are strong within the Waldorf kindergarten curriculum, allowing for intellectual growth of the child and lay the foundations for language arts, science, math,

art, and social skills. These kindergartners are not taught the ABC's, not given worksheets, nor do they practice reading books. Through the power of their own creativity and imagination, they are preparing to read and write through the spoken word. Chapter Four indicates that the kindergartners in Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria's classrooms have incredible use of vocabulary and their verbal skills are beyond their developmental capacities.

Both Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria acknowledged the necessity for and cultivate a healthy collaboration with their parents in order to enhance the educational experience of their children. We see this in both schools in Chapter Four with the groundwork being laid in the morning as the children are dropped off as well as parent participation in the classrooms, on field trips, parent-teacher meetings, and parent in-services. This intention is addressed further in Question #4.

**The Reggio-inspired kindergartens.** In the Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom intentions are a means of focusing on experience in attempting to maximize an opportunity so that the teacher and the children can be aware of each other's discoveries. Intentions in the Reggio-inspired kindergarten allow for a more refined ear with which to make sense of its complexity. It is important to note that intentions are starting points, areas of interest that can blossom and take a group of explorers to fascinating places. The intentions of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher are as follows:

- Focus on the experience. Project work integrates academic mediums as well as creativity, imagination, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This was evident in Chapter Five with the Identity Project and the Playscape Project.
- Maximize the opportunity through creativity and imagination. The kindergartners in The Joy Charter School kindergarten and The Experiential School kindergarten were given opportunities all day long through the centers and the use of a multitude of materials and the experiences that were created.

- Focus on the child. Chapter Five stresses the child-centered attitude by both kindergarten environments. Their individual styles are being met daily and they are encouraged to use their “hundred languages”.
- Parents are an integral part of The Joy Charter School kindergarten community and The Experiential School kindergarten community. They are greatly valued and contribute to the classroom with their thoughts, skills, and possible advice.

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten approach caters to an emergent curriculum that builds upon the interests of the children (Edwards & Rinaldi, 2008). The topics for study emerge from the talk of children, through community or family events, as well as through the known interests of the children. The teachers work together with the children to formulate the possible directions a project might take, the materials needed, the way in which the group will research the topic, and the representational media that will be used to represent the work (Katz & Cesarone, 1994). Projects may last a few weeks or may continue throughout the year.

The teachers at Joy Charter School and The Experiential School, as evidenced by Chapter Five, created experiences that supported their intention of focusing on the experience and maximizing opportunity. An example of this would be the project work done at both schools. As Jenna explained, “I would want to say that [the project work is] a way to integrate all academic mediums as well as creativity, imagination, and twenty-first century skills all in one spot. It’s a way for kids to learn all of those things in a way that is interesting and makes sense to them and is meaningful to them” (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013). Projects are ever evolving and changing. They develop and grow from the interests of the children and their teachers such as at The Experiential School where the children have been developing a natural play scape for several years, and the current group of children expands that project by building storage

for the play scape. These types of projects integrate math, science, art, and language arts and allow the children to learn and extend their thinking on a deeper level while engaged in compelling activities that are exciting to the children. The Experiential School also has been working on the Identity Project, which encourages each child to discover who he is as an individual within the context of the group. Paula and Jenna encouraged the children to think about this concept, and they created, with the collaboration of the studio teacher, self-portraits using a variety of materials. Then, they created self-portraits using oil pastels, followed by the children taking photos of one another. Although, I was not present for these experiences, documentation panels were up in the hall and in the classroom. And, as noted in Chapter Five, I visited the art studio and witnessed the final step of this project: clay self-portrait sculptures.

As seen in Chapter Five, Teacher Teri, Paula, and Jenna gave their children the opportunity to look at and experience their worlds in many different ways and encouraged them to use all of their senses. Loris Malaguzzi (1998) spoke of the “Hundred Languages of Children”. These teachers valued each child’s individual capacity to communicate through languages such as music, painting, drawing, art, clay, collage, imaginative play, movement, dance, friendship, poetry, and song. Additionally, the Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher places the child at the center of their concern. They look at the child as a strong, capable protagonist in his own learning (Rinaldi, 2006). Each child is seen as competent and full of potential. As teachers, Teacher Teri, Paula, and Jenna sought to understand and bring out each child’s viewpoint and individual abilities.

As Chapter Five expresses, parents are an important component in the Reggio-inspired kindergarten's educational process. Parents are encouraged to be active contributors to the children's activities in the classroom and in the school (Wurm, 2005). This will be further discussed in Question #4.

As was the purpose of Question #1, I set out to explore the intentions of a Waldorf kindergarten classroom and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten classroom. I found that goals of both of these types of classrooms put the child at the center hoping to instill a student-centered classroom where learning happens through arts-based instruction by being aware of the children's needs and desires (e.g. Jenna mentioned that if the children notice a squirrel outside the window, they will stop and incorporate the squirrel into the children's learning). Purposeful and deliberate instruction happens for and with the children. As was the purpose of Question #1- Add the following after the very last word of this paragraph: Based on my study, we saw four intentions of Waldorf kindergarten and four intentions of Reggio-inspired kindergarten all overlapping, and I think that it is safe to say that other arts-based kindergartens are likely to have these intentions as well.

**Question #2: What do Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten look like in practice?**

My second research question focused on how the day is organized, and what types of activities, interactions, and situations the teachers offered the children in the Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergarten environments. Chapter Four and Chapter Five provided detailed accounts of the day-to-day inner workings of the four different classrooms allowing for a snapshot of what these approaches look like in practice. Question #2 aligns



with Question #1 as it continues with the intention of examining the two types of classrooms closely in order to observe what they look like in practice.

**The Waldorf kindergartens.** As noted in Chapter Four, a Waldorf kindergarten program is defined by predictable and dependable structure. Consistent daily and weekly schedules contribute to a nurturing and home-like atmosphere. The children become familiar with and secure in the rhythm of their daily activities, and we can see this in both Westcoast Waldorf and California Waldorf. Not only is their Rhythm of the day almost identical, but they both also maintain the *same* rhythm for each day (i.e. both classrooms begin each day with Morning Circle). The rhythm of the day, week, and year are gifts given to these kindergartners and they nourish healthy development by being mindful of a young child's need for rhythm; offering them consistency and the comfort of knowing what comes next.

Laura Ferris, faculty member of the Waldorf Institute of Southern California, classifies a Waldorf kindergarten education as an “unhurried approach” to learning where children take in their surroundings and respond with imitation. As shown in Chapter Four, the care with which an item is placed on a shelf, a door is closed, or a chair moved is noticed and replicated by the children.

Children are strong imitators; it is also their nature to be moving, to be active. According to Ferris (2013), current brain research clearly sees the importance of healthy movement as being key to a solid foundation for academic success (Ogletree, 1996). As Chapter Four indicates, both Westcoast Waldorf and Waldorf of California kindergartens work to incorporate as much conscious movement as possible into their daily activities. In Westcoast Waldorf, Mrs. Schmidt acknowledges the importance of movement: “It's

the movement, it's learning to jump rope, it's being physically fit, going across the monkey bars, all these things are first grade readiness...It's giving them the self-confidence that they need to take into the world” (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013). Movement also is incorporated into both of the schools during Morning Circle. During this time, movement, imitation, and activity are all focused on the different types of songs and rhymes comprised of classical folk tales, fairy tales, folk legends, poetry, nature stories, and finger plays. As shown in Chapter Four, the kindergartners at Westcoast Waldorf participated in, “Mother Goose Movement Journey” while at California Waldorf “King Winter Calls the Snow” was the Morning Circle activity. Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria recited with gestures and song while the children joined in. Each Circle is repeated every day for two weeks or until the children know every song, rhyme, and gesture by heart taking joy in their mastery.

