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Masters by Research

Implementing a Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach in a Mainstream Western
Australian Context: The Impact on Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Role

Claire Hall

**Submitted for the degree of a
Masters in Education**

**Edith Cowan University
Perth, Australia**

November, 2013

Research Title

Implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a mainstream Western Australian context: The impact on early childhood teachers' professional role.

Abstract

Reggio Emilia, an approach to early childhood that was developed in a Northern Italian city of the same name, is highly regarded as acknowledged by educators and researchers world-wide (Gandini, 1993). The Reggio Emilia philosophy is distinguished by the presentation of an image of children as being strong, rich and powerful learners (Hendricks, 2004; Millikan, 2003). This approach is marked as being adopted and adapted to suit particular cultural and educational settings. These situation sensitive approaches are noted as being Reggio Emilia inspired.

This qualitative case study investigated how the professional role of four early childhood teachers was impacted by the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a mainstream Western Australian context. As part of the investigation, the factors that facilitated the change process and those which inhibited it were identified.

The study was conducted in two schools, one private and the other government. The study participants were four pre-primary teachers who were implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in their pre-primary settings. A school leader from each of the study schools was also interviewed. Qualitative data collection methods included observation, semi-structured interviews, field notes, reflective journals and document analysis. Data were analysed using thematic analysis procedures.

The study found that as the teachers engaged with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, they were challenged to change their pedagogical practices which, in turn, impacted on their professional role. These changes were found to conform to the Reggio Emilia approach as described by Fu, Stommel and Hill (2002). While the

factors that influenced the change process differed across the two cases, there were commonalities. The first of these was the influence of the school's policies and governance. In one of the cases, the lack of support from the school leadership team, processes and policies impacted negatively on the change process and the teacher involved. In contrast, in the second case, a supportive leadership team and a whole school approach facilitated the change process.

The second factor found to support the change process was related to internal teacher qualities of commitment, knowledge, self-belief, resilience and self-reflection. These qualities were identified as influencing both the changes the teachers made in their pedagogical practices and in their professional roles. The study found that the internal factors were interrelated and supported the teachers to both undertake and persist in the change process.

Finally, it would seem that a weakness in some facilitating factors can be compensated by strengths in others. This was evident in the first case where the teacher was working in isolation and largely without the support of the school leadership, yet with high levels of commitment, knowledge, self-belief, resilience and self-reflection was able to resist considerable pressure to conform to a teacher-driven approach requiring more direct teaching. In the second case, even though a number of the teachers reported the negative influence of low levels of knowledge and self-belief, the change process was sustained through collegiate support and strong school leadership.

The findings of the study are relevant to those who are engaging with, or seek to understand the implementation and impact of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a different cultural, social and political context. Of particular note, is the recognition that pedagogical change impacts on the role of the teacher. Further, that the change process is either supported or impeded by the key factors of school policy and governance and internal teacher characteristics. The findings further suggest that the positive influence of these factors can be increased by professional learning, networking and access to collegiate support.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher degree;
- (ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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I wish to express my gratitude to my family, especially my two daughters who will hopefully strive to achieve the goals they set themselves in life. I also acknowledge the influence of my parents and sister who have continued to inspire me to succeed in life.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Mark, who has supported me all the way. His encouragement and understanding made this goal a reality for me and I thank him for this.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

For some years there has been a growing interest in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach among early childhood educators working within a mainstream setting. For those educators who choose to implement a Reggio inspired approach, there are implications for their pedagogical practices. Implementing practices in a different sociocultural and political context from that where the approach was developed would add to the challenges inherent in this change process. This is particularly the case given research by Millikan (2003) who suggests that an interest in Reggio Emilia pedagogy has tended to be personally, rather than systematically driven. The reliance on personal initiative implies that the teachers concerned would be required to adapt and change the approach to suit the contextual needs of their learning environment. This, in turn, may challenge the teachers' philosophy and perception of their professional role.

However, despite the interest in the approach and the complexity of implementing it in different contexts, there has been little recent research in Australia to guide this change process and none that has been conducted in Western Australia.

1.2 Background and Rationale

The Reggio Emilia philosophy of educating young children is one of the most highly regarded approaches to early childhood education as acknowledged by educators and researchers world-wide (Gandini, 1993; Savoye, 2001). This educational project, developed in the northern Italian city of the same name, has influenced European and Northern American educators, administrators, researchers, designers, architects and politicians for over the last thirty years (Millikan, 2003). The Reggio Emilia infant-toddler centres and preschools have been claimed to be "the most exceptional example of the highest quality early

education that the world has ever seen.” (Cadwell, 2002, p.6) This philosophy of education is distinguished by its construction of the child as a strong, rich and powerful learner (Fraser, 2006; Gandini, 1993).

Recently, there has been a significant shift in early childhood theory and practice in Europe and North America, and this has been largely due to the powerful influence of the Reggio Emilia approach (Fraser, 2006). This shift in approach has emerged from a long period of continuing debate about what constitutes best practice for early childhood education. Reggio Emilia educators argue that this approach is not one for imitation but rather, needs to be re-created in each particular socio-cultural, political and historical context (Baxter, 2007; Fraser, 2006; New, 1994).

