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# Interpretations of Progressive Education: A Comparative Study of the Philosophies of Education of the Municipal Early Childhood Schools of Reggio Emilia and the Bank Street College of Education

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Interpretations of Progressive Education: A Comparative Study of the Philosophies of  
Education of the Municipal Early Childhood Schools of Reggio Emilia and the Bank  
Street College of Education

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis compares the progressive philosophies of education of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, and Bank Street College of Education and its School for Children. The histories and theoretical origins of each philosophy of education are introduced. Elaborations on the fundamental principles of each are provided, including discussions of the creation of learning environments, the perception of children's learning, the roles of teachers, and the place of the community. Throughout the text, cultural frameworks are made evident, in order to reflect on the influence that culture and history have on the ways in which progressive philosophies of education take form.

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## Introduction

The progressive vision of education as a catalyst for social change brought me to teaching. A few years ago, I learned about the municipal schools of early childhood education in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, well known for its progressive politics and history. Their image of children as capable persons, ripe with potential, combined with the importance the citizens of Reggio Emilia attribute to children touched me intellectually, emotionally, and ethically. As I learned more about the practice of teachers in Reggio Emilia, my ideas of the significance of early childhood education greatly shifted. I thought much about quality experiences and environments adults design for young children, and the relationships we establish with them. I decided that I wanted to be part of the kind of progressive education I saw in Reggio Emilia, and came to Bank Street to be shaped as a teacher.

In my years at Bank Street, my inspiration for teaching continues to be derived from the schools of Reggio Emilia. I wanted to use the opportunity to conduct an independent study to further explore this fascination, and to compare the schools of Reggio Emilia, their philosophy, history, and practice, to the Bank Street method of education. In this thesis, I will clarify the principles on which each pedagogy is based, situating each within its particular history and culture, in order to better understand the meanings and implications of progressive education cross-culturally.

An introduction to the history and philosophy of the schools of Reggio Emilia is provided. Included are descriptions of the image of children and the particular pedagogical frameworks of this Italian city. Then a similar description for the Bank

Street School for Children and College of Education is offered. I discuss the role of Lucy Sprague Mitchell in the history of the Bank Street method, as well as summarizing the developmental-interaction approach to education, and the image of children in this approach.

After the introduction to each approach, the fundamental aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the Bank Street method are considered in detail. A description of the environment, its role and influence in the teaching and learning processes is considered. I proceed to elaborate on the ways in which children are perceived to learn within each philosophy. The role of teachers in these schools is also presented, followed by a reflection on the role of the community in which these philosophies of education take shape.

Finally, the Bank Street method and Reggio Emilia philosophy are situated within their respective cultural contexts. In a comparative discussion of the two, I explain the powerful influence of culture in shaping these progressive approaches to early childhood education.

## **Situating the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preprimary Schools of Reggio Emilia**

During the time of reconstruction following World War II in a small Italian town by the name of Cella located just outside of the city of Reggio Emilia, where the Resistance to Fascism was strong, a community of parents decided to begin rebuilding their lives by constructing a school for their young children. Loris Malaguzzi (cited in Barazzoni, 2000), an elementary school teacher from the nearby city of Reggio Emilia, describes his reaction to this event in the following terms:

I had been teaching for five years, and had done three years of university. Maybe it was my profession that hampered me. All of my little models were laughingly overturned: that building a school would ever occur to the people, women, farm laborers, factory workers, farmers, was in itself traumatic. But that these same people, without a penny to their names, with no technical offices, building permits, site directors, inspectors from the Ministry of Education or the Party, could actually build a school with their own strength, brick by brick, was the second paradox (p. 14).

Loris Malaguzzi continues to describe this decision by the people of Cella to enact change by directly investing in their children's education as an event that forced him to question his view of pedagogy, culture, and history. He realized that "*the impossible* was a category to be redefined" (cited in Barazzoni, 2000, p. 14).

This momentous event is the beginning of the story of origin of the municipal infant/toddler centers and preprimary schools of the city of Reggio Emilia, located in a prosperous region of northern Italy. Stories of origin have much to tell about how a particular group or institution views its sense of place and meaning, and chooses to reconstruct itself through the processes of remembering and narrating its history. The



narration of the history of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia places socialist idealism, historical optimism, and a strong hope in children and childhood, and in their role in rebuilding civil society, at the heart of its lived, remembered, and retold story.

### Roots of Solidarity

According to Renzo Barazzoni (2000), author of the book, *Brick by brick: The history of the "XXV Aprile" People's Nursery School of Villa Cella*, published by Reggio Children, Cella was a center of partisan action against Fascism in Italy, as well as a target of Fascist repression during World War II (p. 16). Barazzoni (2000) attests that a shared memory of suffering and a strong sense of solidarity, reinforced because of the Resistance, were moving forces in the people's construction of a school for its youngest citizens. He describes his own memory of the time immediately following the end of the war,

Everyone wondered how to erase every trace of this dark past [of Fascism and the atrocities of World War II] from our conscience and from our institutions; the answer was democracy, to be built from the ground up, along with the houses and the demolished cities, with the families which were split up or mutilated. The period after the war, therefore, was one of the sunniest moments in our history. A fever of resurrection, of renewal infected just about everyone, in the conviction that from the ashes of the war progress, justice and democracy would rise up (p. 17).

This description connotes a need to purify and rectify the past in a language that reminds one of Catholicism's cultural influences. One of the means through which the citizens of Villa Cella began constructing a democratic future was through the construction of a "people's nursery school." The school was envisioned as one of the many new places in which the townspeople would meet to consolidate this faith in the

restorative power of grassroots democracy (Barazzoni, 2000, p. 18). At the same time, this school was imagined as a break with tradition, for it was a direct appeal for the right to quality education for children of the working class.

By the end of 1946, the People's Nursery School of Villa Cella was finished. Built with the remains of buildings destroyed by Allied bombings, and with money received through the sale of an abandoned war tank, a few trucks, and horses, (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 50) the school is a living symbol of the sense of hope in the future and the strong solidarity of citizens determined to enact a radical break from their immediate past of Fascism and war.

Solidarity is presented as the principal building block not only of the school's physical construction, but also of its daily survival in the twenty years of economic sacrifices that followed. Barazzoni (2000) writes, "the men and women carried on, for the sake of their children, what they had done to help the Partisans; they gleaned fields, cut the grass banks of the ditches, collected paper, scrap metal, wood, and rabbit skins . . . The local hunters also honored themselves by donating their game to the school cafeteria" (p. 21). Citizens working for their community's children are described as sacrificing honorably, and are given the same respect and esteem that the Partisans fighting against Fascists were given during World War II. The language used by Barazzoni reveals not only the sense of pride felt by the citizens of Cella in the 1940s through the 1960s, but also a deliberate act of remembering. To remember the work that the citizens put into fighting Fascism, into rebuilding their city, and into investing in their children above all else is to actively shape a history of solidarity,

hope, dialogue, and sacrifice for the common good – all of which are themes that are reiterated still today in descriptions of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia.

### Socialist Politics: The Movement for

### Publicly-Funded Early Childhood Education

In 1962, parents and citizens of Villa Cella began lobbying to have the municipality take responsibility for the costs and management of the People's Nursery School. It was not until July 21, 1967, after many appeals to national and local politicians, that the school passed under the direction of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. The school was renamed the April 25<sup>th</sup>, and it was given an annual budget by the city of Reggio Emilia (Barazzoni, 2000, p. 23). During these years, many other preschools were established in pre-existing buildings, and they, too, were demanding to become run by the Municipality of Reggio. In fact, the demand for public early childhood centers initiated in Reggio Emilia became a national political struggle (Malaguzzi, 1998, pp. 53-4).

The Union of Italian Women and local cooperatives were at the forefront of these political battles. In 1968, Law 444 was passed, which included an article that stated that municipalities and the State could take part in early childhood education by setting up their own schools and by hiring and paying salaries to their own staff (Barazzoni, 2000, p. 25). By 1974, there were 54 preschool classes in the city of Reggio Emilia, with 40% of the city's children enrolled. Almost 90% of the children were enrolled in municipal, state, or private schools. This was one of the highest percentages of early childhood education enrollment in the nation (Barazzoni, 2000, p. 26).

The history of the XXV Aprile People's Nursery School of Villa Cella is comparable to the history of many of the other nursery schools established in Reggio Emilia, but the XXV Aprile was the only school physically constructed by citizens. It is important that this school receives particular attention in the narrative of the history of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. This attention is testament to the particular values that citizens, including the pedagogue involved in their establishment, Loris Malaguzzi, choose to remember and live by. Loris Malaguzzi was from the city of Reggio Emilia. Struck by the motivations and determination of the people of Villa Cella, he became highly involved in developing the philosophy of teaching of this school and of all the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. The following section will incorporate his influence in the history of these schools more fully.

### Loris Malaguzzi

The initial impetus to change history by starting with the destiny of children, begun by the citizens of Villa Cella, was a transformative historical moment for Loris Malaguzzi. With this impetus came a strong sense of responsibility to succeed in transforming the place and meaning of education in the lives of children and the community. Malaguzzi (1998) remembers, "We had to make as few errors as possible; we had to find our cultural identity quickly, make ourselves known, and win trust and respect" (p. 52). Malaguzzi recalls that this sense of urgency and responsibility sparked a continuous process of active reflection on his part in questioning certainties, philosophies, and implications of particular pedagogies and experiences provided to children.

As a result, education was made public, not only in the sense of publicly funded, but also in terms of being visible to and negotiated with the wider community. For example, in the first years, one day a week, children were brought to the city squares, where easels and other artistic experiences were set up so that passersby could stop and take note of the education their children were receiving as a result, in part, of their political efforts (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 52).