The materials in these two Waldorf kindergartens were carefully selected to afford flexibility in use such as the expressionless dolls. These dolls leave a child free to express whatever emotion is appropriate in play. Each school had many raw materials such as planks, rocking boards, stones, pinecones, seashells, colored play clothes, and puppets. Most objects that the children played with had a living essence. They were made of wool, silk, and cotton. As Teacher Gloria noted, the natural materials are important to allow children the freedom to express creativity: “providing an environment that is full of warmth and joy and caring and has materials that are more natural and free-form to allow their imagination and creativity to flourish and to provide opportunities for artistic and domestic activities” (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013).

As also seen in Chapter Four, a typical day at Westcoast Waldorf and California Waldorf began with Morning Circle, which led to creative play that included dress-up, building, singing, painting, felting, and more. The children enjoyed the rich language, played together, and learned to resolve conflict in a harmonious manner. They were surrounded by purposeful work and often requested little help from their teachers. As noted by Teacher Gloria above, domestic activities are a part of the learning, so children learn to chop vegetables for soup, help knead bread, wash painting jars after painting, set the table for snack, and much more. But artistic activities are also important as the children also participated in painting, finger knitting, weaving, dramatic play, and more. Teaching both types of activities helps to create a sense of wonderment while also teaching the importance of responsibility. Once the children have cleaned-up after their creative indoor play, they each select a sheepskin rug and settle in to a spot on the carpet in preparation for story time. The story is never read from a book, but recited by the teacher. The same tale is repeated daily for about two weeks. The children never tire of hearing the story because interactions are added using role play, puppets, and hand and arm gestures. This gives the children the opportunity to create rich, detailed mental pictures from their imaginations. According to Teacher Gloria, this helps the children prepare for 1<sup>st</sup> grade by helping them learn lesson material in depth, develop their attention spans, focus on detail, and expand their memorizing abilities (Personal Communication, February, 2013). These inner pictures of the spoken word become the basis for making- meaning out of symbolic, written language (Gandini, Etheredge, & Hill, 2008).

Outdoor play, in any kind of weather, was another important element in each of the schools. The outdoor play curriculum that was developed out of the environment, which was constantly changing, provided new problems to solve and new situations to explore depending on the weather or the season at the time. Logs, puddles, sticks, mulch, mud, and leaves became treasures, cars, bridges, and castles. The natural ebb and flow of indoor creative play and outdoor play supported the child's need for a healthy rhythm of the day, giving varied opportunities to be active as well as calm. The children were able to develop and test their physical skills, imagination, critical thinking skills, and sensory integration skills. Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria offered only guidance when necessary and modeled good behavior rather than formal instruction.

A prevailing atmosphere of gratitude, reverence, and wonder was fostered. As the children saw these attitudes demonstrated in their teachers, Mrs. Schmidt and Teacher Gloria, they develop these same qualities that serve them throughout their life. Joy, humor, and happiness were also an important part of the children's everyday experience and these also stemmed from watching and witnessing the teachers. As Mrs. Schmidt said, "That loving way and really meaning it. We want them to learn it" (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013).

**The Reggio-inspired kindergartens.** The Reggio-inspired kindergarten approach addresses the development of the whole child, emphasizing family and societal influences, close collaboration between teacher and careful attention to the physical environment. This happens through activities such as the project approach, which as explained in Chapter Five, is centered around the in depth study of a topic or a theme. This approach dovetails well with the inquiry-based approach of the Reggio-inspired

kindergarten learner. The classrooms of Joy Charter School and The Experiential School provided the ideal environment for the children to learn through innovative activities. Additionally, the schools promoted a peaceful environment conducive to thinking and learning, equipped with plants, natural materials, mirrors, and natural light to set the tone.

As stated in Chapter Five, the Joy Charter School kindergarten and The Experiential School kindergarten are both full day programs. Their “Flow of the Day” schedules were flexible in that they recognized the diversity of the children and made adjustments to the daily schedule in order to meet the needs of the individual child.

Before Morning Meeting, the children had the opportunity to explore and interact with their friends. Morning Meeting began the school day and set the learning tone for each day. As seen in Chapter Five, for the children in the Joy Charter School kindergarten and The Experiential School kindergarten, it was their gathering place to select activities for the day, determine their jobs of service to their classroom communities, and share a song, a book, or an idea. Morning Meeting was also a time when the children could share something that captured the interest of the entire group and provided an opportunity related to the children’s own experiences. In Chapter Five, we saw this in the Joy Charter School’s kindergarten Morning Meeting when a child shared his book on Star Wars. His classmates were intrigued and asked question after question related to the characters and the many colorful pictures.

After Morning Meeting, the children were excused to begin their Center Work. This time every morning allowed the children to engage in small group activities. The children had a broad range of opportunities, from art to music to language arts, math, science, and nature experiences. As we saw in Chapter Five, learning by doing was

valued as it encouraged collaboration and allowed the children to express their ability to understand in a variety of ways as explained in the Reggio principle of “one hundred languages” (Malaguzzi, 1998). Symbolic languages, including drawing, sculpting, dramatic play, writing, and painting were used to represent the children’s thinking processes and theories (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). As the children worked through their ideas and problems, they were encouraged to depict their understanding using many different representations.

Outdoor Play gave the children an opportunity to stimulate and challenge their gross motor skills as well as further develop their creative, exploratory, imaginative, and social play. The outdoor spaces of the Joy Charter School and The Experiential School provided their kindergarten children with places to grow and learn about themselves and the world around them. In addition, the children had physical education during the week. This allowed them to experience organized group play and strengthened their abilities in following rules and regulations already in place.

Snack time and lunch were times during the day when the children were able to simply have conversation with one another and really connect. They chatted about what they were eating, what they were going to do after school, told jokes, expressed ideas, and so on. Quiet time and/or rest time occurred in both kindergarten classrooms. This was the time of day when each child found his own space with a book and their journal in hand. Music played softly in the background and often lured some of the children to sleep.

The afternoons in both the Joy Charter School kindergarten and The Experiential School kindergarten were a repeat of Center Work. The children could finish what they

had already started or choose something else. As we saw in Chapter Five, The Experiential School kindergarteners were given the opportunity to experience twice weekly visits to the Art Studio (Atelier). There the children had the freedom to experiment with a variety of materials and learn their characteristics and capabilities. By exposing them to a variety of mediums and techniques, the Art Studio/Atelier supported playful, open-ended, experiences with sensory materials (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2004). The children's artistic abilities were detailed, creative, and imaginative. They were truly talented beyond their years.

Similarly to Question #1, Question #2 sought to explore the day-to-day activities that happen within a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten. My intent was to closely observe, participate when applicable in these four classrooms so that I may walk away with a better and fuller understanding of what these approaches look like in practice. As demonstrated in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, both types of classrooms attempted to follow a routine, but they allowed for the day to unfold naturally in case of unforeseen events taking place that might enhance the children's learning (e.g. the squirrel outside the window at The Experiential School). The kindergarten teachers sought to inspire their children to learn from academic, social, and emotional experiences and activities. In practice, these classrooms are unlike the traditional kindergarten classroom because the focus is solely on the child and the learning that is taking place. The goal is for each child to progress in their own way, on their own time so that they can mature into caring, happy, knowledgeable members of society.