In Australia, Ardzejewska & Coutts (2004) investigated primary school teachers’ understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Their quantitative and qualitative findings highlighted the importance of knowledge of the change process and the need for debate regarding the implementation of the Reggio approach within primary school settings. Similarly, Baxter (2007) sought to understand teachers’ interpretations of Reggio Emilia pedagogy in the eastern states of Australia. The findings of this study suggested that pedagogical change can occur if teachers create meaning from their own experience and interpretations of Reggio Emilia philosophy, within and across multiple contexts (Baxter, 2007). To date, there have been no investigations of these issues in a pre-primary context in Western Australia.

Although this educational approach has created much interest, Coutts (2004) review of Australian studies, suggested that there is limited critical research about factors relating to the initiation and the implementation of Reggio Emilia inspired approaches (Trotter & Capp cited in Ardzejewska & Coutts, 2004). Fullan (2001) suggests that if the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach is to be successful, further research is needed.

This study therefore explored the impact of the implementation of a Reggio Emilia approach on early childhood teachers' perceptions of their professional role. The study also identified the facilitating factors and barriers to the implementation of the approach.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The aims of this study were:

- To investigate how pre-primary teachers implement a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a Western Australian mainstream context.
- To identify facilitating factors and barriers to the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context.
- To explore how the implementation of a Reggio inspired approach impacts on early childhood teachers' professional role within a mainstream Western Australian context.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was based on the following three questions designed to identify and explore the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context and its impact on the teachers' professional role.

1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context?
2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context?
3. How does the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach impact on a teacher's professional role?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is important as it has a significant world-wide influence on learning and teaching philosophy and practice (Millikan, 2003; Gandini, 1993). Despite this influence, there is a dearth of

research, particularly in a Western Australian context. This is of particular concern to the early childhood sector and to educators who are willing to adapt and modify their teaching philosophy and pedagogy to be Reggio Emilia inspired.

This study investigated how a Reggio Emilia inspired approach is implemented in a context where the cultural and historical links are different to those where the approach originated. Given that this approach needs to be re-created in each particular socio-cultural, political and historical context (New, 2007; Fraser, 2006; Baxter, 2007), the results from this study should provide insights and guidance to Australian school communities who wish to implement the approach. In addition, the research should contribute to the broader field of educational change, particularly related to pedagogy and the impact of this type of change on a teacher's professional role. Finally, it will contribute to the growing international literature related to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in early childhood education.

This study addresses a perplexing gap in the research literature, particularly in Australia, while also meeting the need for extended research agendas in early childhood. The study offers insights into the perspectives of its teacher participants, as well as contributing to an understanding of how to support change within the mainstream context. Of particular significance is how the study contributes to an understanding of the change process in an early childhood setting by identifying facilitating and inhibiting factors, as well as exploring the impact of change on teachers' perceptions of their professional role.

1.6 An Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One provided an overview of the study outlining the statement of the problem, background and rationale and the significance and purpose of this study. The related literature is reviewed in Chapter 2. The methodology used in the study is described in Chapter 3 along with an outline of the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings related to how the

teachers implemented a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a mainstream context. Chapter 5 reports the facilitating factors and barriers to that implementation while Chapter 6 focuses on the impact of the change on the professional role of the teachers. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study with acknowledgement of its limitations and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section will provide an overview of Reggio Emilia philosophy and practice and also demonstrate its importance and world-wide influence. Attention will be given to the nature of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within Australian settings, including the cross cultural elements that have been shown to be important. In order to understand the impact of the approach within this context, an overview of the current early childhood provision within the Australian, and particularly Western Australian, education systems is provided. Of particular importance to this study, is an understanding of the difference between the Western Australian mainstream context and those which are Reggio Emilia inspired.

The process of change will be explored, particularly the facilitating and inhibiting factors that have been identified as influential. The professional role of the teacher within Australian educational settings will also be described and compared to this role in Reggio Emilia based contexts. Finally, the impact of change on teachers' professional role will be identified and discussed. The conceptual framework that guided the study will also be provided.

2.2 History of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Reggio Emilia is one of several small cities in Emilia Romagna, a region in Northern Italy with a history of collaboration and political activism. After World War Two, the people in a small village called Villa Cella close to the town of Reggio Emilia came together to rebuild their community following a long period of political and social dysfunction. As part of this early process, the community, and in particular the women, played a powerful role in providing quality education and experiences for the village children through the establishment of community-based pre-schools (Fraser, 2006). The historical and political context of the democracy

movement in this northern region of Italy, contributed towards a creation of 'a new type of experience and culture that was to bring with it a new vision of childhood' (Barsotti, 2004, p.11).