Malaguzzi organized many sites of public discussion both locally and internationally. These, too, were means of seeking accountability from the community, a desire stemming from his view of education and the history of local involvement in the schools. In 1963, the schools organized an Italian-Czech seminar on play. Malaguzzi visited the Rousseau Institute and the Ecole des Petits of Piaget in Geneva in 1964, where he would continue to return, establishing a close relationship. In 1968, the schools sponsored a symposium on the relationship among psychiatry, psychology and education, and then hosted a meeting among biologists, neurologists, psychologists and experts in education to discuss children's graphic expression. Around 1965, Malaguzzi recalls the forming of two influential friendships: the first was with Gianni Rodari, a poet and children's writer, who dedicated *Grammatica della Fantasia* to the city of Reggio Emilia and its children; the second friendship was with Bruno Ciari, a leading pedagogue in the field of early childhood education (Malaguzzi, 1998). These early encounters established a tradition of learning about children and about the pedagogical efforts of citizens of Reggio Emilia through dialogue and communication with people from all over the world.

Yet another highlight in the narration of the story of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia is the national meeting for teachers organized by Malaguzzi in 1971. Expecting 200 participants, 900 arrived. This meeting resulted in their first publication, *Experiences for a new school for young children*, by Malaguzzi. A few months later, Malaguzzi wrote a second work, *Community-based management in the preprimary school*. These works synthesized the experiences and ideas of Malaguzzi and teachers regarding the educational experiences of the schools (Malaguzzi, 1998, pp. 54-55). The schools have continued to publish many books, two journals, and various newsletters internationally through the years.

In the 1980s, Malaguzzi (1998) led the design of an exhibit today entitled “The 100 Languages of Children” that has traveled the world, beginning in Italy and Sweden (p. 56). It is evident that research, dialogue, communication, and cross-cultural encounters were fundamental to the process of finding a cultural identity and a philosophy of education, and Malaguzzi was a leader in these processes.

### The Image of Children

Historically, the children of Reggio Emilia were imbued with the hopes for a transformative society by the adults of the city. A need for change was enacted through rebuilding the city partly in the name of its children. Physical and moral rebirth were linked to the births of newborn human beings. Viewing children as a fountain of hope and change is a particular cultural construction. Malaguzzi (1998) believed that children have a right to be protagonists in their own lives, in their education, and in the lives of their community (p. 52).

The image of children is strong and optimistic. Malaguzzi asserted that children are born with many resources and with extraordinary potential that never ceases to astound adults. Children have the capacity to construct their thoughts, ideas, questions, and answers. They are capable of high quality dialogue with adults and possess a strong capacity to observe and reconstruct that which is observed (Barsotti, 2004, p. 13). Thus, children are subjects actively engaged in forming relationships with people and their environment and in constructing their understanding of the world.

In a poem written by Malaguzzi (1998), he describes children as “made of one hundred . . . (and a hundred hundred hundred more)” (p. 2). Children are whole beings who are often cut into slices, according to Malaguzzi. Society and schools take away ninety-nine of their one hundred languages, dreams, and discoveries, forcing children to adapt to an already existing mode of living. Instead, Malaguzzi set out to create schools that fit with his image of children, and that would give children the opportunity to develop their “one hundred languages.”

#### A Pedagogy of Relationships.

#### A Pedagogy of Listening

Teaching is not about passing down knowledge, insists Malaguzzi. Teaching and learning are processes through which a subject constructs his knowledge, always in democratic relationships with others and in a state of openness, in which one's knowledge is always recognized as partial and provisory (Moss and Rinaldi, 2004, p. 2). In addition to a constructivist view of learning, the pedagogy theorized by Malaguzzi and the teachers of Reggio Emilia incorporates some of the cultural values

embedded in their history, including solidarity, democracy, and participation.

Relationships and listening are at the heart of the pedagogy of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia.

Therefore, teaching is an act of reciprocity. Children narrate and communicate their worlds and themselves to us, as teachers, adults, and human beings, continuously. Their understandings are continuously in the process of reshaping, as are ours. And the worlds we choose to represent are in need of the listening of others (Rinaldi, 1999, p. 7). Carla Rinaldi, former teacher and currently the Executive Pedagogical Consultant, asserts that any theory, to exist, needs to be expressed or communicated, and therefore to be heard. This assertion is at the heart of the pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 1999, pp. 7-8).

Listening requires a sensibility to the act of being connected to others. By listening, Rinaldi (1999) refers to employing all of one's senses to interpret the many symbolic languages with which each of us communicates. She refers to listening as an act, as a time, and as a context. Listening as an introduction to any relationship of learning and teaching. With this predisposition and in this context, a particular view of knowing is also promoted. It is a view of knowing in which questions and uncertainty abound, and thus requires much courage to fully accept. Children possess this capacity to listen. Rinaldi (1999) states, "In fact, children are, in a metaphorical sense, the greatest 'listeners' of the reality that surrounds them. They have the time of listening, that is not just a matter of having time to listen, but is a curious, generous, and suspended time. It is a time of waiting" (my translation, p. 10).



Because of this capacity to listen, children are seen as social beings and pedagogy is also based on relationships. Malaguzzi asserts that it is not enough to be child-centered. Teachers, families, and children are simultaneous protagonists in the education of children in Reggio Emilia, where interactions are intended to promote “a feeling of belonging in a world that is alive, welcoming, and authentic” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 64). Relationships are the connecting dimension in this philosophy of education.

### Reggio Children

The year 1994 brought the death of Loris Malaguzzi and the establishment of Reggio Children, International Center for the defence and promotion of the rights and potential of all children in his honor and memory, described as the center of the international culture of the schools of Reggio Emilia. Reggio Children was thought up by Malaguzzi before his death, and has the objective of communicating ideas, theories, practices, and experiences to make realities of childhood listened to and visible, in a way that crosses ideological, geographical, and cultural boundaries (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 3). A society funded both publicly and privately, Reggio Children collaborates very closely with the infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 6).

Reggio Children is a “place of encounter” (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 8). It is the heart of a “new culture of childhood,” a “new cultural geography, made up of people that accept the sharing of values” (Reggio Children, my translation, 2005b, p. 9). As such, Reggio Children is responsible for five specific areas of activity: research, professional development, consultations and collaborations, publishing, and

exhibits (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 13). In recent years, three main research projects have taken place in collaboration with universities. The first was in collaboration with the Domus Academy, and resulted in the publication entitled *Children, spaces, relations: Metaproject for an environment for young children*. A second research project, in collaboration with Project Zero, Harvard University, sought to study children's ways of learning, and is presented in the publication *Making learning visible*. Still ongoing is a third research project of family participation in children's learning, and is in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire, the University of Milan, La Bicocca, and the cities of Parma, Trento, Milano, and San Miniato (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 15). Reggio Children has also initiated research in collaboration with companies, such as Alessi, Ikea, Lego, Sony, Isaff, and Play+, in order to enhance children's quality of life outside of schools, as well (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 19). The importance attributed to research by Reggio Children reflects the value of life as research embedded in the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia.

Through Reggio Children, "communication networks" have been established with 13 countries, including Australia, the United States, Korea, the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and all five Nordic countries. Relationships have also been established with countries in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The schools of Reggio Emilia have gained international acclaim and are a site of learning for educators from all over the world. Reggio Children hosts multiple study tours and seminars for visitors, internships, and laboratories, and offers professional development, training programs, and Masters degrees for citizens of Italy and

residents of Reggio Emilia. Particular relationships between Reggio Emilia and other Italian cities, including Naples, Catania, Salerno, Novara, and Torino have also been established (Reggio Children, 2005b, pp. 16-9).

Beginning in 1997, Reggio Children acquired responsibility for the “One Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit, and has financed other exhibits, as well. Finally, Reggio Children also publishes profusely. Its literature is translated into fourteen languages, and they have sold 141,000 copies of their published materials, including books, slides, and videos (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 8). Along with *Rechild*, the official newsletter of Reggio Children, each of the fourteen members of the international Reggio Children network publishes its own newsletters, as well. Reggio Children has responded to the growing international demand for information on the pedagogy and educational practices of Reggio Emilia by continuing to engage in communicative acts.

#### Reggio Emilia Today

As of 2004, the city had 155,000 residents, including immigrants of over one hundred different ethnicities. The unemployment rate of 2.7% is among the lowest in Europe (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 34). About 10% of the children of the city under the age of five come from immigrant households (Moss and Rinaldi, 2004, p. 2).

Reggio Emilia has established 24 infant-toddler centers, 13 of which are municipal 11 cooperatives, and 22 preprimary schools, 2 of which are under an innovative convention between public and private sectors (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 29). This convention began in 1999, with the cooperative *Panta Rei*, made up of nine participants in professional development courses given by Reggio Children. At these

13 schools, funded and directed by a blend of private and public sources, the Municipality of Reggio Emilia supervises the quality of educational service provided, and more children have the opportunity to benefit from the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 20). Approximately 1600 children attend the infant-toddler centers, or 40.1% of children between the ages of 0-3 years, and over 90% attend the preprimary schools, or about 3500 children. These rates are among the highest in Italy, and are a result of the continued investment of the Municipality in early childhood education (Reggio Children, 2005b, p. 29).