**Question #3: What do the children have the opportunity to learn in each of these environments?**

My third research question focused on what the children had the opportunity to learn as a result of the activities occurring in the Waldorf kindergarten and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten environments. It is important to thoroughly understand the received curriculum in order to have a better understanding of why an arts-based approach to kindergarten might be a better option than a more traditional kindergarten and how the arts-based instruction, as seen in Chapter Four and in Chapter Five, benefit the children in a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten.

**The Waldorf kindergartens.** Waldorf kindergarten education teaches children how to develop a love of learning and a natural curiosity for the world around them. This is where the responsibility arises to shape the child's world in such a way that at least three main components permeate their upbringing. According to Peter Lang (2002), these three components are:

1. **Comprehension:** Children should want to know and learn to understand the world in its interconnectedness; therefore, the methodology here should consist of simple and easily grasped associations that lead into the ever more complex.
2. **Application:** Children gain trust in their own growing powers and abilities primarily when they get many opportunities to do things themselves and master tasks themselves. When help is needed, it should, of course, be forthcoming.
3. **Meaningfulness:** Children should develop a sense of meaning in their own actions, feelings, and thoughts step by step. That requires qualified role models in childhood and youth as an orientation and accompaniment on their path (p. 48).

In the Westcoast Waldorf kindergarten and the California Waldorf kindergarten, as seen in Chapter Four, these three components were woven into the daily activities popping up in areas such as Circle Time, Outdoor Play, and Snack Time. For example, the children learned the application component in both schools as they not only set up the snack by setting the table with cups, silverware, cloth napkins, and plates, they also assist in the preparation of the snack by chopping the vegetables for the weekly soup and



mixing and kneading the made-from-scratch bread. These types of activities empowered the children teaching them that they were able to master a skill such as chopping vegetables by observing their teacher and then doing it themselves.

As well and as highlighted in Chapter Four, within Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy, there are seven skill areas that are highlighted: body and movement, senses and perception, speech, imagination and creativity, social ability, motivation and concentration, and ethics and morals. These skills are laced throughout the curriculums in both Westcoast Waldorf kindergarten and California Waldorf kindergarten. As Teacher Gloria commented:

In a Waldorf kindergarten, we're not about learning numbers or letters. We do lots of reading readiness activities and math readiness activities, all through play and the domestic and practical activities that we do, and through the circles that we do. This period of time, to be able to develop their imagination and creativity without having to sit at a desk and do numbers or letters or a certain curriculum I feel is most important. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

Thus, the skills are not learned through the traditional means of workbooks, worksheets, and constant testing, rather they are learned through imitation, through the experiences with the child and the teacher, and through the activities exposing the natural world.

Waldorf kindergarten children are individuals who develop their talents, inclinations, interests, and even handicaps, and want to go their own way. In order to facilitate this process in the best way possible, they need competent, adult role models, living and secure relationships, and their own schedule of development. This again connects back to the teacher's ability to be a good, capable imitator as noted by Teacher

Gloria, “[to] give children the opportunity to be able to take in the world around them and then give it forth in a very imitative way, but then you see them branching out and you see that flexibility of thought that comes” (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013). The imitation, the flexibility, and the good role models all help the Waldorf kindergarteners engage in joyful learning and promote the desire to continue to want to learn.

**The Reggio-inspired kindergartens.** The Reggio-inspired kindergartener is involved in his own learning in which enables him to be more focused as a learner. The teachers in the Reggio-inspired kindergartens use the children’s involvement—their inquires and interests—to help set the tone of the day and the activities that may occur, in short, they help shape the curriculum. As evident throughout Chapter Five, through direct instruction of core subjects, open-ended projects and unstructured, yet thoughtfully crafted play times, Joy Charter School and The Experiential School kindergartners have developed a thirst for knowledge. Based upon teacher-directed lessons and child-inspired projects, core subjects of language arts, math, science, and social skills are balanced throughout the curriculum. Additionally, life lessons such as inquiry, creativity, confidence, critical thinking, risk-taking, and self-discovery are part of the curriculum.

The Experiential School’s kindergartners also learn through adventure education. This is explored through outdoor experiences, wilderness hiking, and rock climbing. The children explore ponds, creek beds, and bat caves. They carry their own supplies, write or draw in their journals, battle bugs, fight fatigue, and at the end of the day, feel tired but accomplished. Their teachers have nurtured and inspired self-confidence in them.

Reggio-inspired kindergarteners have learned to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, Paula explained this through a metaphor,

I love the idea of kindergarten as a child garden, as a place to grow in so many different ways and to grow as an individual and their ability to then be in a school setting and to grow in their ability to listen to one another and participate in discussion. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Her metaphor shows how their classroom encouraged learning through fun adventurous activities, but that it's not just the activity by which the child learns and grows. He also learns from within, from other children, and from the environment.

Similarly, Joy Charter School encourages curious active learners who learn by doing, moving, talking, and engaging in interactions with adults, other children, and their environment. As these children were actively engaged, they are clarified information, integrated ideas from previous experiences and explored and experimented with their environment. Ms. Teri explained this active engagement as a "pedagogy of listening and relationships":

it is a curriculum upon a pedagogy of listening and relationships...[their]families and unique life experiences play a central role in their stories, and the contexts through which they play and work. We honor their connections to the world outside the classroom and invite these in. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Thus, for Ms. Teri a pedagogy of listening and relationships stems from a strong sense of community making it extremely important to the success of her children's learning: "I expect them to help reflect together on their experiences and create agreements for caring

for each other, the environment and materials” (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013). We saw this in Chapter Five with the celebration of the child’s half birthday where everyone is expected to give a positive thought about the birthday boy. Interestingly, we also saw this in Ms. Teri’s response when conflict arose when one child felt left out of a game: “How would you like it if she treated you this way?” she asks. “You can be our neighbor, but you can’t be in our family?” Instead of engaging further, Ms. Teri left the resolution to fall back on the children, and I have surmised that she responds this way often.

The Reggio-inspired kindergarten children at Joy Charter School and The Experiential School are encouraged to actively engage in organized activities, purposeful play, and inquiry-based learning through the exploration of materials and their environment. Learner expectations are integrated throughout learning activities that are developmentally appropriate for four, five, and six year olds. The children’s learning program addresses their social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and creative needs.

Question #3 builds upon Question #1 and Question #2 by seeking to dig deeper into the inner workings of the Waldorf kindergarten and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten. Arguably the most important of my five questions, this question focuses on what *specifically* the children had the opportunity to learn in these environments. As I detailed above, the children had the opportunity to learn much more than academic skills that are required of most traditional kindergarteners. They also learned how to adapt to social situations and embrace different types of personalities (i.e. The Experiential Schools’ “Make New Friend’s Recess”); they learned to participate in creating their learning environment (i.e. the projects that take place in the Reggio-inspired schools);

they reflect in meaningful ways allowing them to develop an awareness of their feelings and emotions (i.e. the Waldorf's schools focus on allowing the children to create an image in their own way); they became individuals who also garner a sense of community (i.e. Ms. Teri's celebration of the half-birthday); and they developed a love of learning through curiosity for the world around them (i.e. both Waldorf and Reggio-inspired classrooms dedication to using the natural world as part of the curriculum). In short, the children at these four schools celebrated their opportunities to learn through learning experiences that focused on developing much more than the ABCs or number problems; they focused on developing the child as a human being.