The establishment of the pre-schools was given direction through the insight of Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher at the time, who dedicated his life to the development of the philosophy now known as the Reggio Emilia approach (Wurm, 2005). In the early 1960s, the Reggio Emilia local council or municipality was the first in Italy to set up its own services for early education (Cartasi, 2004). The first pre-school for children aged 3 to 6 years old, the 'Robinson' school, based on this philosophy was opened in 1963 and was recognised by national law. This was the first time in Italy that citizens affirmed a right to establish a secular school for young children (Malaguzzi, 1994). After this, Malaguzzi stated, 'we began to widen and develop our vocabulary' and to 'develop a cultural project' (cited in Barsotti, 2004, p.12).

The first infant-toddler centre was opened in 1971 and during the 1970s, the first national conference based on the Reggio Emilia educational project was held and its proceedings were published. Following this there was a rapid growth of the cultural influence of these new schools (Malaguzzi, 1998). This led to confrontation with the religious establishment which had previously controlled the educational system and, subsequently, was worried by the rapid growth of the Reggio Emilia approach (Cartasi, 2004). This new approach challenged the traditions of the Catholic Church which, in turn, caused the Reggio Emilia educators to gain a deeper awareness of their work.

Since this time, these municipal schools have continued to base their work on this philosophy which is dedicated and committed to the image of the child (Hendrick, 2004) as a strong, rich and powerful learner (Gandini 1993; Fraser, 2006). Education within the municipality of Reggio Emilia is given a high priority as it is

seen as a social right and this view is also recognised and supported by the Federal Government (Barozzi, 2011).

The first Reggio Emilia exhibition by the municipal schools occurred in the 1970s when the children took the documentation and products of their learning into the central piazzas and theatres of the city to show the people of Reggio Emilia what they had achieved. This was perhaps the most significant change as through this event, the citizens of the city began to participate in the educational project. Malaguzzi called this participation 'collective wisdom' and attributes the nature of the project to the shared understandings of the parents, families and educators involved (1994, p.58). In response to the global recognition of these schools at this time, a touring exhibition was created to display the work undertaken in Reggio Emilia schools. The exhibition is now known as *The Hundred Languages of Children* and continues to be shown world-wide (Thornton & Brunton, 2005). *The Reggio Children*, a private organisation, was founded in 1995 in response to the level of global interest in Reggio Emilia educational centres. This organisation manages this outreach work.

The most recent and significant demonstration of the influence of this approach on early childhood education has been the establishment in Reggio Emilia of the *Loris Malaguzzi International Centre of Childhood* in 2006. This centre hosts exhibitions and meetings to promote early childhood education and works to defend and promote the rights of all children. At the time of this study, in 2011, the latest exhibition was named *The Wonder of Learning* and was underpinned by the notion that with the art of learning, there is a due sense of wonder; the wonder to participate, share and ask questions from the learning and research of the Reggio Emilia inspired children within the community (Barozzi, 2011).

2.3 The Philosophy and Pedagogy of Reggio Emilia

To understand the Reggio Emilia approach and its socio-constructivist view of education, it is important to first recognise the underpinning key principles

believed responsible for its worldwide reputation for forward thinking and excellence in early childhood education. These principles are:

- The image of the child
- Collaboration and relationships
- The environment as a third teacher
- The expressive arts (the Hundred Languages)
- Progettazione
- Role of the teacher - Teachers as learners
- Documentation

(Fraser, 2006; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002)

It is also important to note that each principle is interconnected in many different ways and that one cannot function without the influence of the others.

A recent publication of *Indications: Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia* (2010) by the Reggio Children has redefined the principles of the Reggio Emilia educational project. However, the previous seven principles (Fraser, 2006; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002) as listed above were used to frame this study as they were the most recent version at the time of the data collection phase. The redefined principles from *Indications* (2010) were used to extend the discussion of the findings in this thesis. These twelve redefined principles of the educational project include:

1. Children as active protagonists of their growth and developmental processes
2. The Hundred Languages
3. Participation
4. Listening
5. Learning as a process of individual and group construction
6. Educational research
7. Educational documentation
8. *Progettazione*

9. Organisation
10. Environment, spaces and relations
11. Professional development
12. Assessment

2.3.1 The Image of the Child

Our image of children no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not only see them as engaged in action with objects, does not emphasise only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the reflective domain. Instead, our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and children (Malaguzzi, 1994, p.56).

The Reggio Emilia philosophy promotes an image of the *rich* child and recognises them as curious and powerful learners from birth. The philosophy identifies children as active protagonists with unlimited potential who are eager to interact with and contribute to the world. It emphasises the importance of relationships and collaboration in learning that is characterised as social constructivist (Rinaldi, 1993, p. 104). The dynamics of social interaction with peers is encouraged so that collaboration with each other is essential to all aspects of learning. Through this ongoing collaborative process, negotiation, discussion and the exposure to conflicting viewpoints are encouraged and are seen as an integral part of the educational process. Teachers are aware of each child's potential and construct all their work and the environment of the children's experiences, in order to respond appropriately to them (Hendrick, 2004).

In response to the updated principles (PICMRE, 2010), the strong image of the child includes the view that the child is an active protagonist in their growth and development processes. This principle recognises the child as having high potential for learning and change as they connect and interact within their cultural and social context. The redefined principle has placed a greater emphasis on

rights, having the right to be respected, valued for their own identity and for the child's own process of growth and development (PICMRE, 2010).