The newest investment in childhood is the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, created to give value to the culture and creativity of children, parents, and teachers. The International Centre also is intended to develop the city's potential as a pole of attraction for global citizens involved in the process of education. In 1993, Malaguzzi first suggested the possibility of such a center, which opened to the public in 2004, after eleven years of planning and construction. The Centre is designed like a "park" of highly educational value. When construction is finished, it will include music, theatre, dance, multi-media communication, and play areas, *ateliers*, exhibition areas, areas for professional development and research, the Centre for documentation, a library and book store, a restaurant and café, a preprimary school, and it will also house the Reggio Children headquarters. The total surface area of the building is 11,640 square meters. The Municipality bought the building from Locatelli, a local company that used the space for storing cheese, in 1998. The International Centre is located in an area of the city where families are, on average, larger and poorer, and in which many immigrants migrated during the 1970s. It is, in

part, for this reason that the Municipality chose to invest in this industrial area. The Municipality hopes to revitalize the area, encourage other investments, and redefine the territory's identity (Reggio Children, 2005a).

The remodeling and opening of the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre is testament to Reggio Emilia's continuing tradition of investing in children to promote social change and a sense of belonging in all of its citizens. Today, citizens of Reggio Emilia have come to define their history and sense of self also in terms of the city's educational endeavors. While continuing to promote and value the rights and potential of children, Reggio Emilia now sees fulfilling the city's potential as a place of culture of children as part of its future challenges.

## The Origins of Bank Street College

Bank Street College, which includes the Bank Street School for Children, The Family Center, and the Bank Street Graduate School of Education, was founded in New York City in 1916 as the Bureau of Educational Experiments with funding by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (Antler, 1987, pp. 218-219). This funding allowed Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Elizabeth's cousin, to realize her idea of an organization designed to coordinate and sponsor educational experiments, and disseminate information about them across the United States (Antler, 1987, p. 219). Mitchell deliberated the Bureau during the peak of the nursery school movement, in which new goals for early childhood education were championed. These included liberating children and education, and researching and guiding young children and parents (Beatty, 1995, p. 133). One of the progressive schools begun during this historical period was the Play School, founded by Caroline Pratt in 1913 (Beatty, 1995, p. 138). Mitchell would spend much time collaborating with Pratt, and Pratt's influence on the development of the Bank Street model of education is strong.

The Bureau of Educational Experiments brought together four educational experiments: a laboratory school designed for children with "mental peculiarities"; psychological analyses of typically developing children; sex education through nature study; and an innovative Play School that had been recently founded by Caroline Pratt in Greenwich Village. The Bureau would not only fund these experiments, but would also unite the staff involved in each project. The original members of the Bureau of Educational Experiments were Lucy Sprague Mitchell and her husband,

Wesley Mitchell, Caroline Pratt, Helen Marot, Harriet Johnson, Harriet Forbes, Evelyn Dewey, Elisabeth Irwin, Eleanor Johnson, Jean Lee Hunt, Laura Garrett, and Frederick Ellis (Antler, 1987, p. 219). Each member helped shape the Bank Street model of education, whose leader was Lucy Sprague Mitchell.

### Lucy Sprague Mitchell

In her biography of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Joyce Antler paints a detailed and vibrant portrait of the prime mover of the philosophy and practice of the Bank Street model of education. Antler describes Lucy Sprague Mitchell's life as an example of "feminism as life process," in which Mitchell engages in a personal attempt to mold her destiny and achieve autonomy (Antler, 1987, xiv). In the struggle to resolve the conflict between innovative and demanding professional work and full engagement as a wife and mother, Lucy Sprague Mitchell made significant contributions to the field of education, most clearly evident in the Bank Street philosophy of progressive education.

As Lucy Sprague Mitchell's experience of childhood was one of individual powerlessness in an authoritarian world (Antler, 1987, p. 64), she strove to realize the tradition of education and service she most admired in Jane Addams and Alice Freeman Palmer (Antler, 1987, p. 114). Highly influenced by George Palmer's ethics of self-determination, Lucy Sprague Mitchell saw the answer to the paradox of freedom in "the connection between the self and the other" (Antler, 1987, p. 63). Her belief in the intimacy between self and other played a role in the formation of the educational philosophy of Bank Street. Mitchell believed schools should be made relevant to the needs of individual children, while simultaneously serve as

neighborhood centers that instill community ideals (Antler, 1987, pp. 208-9). Also influenced by John Dewey, Mitchell viewed education as ideally occurring within a constructivist perspective (Antler, 1987, p. 212).

Thus, the Bureau of Educational Experiments, as imagined by Mitchell, was a coordinating agency of educational renewal that shared the progressive conviction that children could become the creators of an improved society.

### A Brief Early History

During the 1920s, the nursery school movement began, and allowed married women to contemplate a career (Antler, 1987, p. 257). At this moment in history, Lucy Sprague Mitchell saw her personal and professional life in unison. Having published her first book, Mitchell felt like a “real worker” at the age of 41 years (Antler, 1987, p. 255). She was also teaching, spending time with her family, and leading the Bureau of Educational Experiments. Initially, the Bureau placed a heavy emphasis on measurement, and appeared to follow in the tradition of G. Stanley Hall, as opposed to John Dewey, for the Bureau’s goal was to develop age-related norms that could be implemented in the educational environment (Antler, 1987, p. 291). Yet, by the end of the 1920s, the Bureau moved away from quantitative measurement, for its members realized that the formulation of exact standards might distort individual variations in development, and deaden rather than enhance children’s impulse to learn (Antler, 1987, p. 293). The child became a small person interacting with his or her environment, a complex organism (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 15). This view represented a shift away from the traditional view that development was governed primarily by individual maturation (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 22).



In 1930, Lucy Sprague Mitchell began a new venture at the Bureau of Educational Experiments: The Cooperative School for Student Teachers, designed to foster the development of “whole teachers” that would guide the learning of “whole children” (Antler, 1987, pp. 307-9). At the same time, the Bureau relocated to 69 Bank Street, and became informally known as “Bank Street” (Antler, 1987, p. 307). After collaborating extensively with Caroline Pratt at the Play School, today the City and Country School, and with Elisabeth Irwin at the Little Red School House, Lucy Sprague Mitchell became convinced that teaching, rather than data gathering, should become the Bureau’s primary concern (Antler, 1987, p. 308). In teaching teachers, Mitchell focused on teaching “how to live,” or on relational thinking.

“Everything...is related to everything else,” she would often reiterate (Antler, 1987, p. 313). In 1956, Mitchell accepted the opportunity for Bank Street to relocate once again to Morningside Heights, as it allowed the School for Children to extend to the eighth grade. The actual move did not occur until 1970 (personal communication with Salvatore Vascellaro). She stated, “Bank Street began like a fairy tale with Elizabeth Coolidge’s gift for ten years. The move to Morningside Heights with an elementary school carries on the fairy tale – and all in my lifetime!” (cited in Antler, 1987, p. 344). Mitchell’s optimistic and progressive vision continued to be realized with this expansion, and her enthusiasm for her educational experiments never waned.

### The Image of Children

Inspired by progressive thought, the Bank Street model views children as “basically curious and impelled to make an impact on their environment” (Biber,

1984, p. 290). According to progressive thought, education has a social use in promoting social justice. Biber (1984) asserts that schooling should promote in children “a greater promise of service to the community in which [they] will live as adult[s]” (p. 5). In fact, this is the kind of effective and autonomous individuality promoted by Biber. The cultivation of a child’s natural desire to make an impact on his or her environment begins with the process of consolidating of a child’s sense of self as an individual. Barbara Biber was responsible for locating the concept of psychological strength and effectiveness, as embodied in the construct of ego strength, at the core of Bank Street’s approach to development and teaching (Zimiles, 1997, p. 26). Biber (1984) states, “the child, in his years of growth, should be helped toward feeling first that he belongs in the world and second that the world belongs to him, that it is his world, and that it is utterly appropriate that he approach it in a spirit of confident expectation and interest in making it over” (p. 6).

A motivating factor in developing this “spirit of confident expectation and interest” in making the world over is what Biber (1984) refers to as a human need for questioning and understanding the world in which one lives (p. 7). “Given half a chance, the young healthy child will set up an endless stream of experiments” (Biber, 1984, p. 7). Thus, children are viewed as naturally inquisitive, or as scientists from birth. And it is through experimentation that children build a sense of self. “What matters most is whether [children] are left with newer, broader feelings about themselves, feelings of power and strength on which to construct the basic feeling that the world is theirs to understand, to influence, to re-create” (Biber, 1984, p. 8). A strong sense of self informs one’s sense of being entitled to reshape one’s society.

Thus, both the image of children and the pedagogy that emerged from this view, the developmental-interaction approach, have their roots in a particular value system that privileges both the individual and his or her social potential (Biber, 1981, p. 11). Children are viewed as naturally inquisitive and interested in informing their environment, and the optimal potential of their individuality is, in part, social in orientation.

### The Developmental-Interaction Approach to Education

The Bank Street model is based on a view of education rooted in the developmental-interaction approach, which is an integration of two lines of psychological thought, as well as the progressive pedagogy of John Dewey. The central figure in elaborating this theoretical position was Barbara Biber (Shapiro and Nager, 2000, p. 19). By development, Biber refers to identifiable patterns of growth and ways of perceiving and responding, which are characterized by increasing differentiation and integration as a child ages. The view of interaction is two-fold, referring both to the interaction of children with their environment, and to the interaction between cognitive and affective spheres of development (Biber, 1984, p. 65).