**Question #4: What Perspective do parents have of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

This research question focused on reasons parents send their child to a Waldorf or Reggio-inspired kindergarten, why the particular school, and how they assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the perspective kindergarten. As with the teachers and directors/administrators, formal interviews were conducted. There were 4-6 parents who participated per site. Interviews ranged from ten minutes to 29 minutes in length.

**The Waldorf kindergartens.** I found that parents who send their child/children to a Waldorf school realized and appreciated that it is a unique world. Its history, philosophy, and curriculum are like no other and within them are the promise of an educational program that understands, loves, and respects the whole child. Parents were seeking opportunities for association, friendship, and a connection with other adults. They felt welcome to participate in a classroom community centered on providing a joyful and secure experience for their kindergartener.

I discovered that the two schools, Westcoast Waldorf and Waldorf of California, each made up a community; parents and educators drawn together to provide a holistic and transformative education, not just an academic one. Waldorf kindergarten spoke to all aspects of the child, not just his head alone: his heart and hands, as well. I found that even parents found their own growth and development and this is nurtured and valued. Westcoast Waldorf and Waldorf of California kindergarten teachers offered gatherings for parents in order to learn about how their child is learning and what they can do to enhance the experience at home. The overall school community offered a variety of parent in-services ranging from parenting skills to reducing media time at home. There is an active Parents' Association, which strives to keep communication open providing feedback and perspectives in order to build a better school.

Both Westcoast Waldorf and Waldorf of California strive to be healthy communities that foster growth of all individuals connected with it: especially parents who lend their strength to the development of the school. I found Waldorf kindergarten parents to be active participants as stakeholder members of their child's school community. It was important for them to be welcomed as partners in their child's education. The most successful Waldorf schools, in the long term, are those that work hard at supporting this stakeholder identity (Rinaldi, 1999). Parents should be allies and co-workers in the effort to create a healthy classroom and school community and work out of this conviction (Malaguzzi, 1998).

My interviews with parents centered on six main questions ranging from why they might send their child to school there to asking them to discuss their own participation in

their child's classroom. I have chosen a series of excerpts to hear from parents at both schools to provide a detailed response to my research question.

One parent's response to why she sends her child to a Waldorf school:

Because I want them to be out-of-the-box thinkers. I hope for more for them because it's really not my wish that they can have different education than I had, and I wish that I had had this type of education ... I think I'm a better parent because they go here. That's a really hard question because we've come up to a lot of walls too. Why do we send them here? We're going to completely against the grain. Is this going to hurt them or benefit them in the long run? There's a lot of small little lights that go on that I think of times and circumstances where I'm so glad I've sent my children here. This is exactly why. I can't give an example now, but it's really little, simple things that take my breath away, and I'm like "That's why I send them here." (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013)

This parent echoed some of my own questions that I wondered about throughout this research: will a Waldorf education hurt or help the child? Though the mother can't quite put her finger on the why, she still managed to capture the essence of how Waldorf education benefits children, "it's really little, simple things that take my breath away" suggesting that it was the everyday occurrences that reassured and proved that her children are in the right place.

Another parent's response was similar, but also managed to delve a little deeper: I have a doctorate myself. I read a lot of research. I never thought I would ever not send my kid to public school because I like interacting with kids from all different backgrounds. It actually was a bit of a stretch for me to do it. My wife

really pushed it, which is even stranger because she comes from India, which is a beat-your-kid-to-do-math-problems-at-age-four kind of background [laughs]. I even have some friends who are teachers, and I really think with the way school has become a standardized, rote kind of place, I've seen research that says that while IQ scores are fairly consistent, when they measure innovation and creativity, those scores are dropping. And part of that, they think, is because pushing kids into rote learning early, when their minds are still wanting to create and play, and I read about Waldorf and it seemed to stress that. You feel a little funny like you're maybe experimenting with your kid, but it was just too early to send her to school. (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013)

This father's sentiment about why he sends his child to a Waldorf kindergarten stemmed from his own research into education and his desire for his child to get more than a "rote education" in hopes that she'll be innovative and creative. He, too, seemed hesitant about if his child is benefiting from the education, but he suggested the alternative weren't better.

Another parent answered what attracted her to the school, "When I got remarried, we moved up here, and I said, 'My only requirement is a Waldorf school'...it wasn't this school in particular, just any Waldorf school. We've been happy with it here" (Personal Communication, February 1, 2013). Another responded,

I started way back, my oldest son was only two at the time, so didn't even have my younger son yet, and I came to a playgroup when the school was [in a different location]. My best girlfriend, her mother had given her flyer that had something about the school on it, and she said, "I think you might like it. They



have a play group.” I’d been looking for a playgroup. I couldn’t find a playgroup where I felt like I fit in with the other moms. So I can still remember walking into the playgroup the first day. The playgroup teacher was there, and she was with the little kids, they were wringing clothes in the old-fashioned washbasin and hanging them on the line and playing outside. I met two or three other moms, and I felt very much like that was the place for me. And we’ve never left. (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013)

These two mothers expressed a desire for Waldorf’s dedication to play as well as their philosophy for teaching the child more than academic skills.

To push the parents thinking a bit, I asked them to give their opinion of Waldorf’s philosophy of technology. One parent responded:

I think it’s fabulous. My husband is actually a computer science graduate, and he, very interestingly, in Austin, at the University of Texas, had the fortune to have a class with [professor name] who was one of the founders of computer science. He created a lot of the terminology that’s used in computer science...this man would—all of his tests were oral, in his home. He wrote with pencil and paper for everything. He rarely used a copying machine. He firmly believed in working everything out by hand...this set the stage for how we understand technology. It’s a tool, like any other tool. It has to be understood before it’s used, otherwise you become a slave to it. (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013)

Another parent responded to the same question:

I work online; everything I do is online. I could not do what I do if we did not have technology. And the reality is, more than half of these parents do the same

thing. And again, we couldn't sit here in the afternoon if that wasn't the case. Part of that with technology, I'm fascinated with the standardization possible with technology. Why people love McDonald's, I don't exactly know, but it's standardized. People know what to expect, so they get it. What's interesting about Waldorf is the way it's maintained a core philosophy about human beings, their interactions, nurturing the deeper sense of willpower and self beyond the academic skills. It's incorporated into it, but it doesn't have necessarily a driving standardized approach. It's interesting...for my technology, what I understand here, especially the media technology is incredibly dangerous. It becomes the other parent. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Both of these parents express the possible dangers with technology and why they believed it's important that Waldorf maintains its philosophy about its use.

To align with my first three research questions, I also asked parents to discuss what they believed the strengths were of their child's Waldorf kindergarten. One parent said:

The creative play, creative learning. I like the fact that they use toys that are not developed that they do exactly what you want them to do. The kids themselves are forced to create and think. I liked that they get a lot of time outside. I think that's really important and nice, especially in today's age, when I don't see many kids outside. When I grew up, there were kids everywhere. It's a really different place. I liked that fact that there's a different, it's not that spread, but they play with different ages. That's good. And its small, small classrooms here. And two teachers. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Another parent responded:

One, the teachers. I loved bringing both of my children to a Waldorf kindergarten where there was going to be what I felt was this very loving but firm kindness in the way the teacher approached the children. I just love that. I love how much free playtime they have, both outside and inside. I think that's a real strength. It models somewhat of a home environment. I love how we sit here and have snack and the children have helped set the table. That's a very good nurturing experience for them. And then the stories, to introduce children to all these imaginative stories, particular when, I'm always so impressed that the teacher would sit there in the rocking chair and know them all by heart and wasn't reading them. (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013)

These parents tuned into some of the core values of a Waldorf kindergarten as the factors that they believed are the strengths of the curriculum.