According to the revised principles, pedagogy of *listening* is now portrayed as a separate principle, but closely aligned to other aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. This principle of the educational project supports in particular the child as an active protagonist in the education process. This demands an active process of listening among adults, children, and the environment and underpins the context of all learning relationships. This ongoing process of listening is also necessary for reflection, dialogue, openness and revisiting ideas that provoke theories and ideas to be recognised by the children and teachers. It is also essential to provide for the documentation that allows the learning to become visible to all participants (PICMRE, 2010).

2.3.2 Collaboration and Relationships

A socio-constructivist view of education favoured by Reggio Emilia supports the philosophy that education has to focus on each child in relation to the family, other children, the environment, the school, the community and the wider society (Fu, Stommel & Hill, 2002; Hendrick, 2004). Each school is viewed as a system in which all these relationships are interconnected, reciprocal and supported. This system is also viewed within the term of *participation* (PICMRE, 2010) within the redefined principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Participation also supports the Hundred Languages of children and adults and nurtures the feelings and culture of relationships, responsibility and inclusion.

The children, parents and teachers are considered as the three subjects of education (Hendrick, 2004). The value of participation is expressed by 'actively engaging all the children, teachers, and parents in a community dimension that involves reading and interpreting change together' (Cagliari, Barozzi & Giudici, 2004, p.29). Children's rights and needs are highly valued and recognised, along with the essential well-being of the parents and teachers. The rights of children,

educators and families are honoured in Malaguzzi's 'Charter of Rights (1995; Reggio Children, 1996a) which forms the ethical nucleus of the educational project. The Reggio Emilia approach is described as a 'pedagogy of relationships' as children learn through making connections between things, concepts and experiences (Wurm, 2005, p.16). It also acknowledges that we connect and learn by interacting with other people and the environment in which we live and learn.

This relationship between teaching and learning as a co-construction portrays a strong view of teaching that focuses on learning (Malaguzzi, 1994). As both adults and children co-construct knowledge together, central to this focus is the *pedagogy of listening* where scaffolding becomes "truly reciprocal, between teacher and child, between teaching and learning." (Rinaldi, 1993, p. 7) This requires the teacher to provoke sustained conversations with children in order to question and explore their ideas and understandings of the world. Reggio Emilia educators are active in placing these conversations at the centre of the curriculum in order to promote critical and creative thinking and collaboration between all participants. They also listen, observe and reflect about children's learning within colleague meetings and in dialogue with parents. The parents play a key role in the educational project and as Malaguzzi states:

It is the right of the parents to participate actively, and with voluntary adherence to the basic principles, in the growth, care and development of their children who are entrusted to the public institution [...] When school and parents are able to converge towards cooperative experience, an interactive experience... (1995, p.69)

These types of reciprocal and respected connections are a core feature of Reggio Emilia pedagogy and practice and learning as a process of individual and group construction (PICMRE, 2010). This process is also fostered by strategies of research, comparison of ideas, and co-participation that is based on a socio-constructivist approach to learning. The principle of educational research as defined in *Indications* (2010) underpins this constructivist process of learning and

represents one of the essential elements of life for children and adults within the educational project. This *knowledge-building tension* of shared research is highly valued as it makes the learning *visible* through documentation of the project and is an important part of pedagogical innovation (PICMRE, 2010, p. 12).

Cooperation occurs at all levels in the preschools with teachers working in pairs in each setting. These collegial teams promote engagement in collaborative discussion and the interpretation of both teachers' and children's work. This, in turn, provides information for connections between ongoing practice and theory-based learning (Fu, Stemmel & Hill, 2002). Unique to this approach is the collaborative role of the pedagogistas. These teams of pedagogical coordinators support relationships between all teachers, parents, community members and city administrators, further supporting this cooperative system (Fraser, 2006; Gandini, 2004). They have the responsibility for research and innovation and constantly re-examine and update the values of the educational project. Additionally, they develop the educational choices and directions for the daily activity in the infant-toddler centres and preschools (PICMRE, 2010). Each pedagogista coordinates a group of preschools and infant-toddler centres, ensuring there is a consistent approach across the two levels of each educational project.

The parents and community members also contribute to the project work of the children, contributing largely to the building of resources and attending class meetings out of school time, rather than being parent helpers in the setting as is often the practice in the Australian mainstream system.

2.3.3 Environment as Third Teacher

The physical environment of Reggio Emilia centres and pre-schools are important in promoting the strong image of the child. *Indications* (2010) also refer to this principle as *environment, spaces, and relations* to promote the view that the exterior and interior spaces of the infant-toddler and preschools are designed

and interconnected to promote learning and research. According to this principle, collaborative participation is vital in creating an environment where the space is designed to encourage and foster choices, autonomy, curiosity, problem solving and exploration in the process of learning. These environments are usually designed by and with the involvement of architects to ensure the environment is specifically designed to promote the relationships and exchanges that will occur within them.