The first influence from the field of psychology in the developmental-interaction approach is the psychodynamic theory of personality, deriving from the works of Freud, Erikson, Sullivan and Hartmann. The second is cognitive theories of learning stemming from the thoughts of Piaget, Wertheimer, Lewin, and Werner (Biber, 1984, p. 242). Psychodynamic theory shaped some of the core concepts of this approach, including ego strength, self, and autonomy. Erikson, one of the

influential psychologists in shaping this approach, developed an individualistic conception of self, according to which identity must be achieved before intimacy is possible (Shapiro & Nager, 2000, p. 29). The cognitive theories of learning incorporated in this approach are theories of learning as an active process, in which meaning is constructed. Learning requires conflict, as does development, and both have multiple determining influences.

The practice of the developmental-interaction approach evolved from a particular conception of the “whole child,” highly related to the theoretical underpinnings of the approach (Franklin, 1981, p. 66). It is the whole child that develops as an organism interacts with its environment. This view allows for seeing development as a reciprocal process, situated in a context of continuous flow of activity and knowledge between a child and his or her environment (Biber, 1984, p. 288). The developmental-interaction approach also implies that development in any particular domain cannot be separated from development in another – affective and cognitive development are interconnected, and in continuous interaction (Biber, 1981, p. 10).

### Bank Street Today

Bank Street has been a leader in child-centered education for approximately ninety years. The Bank Street community includes the Graduate School of Education, the School for Children, the Family Center, a Division of Continuing Education, and a Publications Group. This community has been influencing generations of Americans. In 1965, Bank Street College collaborated with the Federal government to design the Civil Rights Act, the Head Start, and the Follow

Through programs. Bank Street also published the *Bank Street Readers*, the first multi-racial, urban-oriented readers for young children. Today, Bank Street continues to develop projects that address the needs of children and families. It has formed partnerships with schools, universities, community-based organizations, publishing companies, and television networks (Bank Street College of Education School for Children).

In its efforts, Bank Street has striven to connect learning and teaching to the human and natural environments in which educational communities are situated. As a result, it hopes to strengthen individuals and communities (Perryman & Fisher, 2000).

## **Learning Environments in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street**

Educators at Bank Street and in Reggio Emilia put much thought into the environments they create for children. These environments, influenced by differing geographical conditions, reflect the philosophical foundations of each of these pedagogical approaches. In this section, I will detail the structure of learning environments and the principles they embody.

### The Environment in Reggio Emilia:

#### The Third Educator

In congruence with the pedagogies of listening and of relationships, the school environment of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia is envisioned and constructed as a “relational space” dedicated to young children (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). The way the exterior and interior environments are designed and the materials selectively chosen and placed within these environments are intended to facilitate multiple encounters – among children, between children and their environment, and among children, their families, and teachers. Educators and architects describe their efforts in designing learning spaces as seeking to create a quality of “overall softness,” or “an empathetic context for listening to children and their hundred languages” (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). The theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogies of listening and of relationships guide educators, architects, and designers in planning environments that function as places of learning through encounter.

During the 1990s, Reggio Children initiated a partnership with the Domus Academy Research Center, a post-graduate design school in Milan, Italy. Viewing this partnership as a “meeting of minds,” educators, architects, and designers joined together to research and reflect on the designing of spaces for young children. Reggio Children and Domus Academy Research Center published *Children, spaces, relations: Metaproject for an environment for young children*, in which particular keywords detail the principles of design for young children. One of these principles is relation. The schools of Reggio Emilia reflect an “aesthetic of links,” as the environment seeks to build connections (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). Much attention is paid to beauty and harmony of design in planning the environments for children. Educators believe “learning must be pleasurable, appealing and fun. The aesthetic dimension thus becomes a pedagogical quality of the scholastic and educational space” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 115).

As young children demonstrate an “innate and extremely high level of perceptive sensitivity and competence . . . in terms of the surrounding space,” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 116) learning environments are also designed to be multisensorial and facilitate the way children inhabit spaces by constructing their own places within spaces available. Open to receiving imprints, schools are workshops for research and experimentation, in which knowledge and relationships are constructed in a continuous process of becoming. The physical environments, therefore, are flexibly designed to promote community and exploration.

Although each school is physically different, as a result of the culture that is created within each relational space, certain common characteristics abound. All of

the schools are on one floor, so as to eliminate the physical sense of hierarchy created in multi-level environments. Horizontality is the “physical manifestation of a democracy of functions, equal dignity, and sociality” (Ceppi & Zini, 1998, p. 37). The schools avoid building corridors, as educators see these spaces as useless for children’s activities. Classrooms are built to open onto a central *piazza*, or square, similar in intent to the central *piazze* in all Italian towns and cities. These are places of meeting that support the formation of relations, welcoming multiple encounters between families, children, and teachers. Since schools are placed in relation to their surroundings, the architecture promotes a sense of “osmosis” between the interior and exterior (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). Large glass windows abound and transparent walls increase visibility so as to promote a sense of community. Each school also has an *atelier*, or studio. Through observing and documenting the learning of children, educators found the need to add *mini-ateliers* next to each classroom, where small group work could better be accommodated (Hoyuelos, 1998, p. 68). These basic architectural structures reflect the larger values of the schools of Reggio Emilia, while simultaneously structuring in flexibility, so that the interior spaces evolve with the children and the emergent curriculum.

The *atelier* was included in each school during the 1960s (Vecchi, 2003, p. 138.) as part of the larger educational project, and became part of each infant-toddler center, as well, beginning in 1970. Loris Malaguzzi instituted this space in schools for multiple reasons. First, he saw that visual and expressive education had been assigned a marginal role in traditional schooling. Education had traditionally been



based on words, and did not provide the opportunity to view children as capable, rich in resources, and constructivists. Malaguzzi (cited in Gandini, 1998) recalls,

We wanted to create possibilities to refine taste and aesthetic sensibility, to observe and find theories about children starting from scribbles and going forward. We also wanted to try out tools, materials, and techniques. We wanted to support creative and logical paths the children would choose to explore. The *atelier*, in our approach, is an additional space within the school where to explore with our hands and our minds, where to refine our sight through the practice of the visual arts, where to work on projects connected with the activities planned in the classroom, where to explore and combine new and well-known tools, techniques, and materials (p. 172).

It is important that the *atelier* be understood as more than a place of art education.

Alfredo Hoyuelos (1998), pedagogist and author of a biography of Loris Malaguzzi, states, "The *atelier* provides the possibility of finding in children and in ourselves the initials seeds of doubt regarding our own concepts, even the most stubborn ones, treasures that bind us like corsets. It is a kaleidoscope that consents a multiplicity of forms, compositions and structures, as one learns to use it (p. 67). Finally, the *atelier* was also born from the need to keep parents involved and informed. For, the *atelier* and the *atelierista*, or studio teacher, are the heart of the process of documentation that guides the learning that takes shape in these relational spaces. Thus, the *atelier* is fundamental to the constructive learning that occurs in these schools, for children, parents, and teachers.

Documentation as a "Second Skin". The value of community and the openness of information are given a physical space in the schools. Walls, painted a neutral color, slowly become covered with documentation of the children's learning and work. This second skin reflects the interpretation and narration on the part of teachers of the educational community. In turn, documentation is a vehicle for giving

children and adults a sense of the history of their experiences. A reflecting surface, documentation is used by adults and children to revisit and reflect on their experiences and their learning, as it shapes both their memory of their past and their desires for the future.

Since the school is envisioned as a living organism, documentation is needed to manage the ever-presence of change in these environments. Carlina Rinaldi (1998) reflects:

The question lies in how many possibilities there are for the individual child and the group of children, the protagonists of the experience, to have a story, to leave traces, to see that their experiences are given value and meaning. It is the question of memory, narrative and documentation as a right, and as that which embodies the vital quality of the educational space (p. 119).

The stories and traces recorded in documentation are many. In fact, with the use of an increasing number of tools, including cameras, tape recorders, video cameras, computers, and more, educators realized a need for a space to prepare and store documentation. Each school also has a room in which documentations are archived and teachers prepare and reflect on documentation and its history. In the city of Reggio Emilia, a Documentation Center was built, to house the long history of documentation of all of its schools (Gandini, 1988, p. 172). The stories of the children and the learning they engage in have acquired their own architectural space of history within the city's center.

The Use of Materials. As the schools of Reggio Emilia are viewed as spaces in which to construct knowledge and relationships, the materials selected are intended to foster exploration and encounters. Color, sound, tactile qualities, smell, light, and relational forms are taken into consideration when choosing materials, so that the

environment may appeal to children's multisensoriality and holistic perception of their surroundings, in order to facilitate their use of their "one hundred languages." Materials are displayed in transparent containers, and much time is devoted to preparing a beautiful presentation of materials, both a result of a respect for the beauty of the essence of materials, and a result of the value of aesthetic and the search for beauty in which children engage.

In 1996, teachers felt a need for a wider variety of materials to use, and the idea of a "creative recycling center" was born. This center was named REMIDA, and was founded on the dual goals of promoting creativity and raising ecological awareness (Gandini & Kaminsky, 2005, p. 3). The manner in which teachers describe the use of materials is similar to the way in which children are described. Materials "have a right to be listened to and understood." They "show traces of their past identity" while invoking in us our own experiences and a desire to leave our own traces on them (Gandini & Kaminsky, 2005, p. 6). Teachers encourage children to exercise their way of seeing, and enter into relationships with materials, using the inner life and story of materials and incorporating these into their own inner lives and personal stories.