Additionally, I also asked the parents what they believed were the weaknesses of their child's Waldorf kindergarten. Interestingly, I found that parents couldn't find many as noted by one parent:

I don't know if there are! [laughs] I do think that if you are looking at Waldorf kindergarten, if I had thought of it as purely a kindergarten experience and was going to "mainstream" my child once they hit first grade, there's potential risk of them being "academically behind." For most children that's a blip that they would get right over in a matter of a month or two, but if I had to say it, that's a potential

negative. For me, it wasn't a negative because my kids didn't go into public school in first grade. (Personal Communication, January 25, 2013)

Overall, parents sent their child to a Waldorf kindergarten because of the warmth of the teacher and the arts-based creative play environment. They chose a Waldorf kindergarten because of their desire for their child to develop his/her own individuality. The intent was to strengthen the child's ability to think, not what to think, and to provide them with the tools to be—and continue to be—well-rounded individuals with an innate curiosity and a love of learning. All parents were comfortable with no technology in the classroom and had no objection to limiting media use at home. Strengths were plentiful and weaknesses were few. These parents were overjoyed that their children loved coming to school where the environment is a constant nurturing, caring, and homelike space.

**The Reggio-inspired kindergartens.** Parents in both Joy Charter School and The Experiential School were an integral part of their learning communities. Parents contributed thoughts, skills, advice, and possibilities in relation to learning and teaching. There was a great commitment in both schools to share the children's experiences at school with parents through documentation, children's portfolios and art-folios, and meetings. Parents of Joy Charter School and The Experiential School were welcomed into these educational spaces, invited to share their ideas and skills, and joined their children in their learning journey.

The children, the teachers, and the parents were three equally important components in the Reggio-inspired kindergartens' philosophical approaches. Parents were encouraged to be active contributors to their child's activities in the classroom and in the school. Considered essential in Italy (Rinaldi, 1999), parental participation is

manifested in daily interactions during the school day, in discussions regarding educational and psychological issues, and in specific events, field trips, and celebrations. Curricular and administrative decisions involved parent-teacher collaboration, and parents also served as advocates for the schools in community politics (Malaguzzi, 1998).

I asked the same type of question to the parents of the children in Reggio-inspired kindergartens. As with the Waldorf schools, I have chosen several questions to explore further.

I began by asking the parents why they send their children to a Reggio-inspired school. One parent answered,

For us, Reggio was not the draw, necessarily, it wasn't the reputation of Reggio. It was more my wife and I did a lot of research on the kind of approach we wanted for our daughter. What I want my daughter to get out of school is, I want her to learn how to learn and I want her to continue to love learning that's it. I felt like there were too many other options that would stifle that and this school doesn't. [laughs] it's not Reggio, it's just the approach of children learning to love learning. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

Thus, even though this parent expressed that it wasn't necessarily "Reggio" that brought him to the school, it was, in fact, what Reggio stands for: teaching the child to love to learn.

I also asked the parents why they sent them to this particular Reggio-inspired kindergarten. One parent said, "it has a really good reputation, but also knowing the people who were leading the school. I knew that they were smart people who would work well with my kids" (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013).

Next, I asked the parents about the strengths and weaknesses of their child's Reggio-inspired kindergarten. One parent responded:

Oh, my gosh! It is magical it just inspires joy and wonder and creativity and oh my gosh, it just [pause] they really see themselves as capable as involved in their own learning. They're not just sitting back looking for ideas from someone else, they are really learning how to cultivate their own selves and their own ideas and direct their own learning but within a structured frame, a highly inspired frame. It's not like everything's provided for them, so outside of this environment they won't be able to figure it out. They will go out into nature and find inspiration there, and that's always there. So they are finding materials that aren't created for them or presented right in front of them. They're out seeking it just the act of being able to go out and find your inspiration, those types of things can be instilled at such a young age, to feel so capable and to embark on the wonder of life and learning and to see it as something that's exciting and delightful to be able to take what's meaningful and important to you from that and turn it into something that will communicate to others what you have experienced. And what they're learning the language here on how to communicate with others, body language as well as the verbal language. I could keep going on and on. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013)

Another parent responded to the weaknesses of the Reggio-inspired kindergarten:

Weaknesses in the kindergarten? I think my only thing that they could a better job at is making sure the kids wash their hands I noticed even yesterday when we all came in from PE and I was like, "don't they have any GermX?" because I wasn't

going to send them all in line for the bathroom, we didn't have the time for it. I noticed even in the kindergarten they probably could do a better job of wiping down stuff, double-checking that they're washing after they go to the bathroom. I know it's a full time job with 25 of them, but maybe some more hand sanitizers throughout the building. (Personal Communication, February 8, 2013)

As these two responses indicated, the parents appear happy with the education their children are receiving. As another dad mentioned, "I'm really happy with the school here. I feel like my daughter's getting what I want her to get" (Personal Communication, February 15, 2013).

I discovered that the parents of Joy Charter and The Experiential School view themselves as partner, collaborators, and advocates. They appreciated as a strength the teachers' respect of them and the fact that they were included in every aspect of the curriculum. It was not uncommon for me to see parents volunteering in Ms. Teri's classroom as well as in Paula and Jenna's class. I learned that the parents are required to take part in discussions about school policy, child developmental concerns, and curriculum planning and evaluation.

Question #4's intentions were to get at whether or not the parents believed that their child (or children) were receiving a well-balanced, informed, and knowledgeable education. I found that the parents were extremely happy with both the Waldorf kindergartens and the Reggio-inspired kindergartens. And importantly, throughout the interviews, it was clear that the parents found that the Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergartens were true to the philosophies and theories that created them. This question provided me with an extra view of the kindergartens, a way to triangulate my

observations and my interviews with the teachers. Parents, perhaps more than the teachers, provided a detailed and accurate view of what actually occurs within their child's educational experience, and it was valuable to take their views into consideration. My parent interviews showed that the teachers' view of what happens in the classroom is accurately portrayed through the children's learning.

**Question #5: What are the implications of Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten?**

Question #5 served as support for my other four questions. In order to draw conclusions, a study must provide implications; thus, this question derives from the notion that my research provides a lens into the inner workings of four specific arts-based kindergarten classrooms, and that from this, suggestions can be made on how to encourage more successful learning and more successful learners within kindergarten. For this question, I will not separate my schools because the implications remain the same when read across the board.

First, creativity and imagination need to be center stage, again, within kindergarten classrooms. As we saw in Question #4, parents sought out these 4 kindergarten classrooms because of their investment in strengthening creativity and imagination. When creativity and imagination are lost innovation begins to disappear (Lewis, 2013). Through an approach rich in creative and imaginative opportunities, young children have the opportunity to develop skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will benefit all areas of their learning and development (Duffy, 1998).

In this study, the four kindergarten classrooms, as seen in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, stressed creativity and imagination and have shaped the children through



their arts-based approaches and their emphasis on indoor and outdoor creative play. What is lost when creativity and imagination isn't embedded into kindergarten approaches? As noted by one parent, innovation begins to fall away and good ideas are no longer encouraged since good ideas do not support successful test-taking abilities (Personal Communication, Feb., 2013).

Why are the development of creativity and imagination so important to kindergarten students? Because in this ever-changing world the need for creative and imaginative thinkers is imperative (Edwards, 2002). Kindergarten children need to become problem-solvers and have the ability to begin to think critically.