Reggio Emilia schools are known for their beauty (Fraser, 2006) with attention to detail and an environment that is organised in a highly personal way. The aesthetic dimension is important in that it provides an optimal and multi-sensory learning environment (Bullard, 2010). The strong image of the child is thereby encouraged in order for the children to gain an understanding of themselves in relation to their surroundings.

The open design of Reggio Emilia settings fosters participation, involvement and communication between all learners (Wurm, 2005). The rooms are connected spaces and open onto a central piazza (open space) where children can move freely through the space and interact with others (Bullard, 2010). Spaces are available for children to work in small groups or to work individually. Shared meetings are held every morning within the piazza or a shared space to allow for the development of shared memories, to plan and to negotiate with the children. This provides a suitable environment within which children can choose among options and explore a provocation or idea as they research together with their teacher. They have the right to make decisions for themselves and will sometimes work on different projects and share their ideas with others (Barozzi, 2011).

The use of transparency and light are important elements within a Reggio Emilia space (Fraser & Gesticki, 2002). Light can be reflected through materials, windows, glass objects and coloured transparent materials to invite investigation,

discovery and an appreciation of beauty within the learning environment. The use of natural materials allows the outside world to be brought into the learning space. These materials need to be stored, organised and used in flexible and creative ways.

2.3.4 The Expressive Arts (The Hundred Languages)

An important element of the approach is that it encourages children to represent their ideas in many different types of media. Malaguzzi gave art a new meaning in the way that it is used as a tool to express a learner's thoughts, ideas and knowledge (Gandini, 2004). Under Malaguzzi's pedagogical guidance, two theories linking language and thought developed, the hundred languages of expression and the emergence of the atelier (art studio) and the atelierista (studio teacher) and of a mini-atelier attached to each setting (Thornton & Brunton, 2005).

From the beginning of the educational project in 1963, Malaguzzi conceived the idea of the atelier and, subsequently, this feature has been included in the design of each school (Gandini, 2005b). The *atelier*, provides a variety of resources and tools to support the many different means of expression of understandings developed in project work and research (Bullard, 2010). The use of the expressive arts in learning is promoted by an *atelierista*, a teacher trained in the visual arts, who works closely with the teachers and children in every preschool. Vea Vecchi, the first atelierista who worked for thirty years at the *Diana* school, suggests that the atelier provides a place for children to become masters of all kinds of techniques...all the symbolic languages (Vecchi, 1998). The atelier is also a centre for the construction of the culture of the school and is in constant dialogue with the wider context as it relates to developments in the aesthetic and expressive languages (Gandini, 2005a: Vecchi, 1998).

Millikan states that the development of the hundred languages depends on three things, “resources and experiences; opportunities to express in different ways their thinking; and adults who take children seriously and listen to them respectfully” (2003, p.45). Reggio Emilia educators recognise that children’s ability to communicate and connect with others, and to conceptualise and communicate their ideas, skills and understanding of the world in which they live in many different ways is important. The *One Hundred Languages* view of learning demands that educators understand that children learn in many different ways.

Children are encouraged to represent their thoughts and ideas through verbal dialogue and graphic representations, but may also portray their understanding through different *symbolic languages* (Millikan, 2003) such as paint, wire, fabric, clay or textiles that require new interpretations of their ideas. This process of representation is based on the strong image of the child and emphasises the strengths and capabilities that can be used in learning and can provide visual representation of the child’s thinking. Malaguzzi (1994) suggests that these *symbols of language* have strong links to emotions and feelings and can be used to enhance the communication and growth of all children.

2.3.5 Progettazione

Progettazione is an Italian term which defines the approach to pedagogy shared by adults and children. The Reggio Emilia approach uses the term *progettazione* to mean “their way of proceeding” (Millikan, 2003, p. 87). It can be identified as a creative process through which ideas are constructed and developed and likened to a research approach (Rinaldi, 2006). Reggio Emilia educators, in collaboration with the children, identify general goals and the direction experiences and projects might take. These teachers listen and then negotiate with the children to gain an understanding of their interests from which to build ideas and topics (Gandini, 2004). The Reggio Emilia teacher then uses this knowledge to

establish provocations to assist children in thinking more deeply, to question and to design a flexible, but rigorous approach (Bullard, 2010).

The *progettazione* is constructed in the process of each experience or project and changes in response to the continuous dialogue between the teacher and children (Hendrick, 2004; Rinaldi, 2006). This project work does not follow rigid timetables, but instead follows the pace and interests of the children involved in the process as they co-construct meaning collaboratively and so deepen their understandings of their world.

2.3.6 Role of the Teacher

Teachers in Reggio Emilia are viewed as educators and partners within the children's learning as they co-teach in pairs, as they plan together, and as they work with other colleagues. Central to their role is the responsibility to form relationships with a community of learners; a relationship that is based on adults listening rather than speaking (Millikan, 2003). Collaboration and communication are essential skills when relationships are central to the teacher's role. In a Reggio Emilia inspired approach there is a particular emphasis on a pedagogy of listening which requires the teacher to listen carefully to the children's ideas, participate with them in conversations, and then document their experiences (Fraser, 2006). The teacher's role is to collaborate with other educators, other staff and families and to discuss their observations of the children. This high level of collaboration involves interpreting these observations, and making flexible plans for future project work through negotiated discussions with children.