Thus, through a collaboration with 170 companies that donate their discarded materials to REMIDA, children have an immense variety of materials to transform. Recycling becomes an art, as materials' lives are prolonged, and their identities are remade. REMIDA is often referred to as the children's "dream place" (Gandini & Kaminsky, 2005, p. 6). It is also an imaginative community effort to recycle and decrease the negative human impact on the global environment. Because of the way

in which children have used recycled materials in their explorations, creations, and learning, and because companies are made aware of the impact of their donations through documentation and REMIDA festivals, the entire city is more conscious of the beauty and essence of recycled materials. The power of REMIDA as a center of creative recycling was so strong that it changed the teachers' approach to the materials, as well. Initially teachers would visit REMIDA with a list of what they were looking for. Now, they find themselves visiting REMIDA with an open mind, seeking inspiration from the materials, themselves (Gandini & Kaminsky, 2005, p. 7). It is as if materials have become subjects capable of producing encounters and relationships in their own right.

#### The Environment at Bank Street.

At Bank Street, it is believed that the environment should be tailored to the individual needs of children.

We conceive our problem to be building up an environment and developing a procedure which will not only give children an opportunity for full exercise of their physical powers and for real adventure, but which will also look toward the growth of these impulses into directed and organized activities. Beyond this we are opening up to them the world of social contacts and social relationships, and it must be remembered that this is the feature of our experiment most needing careful consideration (Johnson, 1972, p. 139).

With these words, Harriet Johnson was describing the experimental intent and views of the Nursery School she directed. This view informed the work of teachers at Bank Street, as well, for Harriet Johnson was a member of the Bureau of Educational Experiments and closely collaborated with Lucy Sprague Mitchell for many years.

At the heart of this vision of the kind of environment ideal for the development of children is the notion that young children, before the age of six, are

individualists (Winsor, 1973, p. 277). Although this view underwent revision, the focus on children as individuals deserving of individual and tailored attention and learning environments remains a part of Bank Street education today. Biber (1984) summarizes the struggle between individual and group identity as follows:

This, then, is the goal for education in the nursery years: how to create a situation which will offer the child opportunity to develop a deep sense of belonging in the world of people and simultaneously initiate him into the important pleasures and powers associated with being able to sustain an effective and creative relation to his environment; how to find, for each individual child, the best ratio between experience that will enhance his value of self and experience that will help him extend beyond himself; how, in the group situation of nursery school, to provide for differences among individual children with respect to these needs and yet to keep coherence for the children as a group (p. 17).

The environment reflects this attention to both children as individuals and as members of a learning community.

To develop and further children's impulses towards activity, the environment is structured to invite children to engage in and learn through play (Johnson, 1972, p. 139). Children learn by doing, by experiencing, and by making mistakes, for "a child is in the position of someone who has been plunged into the world of unfamiliar things. . . His chief interest is to 'find out'" (Winsor, 1973, p. 274). Children then reenact each experience of exploring and "finding out" in play. Not only do children reproduce their environment through play, but they also manipulate and transform it, so that they may understand and influence. Play is the learning process of children (Winsor, 1973, p. 274). With this assertion, educators at progressive schools such as Bank Street make a critical break with the tradition of viewing children as less capable and play as a wasted, blissful moment of the life of an adult-in-becoming.

The School as a Laboratory. Because play and experimentation are children's ways of knowing, the environment at Bank Street is structured to facilitate these ways of learning. First, children are given time and space in which to explore and play. Children are given materials that they may use freely, and that may be adapted to fit their dramatic play scenarios (Winsor, 1973, p. 277). An example of this kind of material is the use of blocks, which are allotted much space in a Bank Street classroom. These kinds of "free materials" are proposed as tools, which help children to reconstruct the world around them (Winsor, 1973, p. 278). In addition to promoting choice, it is believed that the environment offers the material of curriculum making. Thus, materials must also foster social experiences, for school life "plays a major role in clarifying for the individual his role in society" (Winsor, 1952). Social studies becomes a way of encompassing all other studies, and originates with children's hands-on exploration of their environment, both human and natural (Mitchell, 1934).

Environments should provide an abundance of experience and encounter, and a variety of situations to which children need to adapt. In fact, one of the most important principles guiding the layout of the learning environment is that "in order learn in school and to become lifelong learners, children must interact with their physical and social environments and interpret their experiences of them" (Bank Street College of Education School for Children). By encouraging children to choose and modify their behaviors and thought processes through the set-up of the environment, a child's development is fostered.

### Summary

In Reggio Emilia, environments are perceived as “third educators,” along with the protagonists of children and teachers. Children’s environments are planned and realized as spaces of relationships, in which learning occurs through encounter and exploration, and children are motivated to leave their traces. Architectural style, arrangement of space, and materials are selected with the input of the community as a whole. Although not all schools in Reggio Emilia began as schools, each structure that will be inhabited by children is rethought and renovated as adults find new ways of stimulating children’s potential through the environment.

In contrast, Bank Street always occupied predetermined spaces. The architectural styles in Manhattan, a vertical urban space of millions of people, and the high costs of real estate limited the possibility of designing a space for children. In addition, a culture of individualism in a highly diverse city may be a contributing factor in the absence of discussions of architecture in the founding women’s thoughts on environments for children. Instead, Bank Street pays much attention to the particular materials placed in classrooms and to the layout of space within classrooms. Materials are chosen to stimulate free thought and exploration, and are as gender neutral as possible. Spatial arrangements are designed to promote exploration, free play, and both independent and social learning. The environment is a primary resource for children’s explorations and development.

## Children's Ways of Learning

The ways in which children are perceived to learn has many cultural, historical, and philosophical variations. Although both Reggio Emilia and Bank Street are influenced by the tradition of progressive thought in education, the way in which progressive theories take shape in each philosophy vary according to the history and culture in which each is situated.

### Ways of Learning in Reggio Emilia

In Reggio Emilia, the value of learning is a quality of life itself (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 28). Children learn this value as they learn how to learn, which occurs within the cultural place of school. This learning process consists of a correlation between the construction of one's personal identity and interpersonal relationships (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 28). Because of the particular cultural and political construction of children and citizenship in Reggio Emilia, children are viewed as inherently social, and much learning is seen as occurring within the context of a group.

Group Learning. Children co-construct knowledge. Filippini (2001), a teacher in Reggio Emilia, uses the metaphor of a living organism to describe the organization and purpose of schools. "In our experience, the aim of organization is to create a bond of interdependence that can give each subject the meaning of his or her presence and of the presence of the others" (p. 53). Both individuals and knowledge have a dialogic quality.

This dialogic quality reflects the image of children in Reggio Emilia as inherently social. As social beings, children learn within a community, and



knowledge is co-constructed by children, teachers, and parents, each active protagonists. Much learning is framed as group learning, and includes both children and adults. As groups of learners solve problems, create products, and make meaning together, they are engaged in the emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual dimensions of learning (Gardner, 2001, pp. 17-18). Children and adults notice their competencies grow precisely through this process of participation (Cagliari & Giudici, 2001, p. 138).

Self-reflection is a fundamental part of the process of group learning, and is facilitated by the use of documentation by teachers, children, and parents. In a documentation piece by the teachers Piazza and Barchi (2001), the teachers wrote:

When working together, the children often give each other mutual support, as if they had to follow a recipe. The procedural rhythm, voice, and timing are underscored by multiple voices, as if it were a ritual in which you can find solidarity and a sense of belonging to the group, but also a way to consolidate those actions and gestures that are not always clear, that help to construct new knowledge (p. 221).

Careful observation of the children in the process of learning about faxes together and the time devoted to analyzing this series of actions and thoughts led these teachers to notice the importance of living and learning as a group to the process of developing solidarity and a sense of belonging for all members involved. Children, too, are asked to reflect on their learning. In one instance, children were asked to view a video of themselves playing a game. The children used the video recording to help them design a model of their bodies in space. Part of a study of their bodies in movement, teachers asked children to represent their understanding using a variety of “languages,” including drawing, video, and mapmaking (Vecchi, 2001, p. 207). These steps were documented by teachers, and used in discussions to scaffold the

children's learning and deepen their understanding of movement, as well as to give children the opportunity to become fluent in the use of materials, referred to as expressive languages in Reggio Emilia.

Documentation and continuous dialogue draw the children together in the learning process. Although each individual in the group has his or her own approach to learning, like each has their unique fingerprint, individuals are also open to incorporating the most attractive ideas, strategies, or approaches of others (Krechevsky, 2001, p. 253). Because of this openness to others and because of the fundamental importance of relationships in learning, each individual holds within himself traces of the group (p. 253).

Five and six-year-old children at the Villetta and Diana schools in Reggio Emilia were asked what they thought about working in groups of children by their teachers. Here are some of their comments:

Anna C.: Because your brain works better. Because your ideas, when you say them out loud, they keep coming together, and when all the ideas come together you get a gigantic idea! You can think better in a group.

Francesco: You can help each other better. For example, if you have to make a plane and you don't know where a piece goes, your friend can help you figure out where it goes, and so you learn better.

Andrea: You become even more of an expert.

Nicola: You have to know how to do different things, because if everyone knows how to do different things the whole group knows how to do everything. Even the best things (Barozzi et al., 2001, pp. 323-4).

It is evident that children learn to "see themselves as thinkers with different points of view" (Krechevsky, 2001, p. 263), and to value the novelty that another brings into the processes of meaning-making, understanding, and creativity.

One Hundred Languages. Malaguzzi described children's symbolic use of materials as languages. This means that when children represent their thinking using

drawing or clay, two examples, they are communicating with others. Graphic and visual representations are a kind of narration that orders the thoughts of children (Reggio Children, 2003, p. 77). When children use their “one hundred languages,” they do so to question and explore their worlds, in order to build bridges and relationships between experiences. Viewing children’s expressive use of materials as languages is itself an expression of a pedagogy that is based on relationships and connections, as opposed to drawing boundaries between different kinds of knowledge (Vecchi, 2003, p. 139).