Edwards and Springate (1995) give the following suggestions for developing a creative and imaginative classroom environment for children:

- Give children extended, unhurried time to explore and do their best creating.
- Create an inviting and exciting classroom environment. Provide children with space to leave unfinished work for later completion and quiet space for contemplation.
- Provide an abundant supply of interesting and useful materials and resources.
- Create a classroom climate where children feel mistakes are acceptable and risk-taking is encouraged. Appropriate noise, mess, and autonomy are permitted.

As was evident in my study, and as explained in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, all four kindergarten classrooms exhibited all of the above suggestions regarding creativity and imagination.

Creative and imaginative classroom experiences help children express and cope with their own feelings (Leslie, 2002). A child's creative and imaginative activity also helps the teacher to learn more about what the child may be thinking or feeling (Leslie, 2002). Chapter Four and Chapter Five are full of examples that support this.

Creativity and imagination also foster mental growth in children by providing opportunities for trying out new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new ways to problem-solve (Mandell, 2008). Creativity and imagination help acknowledge and celebrate each child's uniqueness and diversity as well as offer excellent opportunities for the teacher to personalize their teaching and focus on each child's individuality (Mandell, 2008).

Eric Liu (2009), a member of the Washington State Board of Education, an author, a former senior advisor to Bill Clinton, a former White House speechwriter, believes there is a crisis of imagination right now. He also believes that our educational system doesn't do nearly enough to emphasize, reward, honor, and teach creativity and imagination because the emphasis is on testing and rote learning (2009).

As Liu and others suggest, every child is a creative, imaginative individual. What matters is how their creativity and imagination are cultivated, what each of them does with each, and whether or not they can hold onto it as they grow and learn (Lui & Noppe-Brandon, 2009).

Second, we need to go back to teaching to the whole child and not teaching to the test. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, with the implementing of No Child Left Behind, the educational systems within the United States have changed, focuses have shifted—from arts/play-based to academically based—and the attention to detail is now attention to the detail of how to pass the test. This can leave children feeling like a number instead of feeling like a child who learns; thus, teachers need to teach to the whole child again providing them with the experiences necessary for future success in learning environments.

The teachers in my study were interested in their children as individuals, working very hard with each child to address and accommodate their learning needs. In addressing teaching to the whole child, young children were encouraged to think creatively and produce original ideas (Oppenheimer, 2007). Divergent thinking, the inquiry method, and creative questions were effective in stimulating thought. It was essential to be sensitive to each child's genuine interests and keep their explorations focused (Almon, 2010).

Instead of basing student success only on academic achievement or test scores, a whole child education must provide additional skills in order to assist children to succeed in life. Teachers should stress maintaining the child's sense of wonder and curiosity; binding cognitive learning to affective experience whenever possible (Singer & Singer, 2007).

And last, as noted in Question #4, parents want their children to be life long learners, therefore, it's important to note: curriculums should not be determined only by stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals or institutions that are interested in school curriculum (Waters, 2011). Stakeholders may include school board members, superintendents, directors/principals, teachers, parents, and the children. Their interests vary in degree and complexity; however, they all take part in shaping the implementation of the school curriculum, unless we are looking at a Waldorf kindergarten education or a Reggio-inspired kindergarten education. In these approaches, only the children, parents, teachers, and, in some cases, directors have a stake in shaping the kindergarten curriculum. Often these stakeholders don't even have any stake in the matter. When curriculums are co-developed (as seen with the Reggio-inspired schools) or developed from the needs and desires of the children (as seen with the Waldorf schools) then the

children learn much more than academic skills, and they have a better chance at loving to learn for a lifetime.

At the center of these stakeholders is the child. They are the very reason curriculum is developed (Scharf, 2009.) They are directly influenced by it, and their experiences must be the starting point in accomplishing the goals of the educational approach in order to let them grow in knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes. As was shown in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the appropriate fit between the planned or written curriculum and the characteristics of the children in this study guaranteed the success in education in the two arts-based approaches.

Parents' primary objective as stakeholders is the assurance that their child/children will receive a quality education, which will enable them to lead productive lives as adults in a global society (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Parents are recognized in the Waldorf kindergarten and the Reggio-inspired kindergarten as bringing valuable qualities to the educational experience of their child/children because they better understand their own child/children and can influence significantly their child's/children's behavior and work habits.

The teacher as the developer and implementer is the stakeholder on the other side of the coin (Waters, 2011). The teacher designs, enriches, and modifies the curriculum to meet the needs of each child (Scharf, 2009). In my study, the teachers in the Waldorf kindergarten classrooms and the teachers in the Reggio-inspired classrooms were empowered to develop their own curriculum taking into consideration their own expertise, the context of the school, parental input, and input from the children and their abilities. Chapter Four and Chapter Five were rich in content in establishing this.

As far as this study was concerned, the directors in each of the four schools did not have the responsibility of the final decision in regard to the curriculum. Some had input, but their input was not the deciding factor for a go ahead. Collaboration between the child, teacher, parent, and the environment was the direction for the Reggio-inspired kindergartens and the Waldorf kindergartens based their curriculum on the needs and desires of the child, parental input, and the teacher's own ability to know and understand her children.

All it takes is disregard for the children and the unsuccessful implementation of the curriculum for it to fail (Waters, 2011). There should be no hierarchy only those working together for what is best for the children. This isn't always the narrow road toward academics and high stakes testing especially in kindergarten. As shown in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten strive for balance in creating lifelong learners.

Question #5 is important because it presents us with suggestions for improvement within the educational system, specifically within the kindergarten classrooms as well as offering suggestions for how to encourage life-long learners.

### **Further Research**

My study is not the first that has been conducted on Waldorf education or Waldorf kindergarten nor is it the first conducted on Reggio-inspired education or Reggio-inspired kindergarten. However, this does not mean that further research isn't necessary. On the contrary, further research does need to be conducted because, as this study suggests, the issue at hand is timely given the nature of education in the United States and the stakeholders' responses to what should be taught within kindergarten

curriculums. I have three specific suggestions for further research:

1. Continue research at the four schools I observed. At least one of the schools serves as a national headquarters for filtering in teachers to witness a Reggio-inspired classroom in action. Additionally, since all of the schools continue past kindergarten, it would be interesting to see what their other classrooms look like; what the children continue to learn; how well the kindergartens progress throughout their education; and how the philosophies for the two arts-based curriculums are implemented in the different grade levels.
2. It would be interesting to conduct longitudinal studies that follow children either in a Waldorf educational system or a Reggio-inspired educational system (or both) alongside children in traditional school settings from kindergarten to high school and make note of the similarities and/or differences within learning test scores, academic standing, ability to adapt in social settings, and dedication to learning.
3. A matter for further research would be to compare and contrast these two kindergarten approaches to arts-based education.

Importantly, these three suggestions for future research encourage that we continue push through strict academic standards that may limit a child's learning.

### **Limitations**

All studies have potential limitations. Although this research was conducted in four specific academic sites that support either a Waldorf education or a Reggio-inspired education, the findings can be generalized to just those locations. I have identified four limitations in this study:

1. Lack of a Specific Resource: I was unable to formally interview children as I did not have IRB approval nor was it appropriate for this type of study. As animated and verbal as most of children were, I would have been able to collect interesting data from them.
2. Misunderstanding by a Participant: The teacher in Oregon had a misconception of what was going to happen during the week I was observing. She was gone for two days and her formal interview was unable to be one-on-one due to a classroom emergency that had to be tended to. She was given the questions and emailed me her answers.
3. Genre Constraints: I am bound by the fact that this is a dissertation and constraints of the genre.
4. Student Population: The student population used for the purposes of this dissertation could have been more diverse, specifically including more minority groups. These four schools were private or Charter, which may be a contributing factor to the lack of socioeconomic diversity.