In addition to being a co-learner and collaborator with the child, the role of the teacher is to act as a guide and facilitator. The teacher is not viewed as the sole source of information and they must play an active role in providing the children with provocations (Hewett, 2001). This is not to impose ideas but to support and scaffold children's learning in the process of building and constructing knowledge. The teacher's role is to create a partnership with the learner as they

guide, ask questions, listen, offer suggestions and provide information as they move forward or change direction during the learning experiences. This role is also consistent with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) in that they facilitate and guide children to reach their full potential (Fraser, 2006).

Malaguzzi (cited in Millikan, 2003), suggested that as teachers facilitate children's learning according to their questions, interests and understandings, they take on the role of a researcher. In this role, the teachers are actively engaged in the children's work and document the process of learning. This involves the teacher gathering information, analysing it and reflecting on it in collaboration with other teachers and the children themselves (Follari, 2007). According to Hewett (2001), research has three main functions in this context. The first is to provide a visual record of the children's work. The second is to assist educators to develop or extend project ideas. The final purpose is to provide parents with an account of their children's learning and to encourage them to participate more fully in the educational work of the projects.

2.3.7 Documentation

The documentation of the child's learning process is fundamental to the role of the teacher in a Reggio Emilia approach. In this approach, educational documentation is a complex process which takes place during the child's learning. It includes the children's project work and it is placed at child and adult height as a prominent feature of the Reggio Emilia schools and centres (Bullard, 2010). Reggio Emilia influenced educators are asked to observe, document and analyse children's learning journeys and to use this process to make informed decisions as to how to guide their future learning (Rinaldi, 1998).

Teachers share and discuss this documentation in order to collaboratively interpret and evaluate each learning process. This, in turn, values the potential of every child and underlines the reciprocal relationship between learning and teaching (Hendrick, 2004; Rinaldi, 2006). As a part of this socio-constructivist

process of learning, the centres and preschools of Reggio Emilia view *educational documentation* as a *public place* or forum for observing a culture of childhood and education (PICMRE, 2010).

In the recent update of the principles guiding a Reggio Emilia approach there is an added emphasis on assessment of the educational project (PICMRE, 2010). This assessment is focused on the structured process of all learning, including the children's learning, the professionalism of the educators and the organisation and quality of the service provided. The assessment process is seen as an opportunity to recognise and negotiate the meanings and intentions of the educational project. The pedagogical coordinating team, the work group and the educators in the schools use practices that support the documentation and encourage the participation of the families and community in the process (PICMRE, 2010). The essential elements for the operation of the Reggio Emilia schools will be overviewed in Section 2.9.1.

2.4 The Reggio Emilia Approach within an Australian Context

While the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been widely recognised world wide, it has mainly been in the last ten years that Early Childhood educators have been exposed to a more in depth perspective of its pedagogy within an Australian context. The Australian Early Childhood Association bi-annual conference in 1992 was the first of many professional workshops and was introduced by Jan Millikan, the highly respected author of *Reflections: Reggio Emilia Principles within Australian Contexts* (Millikan, 2003). It was after her visits to the USA and then to Reggio Emilia in 1990, that Millikan was officially appointed the Reggio Emilia Liaison for Australia and New Zealand by Reggio Children in 1995. In 1996, Millikan established the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE), based in Melbourne, Victoria (Millikan, 2003).

Organised study tours of Reggio Emilia began in 1992 (Millikan, 2003) and the Traveling Exhibition *The Hundred Languages of Children* first exhibited in

Melbourne in 1994, in Perth in 2001, Ballarat in 2010 and recently in Canberra at the Landscapes of One Hundred Languages in 2011. These REAIE conferences and Traveling Exhibitions by Reggio Children, reflect the philosophical underpinning of Loris Malaguzzi's, the founder and theorist of the educational project for young children in the City of Reggio Emilia, *Hundred Languages of Children*. At recent conferences held in Australia, REAIE hosted Italian educators from Reggio Emilia to present educational projects completed by Reggio Children.

Related literature and resources about the approach from Reggio Emilia and elsewhere are now available in English within Australia and main sources of information can be accessed through the Reggio Emilia Australian Information Exchange (REAIE), based in the state of Victoria. Networks of interested educators have formed within each state of Australia and meet usually once or twice a school term to network, share and discuss related literature, research and work from Reggio Emilia and work by Australian educators who have adapted the approach within their own context or setting. The Reggio Emilia Australian Information Exchange (REAIE) produces its own quarterly journal *The Challenge* for subscribers across Australia.