To enhance children’s quality of learning, relational modes are critical on all levels (Krechevsky, 2001, pp. 266-7). Reality has many perspectives, and the roots of knowledge are multiple (Vecchi, 2004, p. 19). In the school, this view translates into learning in part by provoking children to represent their ideas using multiple languages. For example, they may act out a scenario, observe it, describe it verbally, make predictions about how it can be represented graphically, draw individual representation, reflect as a group on the drawings, make another set of drawings considering their new understandings, and then reflect on both sets (Krechevsky, 2001, p. 262). To make meaning, children are urged to continuously assess themselves and others during the learning process.

#### Ways of Learning at Bank Street’s School for Children

At Bank Street, teachers work to create an environment that fosters “intrinsically child-ways of doing, exploring, and experimenting” (Biber, 1984, p. 5). This reference to “intrinsically child ways” is a particular cultural and pedagogical construction that reflects the Bank Street image of children as natural scientists. This

image frames the ways in which teachers view the learning process of children, and act accordingly.

Learning through Experimentation. Learning takes place through action and interaction. “A pervasive climate of why and wherefore and wherefrom kind of thinking” is experienced by children in Bank Street classrooms (Biber, 1973, p. 2). Through their actions and their play, children experiment with their environment and with their ideas, in order to know. This is because children are curious and impelled to make an impact on their environment. Knowledge is gained and children find their own ways to adapt through investigating and exploring (Biber, 1984, p. 290).

Thus, environments are made to nurture and develop the natural scientist in children. Children are provided with an abundance of experiences and encounters, a variety of situations to which they need to adapt, and plenty of alternatives to choose from. As play is the format through which children experiment joyfully with the world, self-initiated exploratory play is cultivated (Biber, 1984, p. 291).

Play and experimentation are almost synonymous in the Bank Street method to early childhood education. Play is viewed as children’s mode of thinking, and as a natural medium for expressing relationships and understandings that children both have mastered and seek to understand further (Biber, 1981, p. 17). Although other means of representing their knowledge are part of the quotidian experience of learning, these symbolic representations take place within or begin from a context of discovery through play.

As children are viewed as natural scientists, teachers have a “reverential” attitude towards their independent learning processes (Winsor, 1973, p. 15). The

developmental-interaction framework begins with the individual child. Teachers assume that learning emanates from the individual child and moves outward to peer groups, the school, and the community (Winsor, 1973, p. 15). Thus, children's self-expression and independent learning are highly respected. At Bank Street, learning begins with the individual child, is driven by the mode of the scientist, and is influenced by the child's environment.

### Summary

Children at Bank Street and in Reggio Emilia are seen as powerful, motivated learners, able to construct their own knowledge as a result of their natural drives to explore and understand. Yet, the ways in which this constructive learning is perceived to occur and fostered are strikingly different. In Reggio Emilia, the assumption is that children are born competent to engage in relationships with the world, and learning, even when occurring independently, is inherently structured as a group experience. Documentation helps unite teachers, parents, children, and the community, by making this social learning visible and of highest value. At Bank Street, children's development is viewed as beginning with the individual. Although learning is both an individual and a social experience, priority is given to enhancing each child's sense of self and competence. This is achieved by gradually leading children beyond the boundaries of their experiences, and their selves. Feeling and identifying with one's social role is a goal that results from ordering one's experiences and experimenting with one's surroundings. The different origins of learning have their roots in different images of children, with the result that children's

learning in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street occurs in different ways,  
notwithstanding the fact that these philosophies share progressive beliefs.

## The Roles of Teachers

Teachers have many responsibilities to children, families, and to themselves. The ways in which teachers interact with children and view their roles and duties are shaped by their personal views of education, as well as the views of the school system and community in which they teach. In this section, I will discuss the principal and overarching roles of teachers in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street.

### The Teacher's Roles in Reggio Emilia

The roles of teachers in the municipal early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia are in relationship to the image of children as learners. Children are recognized as powerful, active, and competent protagonists of their own growth and development. Similarly, teachers must be competent protagonists in the learning process of children, as well as in their own learning and professional development. At the heart of this sense of being competent protagonists are the pedagogies of listening and of relationship described earlier.

To foster a culture of listening and of relationship-building, teachers always work in pairs of equal status. Co-teachers collaborate with the *atelierista* and *pedagogista*, as well as with the other teachers of the school. Teams of teachers meet regularly to review documentations of children's learning, allowing for the creation of common meanings and values (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 122).

The Teacher as Researcher. Daily, teachers observe and listen to the ideas and actions expressed by children. As they listen, they record their observations using various equipment and narrative forms. This process of documentation,

described earlier, is central to the work of teachers and to the professional development of educators.

The role of teachers as researchers originated in opposition to the tradition of teachers as leaders in the process of handing-down knowledge, and of learning as a passive absorption of the status quo. Research is traditionally viewed as part of the job description of a select few, and not as part of the normality of daily life (Rinaldi, 2003, p. 2). Instead, educators in Reggio Emilia chose to propose the concept of “the normality of research,” in which research is defined as an attitude and an approach to everyday living, “as a way of thinking for ourselves and thinking with others, a way of relating with others, with the world around us and with life” (Rinaldi, 2003, p. 2). The source of this repositioning of research in life and in the classroom was inspired by teachers’ knowledge and observation of children as great researchers (Rinaldi, 2003, p. 2).

In order to truly experience life and learning as an experience of research, curriculum is emergent and project-based, referred to as *progettazione*. Carla Rinaldi states that *progettazione* reflects the importance attributed to the unexpected and the possible (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 115). In developing captivating projects, teachers look for a key concept, a knot or unresolved question, or an idea in which children express interest. Any problem that impedes the action of the children is viewed as a kind of cognitive knot, with the capacity to stimulate the growth and development of children (Edwards, 1998, p. 187). The theories of cognitive disequilibrium described by Piaget and Vygotsky are evident in this view of cognitive growth.



Then, teachers meet and review the documentation of the play and conversations in which these interests emerged. They discuss the possible evolutions of a project, considering the likely ideas, hypotheses, and choices children will indulge, and decide on a material or problem to propose the following day to stimulate the children to research their interests with greater depth. This process of revisiting documentation is ongoing, and teachers engage children in revisiting their work continuously, using both the video, photographic, or audio documentation created by teachers, and the artifacts created by children themselves. Thus, in a way, they act as the group's memory (Edwards, 1998, p. 185). Documentation, as part of *progettazione*, is a process of reciprocal learning that guides both the learning of children and the professional development of teachers, as they reflect on their influence and experience in the learning process.

The Teacher as Provocateur. The cyclical process of *progettazione* embraces the co-action and co-construction of knowledge by adults and children in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Teachers and children share control and responsibility for the development of projects that guide group learning. When teachers enter into intellectual dialogue with children and join in their excitement and curiosity, they do so also by providing children with the environment and occasions to challenge their thought process and enhance their relationships with their world.

Teachers provoke children through their design of the environment, their selection of materials, and their presentation of learning opportunities. They arouse learning by making problems more complex and involving. Bringing cognitive knots to the forefront of a daily conversation, exploration, or long-term project, they direct

the learning process with flexibility and with an enthusiasm for questioning and research that the children learn to model (Edwards, 1998, p. 187).

In their many roles, teachers in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia act principally as learners. With the erosion of the dichotomy between teaching and learning, research becomes the mode of engaging in pleasurable and challenging relationships with others for both adults and children.

### The Teacher's Roles at Bank Street

Biber (1962) asserts that the formation of good teachers begins with a particular mindset, in that teachers should both know and love the world, and all of its manifestations of life (p. 3). Elaborating, Biber (1962) continues,

A genuinely positive attitude toward life almost inevitably carries with it a critical attitude toward the many distorted forms of modern living and a deep protest against the far-reaching injustices and the pitiable depths of human waste which are part of the fabric of our society. A genuinely positive attitude, a love of life, holds within itself an abiding though not foolish optimism concerning man's progress (p. 3).

What Biber describes as a "love of life" is comparable to Lucy Sprague Mitchell's desire to foster the development of "whole" teachers engaged in finding out what a full life is by learning and playing with children (Antler, 1987). As knowledgeable, socially critical, and active beings, teachers model an attitude towards life and learning that is responsive to children's ways of knowing and being.

The Teacher as Ally. Teachers serve as a support and guide for children, who need help toward feeling the confidence of familiarity and power in their worlds (Biber, 1984, p. 6). Biber (1984) believes:

Through methods that must be subtle as well as cognizant, the child, in his years of growth, should be helped toward feeling first that he belongs in the world and second that the world belongs to him, that it is his world, and that it

is utterly appropriate that he approach it in a spirit of confident expectation and interest in making it over (p. 6).

A fundamental part of these methods is scaffolding children's learning, which begins with understanding development and where individual children are in this process. Teachers clarify confusion, introduce new experiences that feed children's interests, and provide next steps continuously (Biber, 1984, p. 6).

Biber (1984) describes key aspects of children's development that teachers must internalize to properly serve as allies for children, in the processes of learning and of building an image of themselves as discoverers. Early childhood involves sensory-perceptual-motor modes of relating to experience, finding meaning through personal experiences beginning with the self, the development of cause-effect paradigms following a view of contextual simultaneity, and the dominance of subjective life, as expressed in the child's use of fantasy (Biber, 1984, p. 43).