### **Conclusion and Personal Statement**

As someone who has been involved in education—in one way or another—for over thirty years, I am a strong believer in teaching to the whole child with the integration of the arts. Thus, this study was especially important to and for me as I sought to explore whether or not these two types of arts-based approaches do what they suggest that they do.

The findings of this study align with my original thinking that, yes, Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten do an extraordinary job of teaching to the

child while incorporating arts-based philosophy. I realize that this study is not representative of all Waldorf and Reggio-inspired kindergartens or schools as I only researched a small sampling of kindergartens. To fully understand the implications of a Waldorf and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten, more studies would need to be conducted, their research interpreted and compared, and conclusions drawn that could be shared among educators and stakeholders.

My aim, with this research, was not to necessarily find new answers but to build on the research that is already out there by providing another lens into two arts-based approaches to kindergarten, and from there, see how these arts-based approaches are developed and implemented. My findings support research already conducted on both Waldorf education and Reggio-inspired education; however, they are relevant to educators who continue to strive for more than simply teaching to the test; they are relevant for soon-to-be educators eagerly approaching teaching opportunities; they are relevant to educators who value the arts; and they are relevant to stakeholders because it shows that there is more to teaching than receiving a score on a test.

As educators, we have the unique opportunity to give children a lifelong love of learning with help from an arts-based approach and I believe that's one of the most important values that my research showcases.



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## APPENDIX A

### Permission Letter from IRB

The following human subjects protocol application has been approved by the IRB, effective 01/08/2013.

**Protocol Director:** Daria Stowell

**Protocol Title:** Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-based approaches

**Protocol Number:** 2012-2434

Submission include Email to Administrator.Stowell.2012, Interview

Questions.Stowell.2012, Procedures for Recruitment.Stowell.2012.Revised, Reggio

1.Stowell.2012, Reggio 2.Stowell.2012, Waldorf 1.Stowell.2012, Waldorf

2.Stowell.2012

#### For New/Renewals

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the above named project. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol for a period of 12 months.

This information must be updated on a yearly basis, upon continuation of your IRB approval for as long as the research continues. Please submit any changes, revisions and unanticipated events reports in a prompt manner. We will send you a courtesy continuation/renewal email reminder as this expiration date approaches. However, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to keep track of the expiration date for each protocol. No human subjects-related work can take place during an expiration period. Please see your official IRB approval letter.

#### Approval Letters:

You may find your approval letter on eprotocol as well. Your IRB application will now be listed under protocols approved. Select the protocol ID of interest and open in view mode. On the left menu, please select "Event History".

#### For Revisions

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed revisions to the above named project. The revision has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. The expiration date for this revision is the same as the original IRB approved application. Revisions do not extend the approval period.

The Institutional Review Board appreciates your cooperation in protecting subjects and ensuring that each subject gives a meaningful consent to participate in research projects. If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact Research Compliance at [du-irb@du](mailto:du-irb@du).

## APPENDIX B

### Formal Interview Guide: Waldorf Kindergarten Teacher

The following interview guide will be used in the formal interview with the two Waldorf kindergarten teachers.

#### General

1. Describe your role as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher?
2. How long have you been a Waldorf kindergarten teacher?
3. Why are you drawn to Waldorf education?

#### Intentional

1. What is unique about Waldorf kindergarten?
2. What kinds of things do you think the children should be learning in a Waldorf kindergarten?
3. What expectations do you have for your students?

#### Structural

1. Could you describe a day in the life of a Waldorf kindergartener as it relates to time and the schedule of the day?
2. Could you talk about the layout of your classroom and why it is arranged the way it is?
3. What kinds of materials are available to your students to use in the classroom?
4. How much contact do you have with parents? In what settings: observation, participation, class activities, and extracurricular activities?

#### Curricular

1. How is the curriculum created for your Waldorf kindergarten?

2. Will you talk about the importance of imagination, creativity, and play in the Waldorf kindergarten curriculum?
3. Curriculum corresponds with specific child developmental stages in Waldorf education. Could you discuss this as it pertains to Waldorf kindergarten?

#### Pedagogical

1. Example and imitation are very important in Waldorf kindergarten. Could tell me why and what they look like in your classroom?
2. Could you give me some examples of your auditory, visual, and hands-on teaching techniques?
3. Why do you teach what you do?
4. In teaching to the whole child, how do you address the various learning styles of your students?

#### Evaluative

1. What are your thoughts about evaluation, and can you give me some examples in how you evaluate your students' performance and achievement?
2. Are you evaluated, and if you are, who evaluates, how often, and what criteria are used?

#### Aesthetic

1. Could you talk about the environment of your classroom? The colors and materials that have been selected are very soothing and pleasing to the eye.
2. Natural materials, yarns, dolls with no faces...could you talk about these for a moment?

3. In what ways, do you create an arts-based learning environment for your students?

## APPENDIX C

### Formal Interview Guide: Reggio-inspired Kindergarten Teacher

The following interview guide will be used in the formal interview with the two Reggio-inspired kindergarten teachers.

#### General

1. Describe your role as a Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher?
2. How long have you been a Reggio-inspired kindergarten teacher?
3. Why are you drawn to Reggio-inspired education?

#### Intentional

1. What is unique about Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
2. What kinds of things do you think the children should be learning in a Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
3. What expectations do you have for your students?

#### Structural

1. Could you describe a day in the life of a Reggio-inspired kindergartener as it relates to time and the schedule of the day?
2. The layout of your room is extremely comfortable and homey. Could you talk about its physical layout?
3. What kinds of materials are available to your students to use in the classroom?
4. How much contact do you have with parents? In what settings: observation, participation, class activities, and extracurricular activities?



### Curricular

1. How is the curriculum created for your Reggio-inspired kindergarten? Is there collaboration?
2. Will you talk about the importance of imagination, creativity, and play in the Reggio-inspired kindergarten curriculum?
3. How is technology utilized within your classroom?
4. Reggio educators speak of the hundred languages of children. Could you tell me something about this?
5. Please explain the utilization of the project.

### Pedagogical

1. Could you give me some examples of your auditory, visual, and hands-on teaching techniques?
2. Why do you teach what you do?
3. In teaching to the individual child, how do you address the various learning styles of your students?
4. What does the student's spontaneous, creative self-expression do?

### Evaluative

1. What are your thoughts about evaluation, and can you give me some examples in how you evaluate your students' performance and achievement?
2. Are you evaluated, and if you are, who evaluates, how often, and what criteria are used?

### Aesthetic

1. Could you talk about the environment of your classroom? What types of things do you consider when preparing the space?
2. The use of natural and recycled materials are everywhere in the classrooms.  
Could you talk about this?
3. In what ways do you create an arts-based learning environment for your students?
4. Describe expectations of engaging the creative arts in your classroom.

## APPENDIX D

### Formal Interview Guide: School Administrator/Director Waldorf

The following interview guide will be used in the formal interviews with the school administrators/directors of the two Waldorf schools.

#### General

1. Describe your role as the school administrator/director?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Why were you drawn to Waldorf education?
4. Could you discuss the make-up of your student body?

#### Intentional

1. What is unique about Waldorf education?
2. Does your board of directors have specific stated educational goals? Could you discuss what they are?
3. What are your expectations for your teachers?
4. What are your expectations for your student body?