2.5 To Be Reggio Inspired

It is important to understand what it means to be Reggio inspired (Cadwell, 1997; Wurm, 2005) because the Reggio Emilia approach is a contextualised philosophical approach and not a model for re-creation. Being Reggio Emilia inspired is how to “bring Reggio home” (Cadwell, 1997, p.1). This suggests a contextualised philosophy should reflect the cultural and historical values and beliefs of the community in which the learning takes place (Fraser, 2006; Millikan, 2003; Wurm, 2005). Fullan (2001) notes that successful implementation of the approach requires an understanding of the process of change. Additionally, the development of a shared understanding of the philosophical principles prior to

implementation is necessary to ensure its success (Ardzejewska & Coutts, 2004; Fullan, 2001).

Reggio Emilia inspired approaches will differ in response to diverse settings and provide educators with a philosophical way of thinking about teaching, learning and the children and families involved in their context. In a Western Australian context, the knowledge and practice of Reggio Emilia's early childhood projects are not well known, particularly where they are established in mainstream school settings. The approach may be more broadly practised within day care settings.

2.6 Early Childhood Education in Australia

Australia has a federated, national system of government consisting (or referred to as the Commonwealth) of eight states and territory governments (DEEWR, 2009). Historically, funding, licensing and policy responsibility for early childhood education has resided with state and territory governments. These governments have made a substantial investment in the early childhood sector, including the provision or funding of preschools/kindergartens, intervention services, child and maternal health services and family support services. The Commonwealth Government first became financially involved in day care with the *Child Care Act* in 1972. Its involvement has included a national system of long day care services and support for an accreditation system for these services (Early Childhood Education & Care in Australia [ECECA], 2011).

At the national level, the Commonwealth Government created the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 2007. As part of this new department, the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC) was established, bring together the responsibility for early childhood education, child care policy and funding at a national level. Responsibility for achieving policy coordination and consistency across all levels of government was assigned to the Council of Australian Government (COAG) (ECECA, 2011).

The responsibility for early childhood education in Australia has primarily been with the states and territories. Although the Commonwealth provides additional funding, each state and territory has different ways of structuring their education system within the early childhood sector from birth to 8 years (Anning, Cullen & Flear, 2009). Local Governments, however, play an important role in governing child care and supporting childcare and early learning institutions throughout Western Australia (WA), through regulation, facilities management and service provision. This involvement is subject to the goals and priorities set by COAG and others (WA Local Government Association, 2012).

From the mid 1970s, non-compulsory pre-school education in Western Australia (WA) was provided and staffed by the Department of Education. These community based kindergartens were popular and influential in building quality early childhood education. In 1992, optional and sessional pre-primary was made available to all children in the year they turned five, through pre-primary centres attached to 480 government primary schools in WA (Kronemann, 2001). Community based kindergartens (now known as community pre-school centres) were then seen as separate institutions, administered by community committees with teachers provided by the Education Department. Kindergarten services were provided by both the Department of Education and the Department for Community Development (DCD).

In 1993, the Scott taskforce reviewed pre-compulsory education in WA and proposed that by 2002 all children should be given the option of 10 hours per week of kindergarten. This was to begin in the year before full time pre-primary started and to be administered by qualified early childhood teachers (Kronemann, 2001). An Office of Early Childhood Services was also then established to coordinate government policy and to set standards for non-compulsory education services.

In 1993, government schools began the introduction of full time pre-primary and until 2001, these early years programs were provided for children in the year they turned five years old. In 2001, 'The Good Start program' provided free education for the first two pre-compulsory years of education (Early Childhood Australia, 2008). Currently, most early childhood services are on both government and non-government school sites under the governing body of the school (Early Childhood Australia, 2008). Community based pre-school centres are now governed by the Department of Education and linked closely to a nearby primary school. The child care system and early childhood sector (0 - 8 years) in Western Australia are separately governed. It has been argued that this structure makes it difficult to provide a continuous and quality education system for all young children.

From 1998, the mainstream education system in Western Australia had an outcome based approach and the curriculum was based on the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 in Western Australia (Curriculum Council, 1998).

2.7 Current Changes to Early Childhood Education in Australia

Early childhood education in Australia is undergoing significant change both on an educational and social reform level (Coalition of Australian Governments, [COAG], 2009; Fler, 2010). One of the influences on this change is the extensive research in early childhood education over the last ten years (Fler, 2010). Another is that both internationally and in Australia there has been a focus on policy development which has resulted in substantial changes related to political and economic factors.

The research and shifts in policy have influenced a new reform agenda being undertaken by the Australian government. In Western Australia, a recent Senate inquiry report into early childhood education, found the current early childhood education system to be fragmented with varying degrees of quality and lacking

equitable access (Early Childhood Australia, [ECA], 2009). The inquiry also found a lack of consistent approaches, child ratios, costs, delivery hours or terminology, and a system without national vision (ECA, 2009).

The current challenges to early childhood education have resulted in the development of a National Early Childhood Development Strategy to ensure that “every child has the best start to life by 2020” (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, [DEEWR], 2010, p. 1). This could be a considerable challenge as it has been estimated that 30% of children are not participating in a preschool program in the year before compulsory schooling begins (COAG, 2009).

As part of this review process, disadvantaged families, Indigenous families and those with school-aged children who have disabilities have been given more attention (COAG, 2009; OECD Report, 2006). This suggests that quality early childhood education is needed in order to overcome the challenges faced by these children, their families and their communities (Fleer, 2010).