Teachers must respond to these developmental realities in their everyday interactions with children. For example,

the teacher who responds to a preschool child's drawing by pointing out a disparity in size relations and who pressures children to adhere more closely to external reality is violating one of the essential processes by which children achieve a strong sense of self: to have their creative products accepted and recognized as the end of an integrative process in which they, as individuals, find symbolic ways of dealing with both the logical and alogical aspects of their experience (Biber, 1984, p. 290).

This understanding of early childhood in terms of development is applied to specific techniques employed by teachers, as illustrated in the example described above.

In particular, teachers should set up the environment and choose materials that set the precedent for full and free activity in verbal and nonverbal modes of symbolizing and organizing experience (Biber, 1984, p. 46). This environmental

arrangement is a reflection of a teacher's appreciation of the significance of play in a young child's life. "By reliving the most meaningful aspects of their experience through self-initiated play, children actually master the realities of life experience" (Biber, 1984, p. 47). Teachers at Bank Street understand and accept that young children use themselves as the starting point for interpreting life experiences, and help children expand their understanding by beginning with children's play and interests, and merging fact and fantasy.

The Teacher as Interpreter of Play. Since play is a child's natural vehicle for mastering reality through subjective expression, teachers need to be able to read the language of play (Biber, 1984, p. 47). Teachers spend much time observing children and recording their play scenarios, having been trained in the field of child development. They assess the nature of the thinking that is occurring, and decide on the appropriate stimulation to present to the children. Stimulations are intended to broaden the scope of the content that children can bring under control (Biber, 1984, p. 66). At other times, teachers provoke children by posing problems that spark children's thinking. Each teaching technique should promote a child's potential for organizing their experience through cognitive strategies (Biber, 1984, p. 67).

Being an interpreter of play so as to stimulate thinking and advance learning is part of the process of discovering the meaning of what a full life is in the classroom. Active learning is required of teachers, as well as of children. Thus, a teacher who analyzes a child's play and promotes development by deepening and enhancing play is creating an environment that stimulates and supports the naturally inquisitive mind of children (Biber, 1984, p. 75).

The Teacher as Observer and Recorder. With a firm grounding in child development, and an understanding of the play life of children, teachers at Bank Street spend time observing children and recording their behaviors in rich detail. Teachers record both what children do and how they feel about their actions, thereby paying much attention to the quality of a child's interactions with his physical and social environment (Cohen, Stern, & Balaban, 1997, p. 2). This attention to observing and recording "nourishes and integrates the dual elements of a teacher's role – 'doing' and 'reflecting'" (Cohen, Stern, & Balaban, 1997, p. 1).

This teacher's role insists that teachers, as well as children, act like scientists in the classroom, and develop their understandings of individual children as a result of careful data gathering, as opposed to simply relying on intuition or isolated testing (Cohen, Stern, & Balaban, 1997, p. 2). Observation and recording also allows teachers to better inform parents and to gear activities and curriculum towards the children's interests and challenges (Cohen, 1984). In order to develop the skills of observing and recording, and an understanding of the importance of this role in classroom life, training is integrated into many courses that are part of certification and Masters degrees given by Bank Street College of Education.

#### Summary: A Break with Tradition

Teachers in Reggio Emilia and teachers at Bank Street both set out to challenge accepted pedagogies and views of children. Teachers educated through the Bank Street model were part of a progressive movement that explicitly sought to break with the tradition of an education of conformism and authoritarianism (Shapiro

& Weber, 1981, p. 12). Bank Street teachers commit to an experimental approach that follows its own tradition. Teaching is a product of a progressive vision of education merged with the developmental-interaction approach, which frames children and their learning in both individual and social terms.

In Reggio Emilia, teachers are primarily researchers, documenting children's learning in order to understand and provoke them. Working as part of a triad of protagonists that includes parents and children, learning is viewed as teacher-parent-child derived, whereas learning at Bank Street is viewed as child-centered and teacher-structured. At Bank Street, teachers also observe and record children's behaviors and learning, relying on the framework of developmental-interaction to read children's actions and understand them as individuals. As part of a learning community, teachers in Reggio Emilia have the primary responsibility of confirming the image of children as competent, social beings with one hundred languages. While there are similarities in the roles of teachers at Bank Street and in Reggio Emilia, varying cultural and philosophical frameworks shape the daily interactions between children and teachers, and the image of teachers in the two pedagogical approaches.

## **The Place of the Community in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street**

It has become increasingly common for educators to consider the role of families and communities in the learning and development of children. The ways in which schools interact with families and communities reflects the culture of the society, and the particular values and pedagogical approach of the schools. This section describes the views of community in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street, and provides an introduction to the ways children, teachers, families, and communities relate to each other in each setting.

### Origins of Community Solidarity in Reggio Emilia

As recounted by Barazzoni (2000), the infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia began with a community effort to rebuild a future that would provide citizens with memories of participation, democracy, solidarity, and a guiding belief in the human potential of children. Parents were the first to pick up a brick and begin building a school, Villa Cella. As a result of their efforts, the city of Reggio Emilia was inspired to participate in this new beginning in honor of their children and in hopes for social change. These beginnings of community solidarity are today replicated in both the governing structure of the schools, and in the central role the schools play in city and community life.

Community-Based Management. Community-based management is the embodiment of the theoretical and practical interrelationships in the schools of Reggio Emilia. These relationships include those developed among children, families, teachers, service providers, and the city as a whole (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 102).

Community-based management is both a system of governing and a philosophical ideal.

In this system, parents and community members play a fundamental role. 1971 marked the passage of national laws in response to many years of political lobbying. These laws gave various levels of government different responsibilities: national government would provide public funding of infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools; regional governments would be responsible for the overall planning of the schools; and municipal governments would direct community-based management (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 100). During the 1990s, this experience of community-based management, which originated in Reggio Emilia, was consolidated throughout Italy (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 101).

Community-based management is one division of the overall municipal administration, and is under the Department of Education. Each infant-toddler center and preprimary school has a Community Advisory Council, composed of parents, teachers, educational coordinators, cooks, auxiliary staff, and community members. Some members from each of these 32 Community Advisory Councils also make up the Advisory Council Coordinating Board, serving as representatives of the pedagogical team of the municipal administration (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 101). These members serve alongside the Administrative Director of Early Education, the team of *pedagogisti*, the Superintendent, and the Mayor, all part of the Advisory Council Coordinating Board (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 103). Over time, the role of the Advisory Council in community-based management has evolved, shifting from being primary responsible for administrative concerns, such as enrollment and fees, and political



choices, such as the establishment of new centers and schools, to directly addressing the needs of families and educators. Thus, today, the Advisory Councils are initiators of participation (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 103).

Elections for the Councils are held every two years. Participation in these elections is high. In the 1990s, the average percentage of parents voting was 75%, and one in five families had members serve as representatives (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 103). Within each Advisory Council, various committees are established to better realize the needs of individual schools and to tailor participation to the interests and capabilities of representatives. For example, some members may study and implement strategies to maximize parental participation, others may organize meetings on particular topics, such as children's sleep problems, or the need to repaint a dining hall, and yet other representatives may consider activities to facilitate transitions between preprimary and primary school (Spaggiari, 1998, pp. 103-4). Advisory Councils have responded to changing community needs by increasing the degree of involvement of families and community members in the everyday life of the schools.

Parent Involvement in the Classroom. Parents also participate in the life of their children's school and class in various ways. Meetings between teachers and parents, both as a whole group and in smaller groups, take place multiple times a year. At these meetings, documentation is used to inform parents of the learning occurring amongst children, and they are often asked to interpret the children's activities and offer contributions to the development of an emergent curriculum. Meetings are also scheduled to discuss particular issues, such as the role of fathers,

and much exchange of ideas shapes the dialogic character of these meetings. At times, experts are invited to lecture or lead a discussion on areas of interest, such as fairy tales, children's sexuality, or books for children. Parents also may seek out individual parent-teacher conferences, or teachers may arrange them in response to a concern (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 105).

Families are also invited to participate in the upkeep of schools. Work sessions are arranged on a voluntary basis to build furnishings, rearrange the educational space, improve the yards, and maintain classroom materials (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 105). At these sessions, parents take part in the construction and maintenance of a stimulating environment for their children. Parents also are given opportunities to understand the ways in which their children learn by participating in laboratories, in which parents learn by doing. Finally, holidays and celebrations are events that bring parents and the community together. These include birthdays, seasonal occurrences, a culminating experience, and various events and field trips (Spaggiari, 1998, p. 106). The variety of opportunities for parents to participate in the school life of their children is both a reflection of the cultural value of participation, and a means of ensuring that this value continues to be cultivated.

A Culture of Welcoming. One of the first and most intimate experiences of participation for parents is the process of adapting to the infant-toddler centers for both children and parents, referred to as *inserimento*, or transition (New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 602). *Inserimento* practices began in the 1970s, in response to concerns regarding the possible damaging effects of early separation (New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 602). *Inserimento*, today, not only protects children, but is a

fundamental part of the process of establishing relationships between adults – teachers and parents (New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 603).

Part of the broader goal of home-school relations, *inserimento* can be viewed as initiating “a cycle of reciprocity and the building of respectful relations” (New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 603). Parents are given the opportunity to share in the school experiences of their children, which many express as a need. One mother stated, “I am jealous of the time that my son passes there [in school]...and the only way I have to recover [those experiences] is to speak with his teacher” (cited in New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 604). A second mother spoke of the importance of establishing a relationship between parents and teachers for children: “The child is like a sponge; he senses it if there is rivalry, or anxiety, and can’t stay calmly in the [new] environment. At the same time, if he senses the tranquility, the affiliation, the serenity in a rapport between the school and his family, the child accepts the new environment calmly and lives well in that setting” (cited in New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, p. 604). A bridge is created between parents and schools, as teachers work with parents and their children in this unique moment of *inserimento*.