#### Structural

1. Could you talk about the physical layout of your school?

#### Curricular

1. How is the overall curriculum created?
2. Are you involved? How?

#### Pedagogical

1. Could you discuss how much support and guidance you expect your teachers to give their students?

### Evaluative

1. What are your thoughts on the evaluation of students?
2. How is the progress of the students in the school monitored?
3. Are teachers evaluated? If yes, who evaluates them, how often, and what criteria are used?

### Aesthetic

1. The physical environment of the school is very specific. Could you talk about the environment?
2. How do you make sure that the school maintains an arts-based atmosphere?

## APPENDIX E

### Formal Interview Guide: School Administrator/Director Reggio-Emilia

The following interview guide will be used in the formal interviews with the school administrator/director of the two Reggio-inspired schools.

#### General

1. Describe your role as the school administrator/director?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Why were you drawn to Reggio-inspired education?
4. Could you discuss the make-up of your student body?

#### Intentional

1. What is unique about Reggio-inspired education?
2. Do you have a board of directors? If yes, do they have specifically stated goals?  
Could you discuss them?
3. What are your expectations for your teachers?
4. What are your expectations for your student body?

#### Structural

1. Could you talk about the physical layout of your school and the significance of it?

#### Curricular

1. How is the overall curriculum created?
2. Are you involved? How?

#### Pedagogical

1. Could you discuss how much support and guidance you expect your teachers to give their students?

### Evaluative

1. What are your thoughts on the evaluation of students?
2. How is the progress of the students in the school monitored?
3. Are teachers evaluated? If yes, who evaluates them, how often, and what criteria are used?

### Aesthetic

1. The environment of the school is very specific. Could you discuss this?
2. How do you make sure that the school maintains an arts-based atmosphere?

## APPENDIX F

### Formal Interview Guide: Parents with children in Waldorf Kindergarten

The following interview guide will serve as an outline of possible topics for conversation during the interviews with parent from the two Waldorf kindergarten classrooms.

1. Why do you send your child to a Waldorf School?
2. What attracted you to this particular Waldorf School?
3. What is your opinion of Waldorf's philosophy of technology?
4. What are the strengths of your child's Waldorf kindergarten?
5. What are the weaknesses of your child's Waldorf kindergarten?

## APPENDIX G

### Formal Interview Guide: Parents with children in Reggio-inspired Kindergarten

The following interview guide will serve as an outline of possible topics for conversation during the interviews with parent from the two Reggio-inspired kindergarten classrooms.

1. Why do you send your child to Reggio-inspired school?
2. What attracted you to this particular Reggio-inspired school?
3. In your opinion, what are the strengths of your child's Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
4. What are the weaknesses of your child's Reggio-inspired kindergarten?
5. Is there anything you would change?



## APPENDIX H

### Informed Consent Form (Director/Administrator)

#### Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-based Approaches

You are invited to participate in a study that will describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens in the United States in order to provide an in-depth analysis as well as document the value of both educational models. Daria Stowell, Ph.D. candidate in Education, will be conducting the research for her dissertation from the University of Denver. Results will be used for her dissertation as well as to present in conferences and for publications on subject. Ms. Stowell can be reached at Morgridge College of Education, 1999 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208. Her phone number is 813-493-9281 and her email address is [dks217@aol.com](mailto:dks217@aol.com). Her dissertation head is Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., professor at Morgridge College of Education. He can be reached at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmacher@du.edu](mailto:buhrmacher@du.edu).

Your participation, should you accept this invitation, will involve two commitments:

Engaging in one interview, of up to 60 minutes, scheduled at time convenient to you, during winter 2013. There will be audio recording as you are being interviewed.

Sharing of school newspapers/blogs/websites, board policy, school policy, assessment of curriculum, and any other artifact that might be valuable to understand the administrative side of this type of school system.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The audiotape will not be shared with anyone but myself—no administrator, director, or other person will have privilege to it.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Emily Caldes, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

## APPENDIX I

### Informed Consent Form (Parents)

#### Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-based Approaches

You are invited to participate in a study that will describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens in the United States in order to provide an in-depth analysis as well as document the value of both educational models. Daria Stowell, Ph.D. candidate in Education, will be conducting the research for her dissertation from the University of Denver. Results will be used for her dissertation as well as to present in conferences and for publications on subject. Ms. Stowell can be reached at Morgridge College of Education, 1999 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208. Her phone number is 813-493-9281 and her email address is [dks217@aol.com](mailto:dks217@aol.com). Her dissertation head is Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., professor at Morgridge College of Education. He can be reached at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmacher@du.edu](mailto:buhrmacher@du.edu).

Your participation, should you accept this invitation, will involve one commitment:

Engaging in one interview, of up to 60 minutes, scheduled at time convenient to you, during winter 2013. There will be audio recording as you are being interviewed.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The audiotape will not be shared with anyone but myself—no administrator, director, or other person will have privilege to it.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Emily Caldes, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

## APPENDIX J

### Informed Consent Form (Teacher)

#### Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-based Approaches

You are invited to participate in a study that will describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens in the United States in order to provide an in-depth analysis as well as document the value of both educational models. Daria Stowell, Ph.D. candidate in Education, will be conducting the research for her dissertation from the University of Denver. Results will be used for her dissertation as well as to present in conferences and for publications on subject. Ms. Stowell can be reached at Morgridge College of Education, 1999 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208. Her phone number is 813-493-9281 and her email address is [dks217@aol.com](mailto:dks217@aol.com). Her dissertation head is Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., professor at Morgridge College of Education. He can be reached at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmacher@du.edu](mailto:buhrmacher@du.edu).

Your participation, should you accept this invitation, will involve two commitments:

Engaging in one interview, of up to 60 minutes, scheduled at time convenient to you, during winter 2013. There will be audio recording as you are being interviewed.

Sharing of lessons plans, classroom rules and regulations, readings, student assessment, student projects, including art work and writings as well any other artifact that might aid the understanding of the type of kindergarten curriculum being used.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The audiotape will not be shared with anyone but myself—no administrator, director, or other person will have privilege to it.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required

by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Emily Caldes, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

## APPENDIX K

### Informed Consent Form (Parents to allow observation of child)

#### Waldorf Kindergarten and Reggio-inspired Kindergarten: Documenting Value and Effectiveness of Two Arts-based Approaches

You are invited to participate in a study that will describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions and operations of two Waldorf kindergartens and two Reggio-inspired kindergartens in the United States in order to provide an in-depth analysis as well as document the value of both educational models. Daria Stowell, Ph.D. candidate in Education, will be conducting the research for her dissertation from the University of Denver. Results will be used for her dissertation as well as to present in conferences and for publications on subject. Ms. Stowell can be reached at Morgridge College of Education, 1999 E. Evans Ave Denver, CO 80208. Her phone number is 813-493-9281 and her email address is [dks217@aol.com](mailto:dks217@aol.com). Her dissertation head is Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., professor at Morgridge College of Education. He can be reached at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmacher@du.edu](mailto:buhrmacher@du.edu).

Your agreement, should you accept this invitation, will involve allowing me to observe the general behaviors of your child(ren) as they relate to the classroom. I will not be collecting any personal information about your child(ren), and there will be no tracking of observations. My intent is to study the two different types of kindergartens in an attempt to understand how they operate as well as attempt to describe the benefits of a Waldorf kindergarten and a Reggio-inspired kindergarten.

The risks associated with this project are minimal. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during this process, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Emily Caldes, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address.