In Reggio Emilia, groups of children and their families are invited to the school for the first few days, and are soon joined by other small groups until the class is complete. Children form relationships with primary caregivers and other children, and begin to feel a sense of belonging to school life. The process of *inserimento* may take a few days, or a few weeks (New, Mallory, and Mantovani, 2000, pp. 605-6). Families feel welcomed because of the attention and time dedicated to cultivating a

sense of belonging. In fact, *inserimento* begins “connecting new families to a network of adults that has a long history as well as a future together” (p. 606).

### Bank Street’s View of Community as an Extension of the Classroom

The Bank Street view of the place of community begins in the classroom, which is the embodiment of a way of life among people (Biber, 1973, p. 2). The social environment of the classroom begins with the individual children. “We want the children to be aware of themselves as initiators in their learning roles, to establish their individual identities and, at the same time, to grow through the mergence of the self in the cooperative, collective group experiences of play and learning” (Biber, 1973, p. 2). As part of a classroom community of learning, children begin to understand their role in society (Winsor, 1952).

The curriculum reflects this view of community, which is influenced by the developmental-interaction approach, and begins with individual children during the early years. Children are seen to begin understanding the world by understanding themselves, and giving others importance in relation to themselves. “To think as a member of any group instead of as an individual indicates a tremendous social growth” (Mitchell, 1934). As children develop, boundaries of loyalty extend to include the group, or culture, to which one belongs (Mitchell, 1934).

Through a curriculum based on an environmental approach to human geography, children are brought out of the classroom environment and into their neighborhood and their wider community. With each field trip or social studies curriculum, children are provided with new experiences and challenged to move

beyond the limits of the known. This enlargement of social experience is congruent with a child's development (Mitchell, 1934).

The Community as a Locus for Social Action. Lucy Sprague Mitchell devoted her life work to improving the quality of education for children. Her belief in education as a vehicle for social change led her to realize many other acts in the spirit of progressivism. One such act, the "long trip," was developed to take teachers beyond their own boundaries of experience (Perryman & Fisher, 2000). Long trips served teachers as field trips served children.

### Summary

The relationship between communities and learning in Reggio Emilia and at Bank Street are rather different. In Reggio Emilia, learning, within the current pedagogy of relationships, originated as part of a community effort to realize a changed future. The community has become an increasingly important part of children's learning through the years, and children have literally shaped the physical structure of the city and its sense of history and belonging in the world as a space for the culture of childhood.

Bank Street originated with the funds of the Sprague family, and the social convictions and intellectual framings of Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Part of the diverse approaches to education in New York City, the school's priority has long been focused on creating a sense of community within the school itself. Children are welcomed as individuals, who grow to become competent selves taking social actions. Families and communities are extensions of these individual children.

## A Comparative Discussion

Bank Street and Reggio Emilia are two places where children are given the utmost esteem. Adults living, learning, and working with children believe that children's early years are fundamental to shaping their future as adults. Children's development is greatly impacted by the high quality of early childhood education in which they participate, and by the relationships they develop with adults, peers, and their environment in the present.

This sense of the importance of children and the image of children as powerful figures led educators at both Bank Street and in Reggio Emilia to reconsider traditional methods and views of early childhood education many years ago. At both sites, leaders intentionally rewrote the field of early childhood education. Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Loris Malaguzzi were both invigorated by the progressive movement, and were moved to rethink the worlds adults had created for young children and the place in society they had been allotted.

During their years of theorizing and practicing new philosophies of education, both Mitchell and Malaguzzi "rediscovered" children. In different ways, they spoke of returning a lost sense of wholeness to children. They advocated for children, insisting that children had long been silenced and discounted. Malaguzzi and Mitchell each promoted new images of childhood and of education within their respective communities. As a result of their dedication, Bank Street and Reggio Emilia today serve as two reference points of fundamental importance in the field of early childhood progressive education.

Yet, the stories of these sites of learning about children and childhood diverge greatly, for each has been influenced by the history, politics, economy, and culture in which each began and flourished. In this concluding section, I will address these differences more fully. Using culture as the primary tool of comparison, I will stress the particular cultural constructions that have shaped the uniquely lived reality of early childhood education, childhood, and community life in each place.

### Social Relationships

In Reggio Emilia, children are viewed as inherently social beings, born with the capacity to enter into relationships with others and with their environment. This basic way of approaching the world shapes the entire philosophy of early childhood education in Reggio Emilia. In contrast, children at Bank Street are viewed as individuals striving to arrive at a sense of self as part of a group. Individuality is the means through which children grow and learn to become social beings, with a sense of responsibility towards enacting change in their respective societies. The difference is one of emphasis, for both philosophies of education recognize individuality and social relationships.

These strikingly different emphases on the development of a sense of self are reflective of cultural views of personhood. Bank Street is part of the history of New York City, a cornerstone of American individualism. This cultural reality is a connecting thread, binding much of the history of Bank Street. Bank Street began because of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, who enacted her vision, found funding, and acted as the prime mover of this educational institution. Bank Street is a private institution that has collaborated with the public sector of education, and contributed much to

both public and private education, but it remains a single independent educational institution as opposed to a cohesive network.

Reggio Emilia has been a nucleus of Socialist politics for over a hundred years. It prides itself on this history, which is reflected in its progressive social politics still today. Citizens of Reggio Emilia feel a strong sense of belonging to the physical space of this city, its long history, and culture. Children born here are immediately part of this rich tradition of progressive politics. They begin as active participants in the social life of the city. In this culture, participation is a daily reality of life, highly valued and cultivated in citizens, no matter what their age. The sense of social responsibility is high. Thus, the early childhood schools originated as a result of the sense of responsibility towards future generations strongly felt by women and men post World War II, combined with an equally strong faith in children as bringers of democratic change. This sense of social responsibility and the feeling of belonging developed in citizens remain important contributors to the continuing success of the network of municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. It seems that their particular cultural construction of what it means to be human, and a citizen of Reggio Emilia, motivates adults to continue to redefine the possibilities of what children and adults are capable of.

### Aesthetics

Views of beauty and creativity are influenced by culture, as well. In Reggio Emilia, educators speak of an aesthetic of relations. It is clear that adults continuously give much thought to how to give form to this aesthetic of relations. Architecture, design, and presentation are influenced by the perception of beauty in



the mutable essence of materials, like the beauty in the possibilities and potential of children, adults, and environments. This postmodern view of beauty is placed in relation to the view of sociality in Reggio Emilia. That which is beautiful emerges from the search for new perspectives and new relations.

Creativity, then, is cultivated in “hundreds” of ways. Children, having an infinite number of expressive languages, have an innate and overwhelming source of creativity from which they are encouraged to draw. The particular creation of an environment that reflects an aesthetic of relations is the stimulus that invites children to liberate their creativity, and use it to think more deeply about the story and possibilities of materials, realities, and questions. The creative process, even when engaged in independently, is part of a communal search for meaning and beauty. Children are provoked to look at their products with different perspectives at young ages, and expected to revise their work as a result of dialogue and seeing their work in relation to that of others. Beauty and creativity are defined in relation.

Bank Street educators, Gwathmey and Mott (2000) describe the unique contribution art brings to learning, for it is a means of expression that combines feeling and thought. They combine a sense of devotion for artistic expression with a description of the developmental progression of children’s artistic abilities that summarizes Bank Street’s view of creativity. Reflective of the developmental-interaction approach to education, admiration for children’s creative expression is rooted in a particular conception of child development. Described as “natural artists,” (Gwathmey & Mott, 2000, p. 139) children are first attracted by sensory materials in a desire to explore and create. As they gain experience with materials, children use

art as a means of experimenting and representing what they know. By working together, children incorporate new ideas into their existing frameworks. Learning to be part of a classroom community, through experiences with creative expression, as one example, is part of a child's developmental progression. Creativity and development mutually influence one another.

By emphasizing the connection between creativity and development, and by paying attention to individual children's creative development, an ambiguity surrounds the concept of beauty. Beauty is not given much attention as a goal. This may be because the cultural value of beauty that is primary in Italy is imagined very differently in the United States. Setting aside individual differences of what is perceived as beautiful, it is my impression that beauty is not as colloquial a discussion in New York as it is in Reggio Emilia. In fact, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of Bank Street educators to explicitly comment on the beauty of a child's work, for the logic follows that children would then become creators for the eyes of others. Proclaiming beauty is viewed as an act of judgment, as opposed to an act of relationship, as it is viewed in Reggio Emilia.

### Conclusion

Through the process of writing this thesis, I realized that what most attracts me to the philosophy of education of the municipal early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia is the community that it has created. Reggio Emilia, as the locus of a "new culture of childhood" is like a living utopia to me, with conflicts and obstacles a continuous part of the living – challenges that force one to reflect and define oneself. Their hopeful view of life, their view of humanity as realized through relationships,

and the power they give to children on a daily basis never fail to astound me. I also grew to see many parallels in the progressive vision shared by Reggio Emilia and Bank Street, and became more aware of the radical history of Bank Street as an educational institution within the American context. Lucy Sprague Mitchell's vision had utopian origins, as well, but Bank Street began in a society that has never truly embraced socialism.

It is evident that culture shapes progressive ideology accordingly. The emphasis placed on particular values and interpretations of childhood, humanity, belonging, individuality, learning, beauty, politics, teaching, community, environments, and life are each subject to the culture in which one is situated. Thus, the way in which progressive education becomes a lived reality cross-culturally derives from the particular stories of the individuals and communities engaged.

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