In response to this need, the Australian government has invested \$970 million in early childhood over the next five years. Through a National Partnership with States and Territories, the government has provided resources so that by 2013, every child will have access to a quality play-based early childhood education program (COAG, 2009). These programs are to be delivered by a university trained early childhood teacher in a diversity of settings. The Kindergarten (WA based education system) hours has also increased from 13 to 15 hours, 40 weeks of the year in 2012.

In 2008, the Australian governments signed the ‘Melbourne Declaration for Educational Goals for Young Australians’. This agreement set the direction for Australian schooling for the next ten years, including a focus on learning and development in early childhood, the transition to school, and on literacy and

numeracy. Since 2012, the states and territories have been implementing a new national curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, with the aim of improving outcomes for all young Australians. This curriculum, in a Western Australian system context, includes pre-primary (Foundation level) to Year 10.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that from January 2012, a National Quality Framework (NQF) would be introduced to provide improved education and developmental outcomes for children using education and care services (Australian Children's Educational & Care Quality Authority, [ACECQA], 2013). Components of the NQF are a National Quality Standard (NQS) with seven quality areas, a new rating system, a regulatory system and a new national body, the Australian Children's Educational and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

The NQS is linked to national learning frameworks that govern educational and care services to children from birth. *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Framework for Australia* (from birth to 5 years) and *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* are frameworks that outline practices to support and promote children's learning (ACECQA, 2012). The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) has emerged as a catalyst for change in early childhood education and care from a domains-oriented approach to a broader more sociocultural-historical philosophical one (Anning, Cullen, Fleer, 2009). It has a specific focus on play-based learning and recognises the importance of communication, language and social and emotional development.

More recent ideas in regards to children's learning and development have drawn on the philosophical ideals of Reggio Emilia and the sociocultural theory (Edwards & Hammer, 2010). This notion of change is evident in the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia with an emphasis on this theoretical stance (DEEWR, 2009). This represents a re-conceptualisation of early childhood pedagogy with an emphasis on how teachers interact with children to support

learning. It also identifies the importance of the cultural and social context in relation to development. Anning, Cullen and Fler (2009) suggest that the principles of Reggio Emilia have been enacted in some child care centres and pre-schools, although, this has mainly been in the private sector. The only Reggio Emilia setting catering for students from Kindergarten to Year 10 in Western Australia is a private school situated in an a western suburb of Perth.

2.8 Philosophy of Teaching and Learning in an Australian Context

In Australia, early childhood education has historically been based on the educational ideas and philosophies from a range of theorists including Froebel, Piaget, Vygotsky, Malaguzzi and Rogoff (Edwards & Hammer, 2010). Learning and pedagogy within these settings have typically been framed within a developmental theory and mostly shaped by the United States of America and their construction of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Anning, Cullen, Fler, 2009). This theory of practice has led Australian educators to use this perspective for framing curriculum development in order to meet the identified developmental expectations for young children (McLachlan, Fler & Edwards, 2010). Historically, this has allowed the school sector to follow a discipline focus alongside a child-centred approach to learning and pedagogy. In early childhood, this approach has tended to be child driven, rather than driven by the school-based curriculum.

Philosophies of learning within the early childhood sector have been derived from a domains-based approach, drawing upon DAP to inform *best* teaching practice. 'Best' practice implies that it is possible to "establish a set of standards for judgment about the quality of practices" (Goodfellow, 2001, p.1). Recent changes to curriculum and governance in Australia signifies a move away from this practice to a national curriculum approach guided by the Australian Curriculum and National Quality Framework (NQF) in early childhood.

2.9 The Reggio Emilia Infant-toddler and Preschool System

Reggio Emilia is known for its forward thinking and strong visions for children and the community in which they live. Given its historical background and inspired by the philosophy and educational vision of Loris Malaguzzi, the early years of education were deemed vitally important and Malaguzzi and the team of professional teachers in Reggio Emilia attended to the connection and collaboration between the home and the community. Particular attention was given to professional expertise, pedagogical outlook and the development of a unique learning environment that responded to the particular learning needs of the age group (Fraser, 2006; Millikan, 2003). Therefore, the schools in Reggio Emilia have been emulated worldwide for their pedagogical practice and their socio-constructivist view to early childhood education.

Educational centres were built and run by the local communities before the Municipality of Reggio Emilia became responsible for preschool education in 1963. School-city committees were then set up to establish a democratic administration with Reggio Emilia being the first school to do so in Italy (Millikan, 2003). In this context, 15.5% of the local council budget is transferred to the schools of Reggio Emilia, where 40% of children aged 0-3 years are within the infant toddler centres and 80% of 3-6 year olds are educated within a Reggio Emilia preschool (Barozzi, 2011).

The structure of the Reggio Emilia schools is one that demonstrates participation, democracy, collective responsibility and decision-making (Millikan, 2003). The emphasis is, therefore, on the collaborative way in which the municipal education programs in Italy operate which is highly reflective of its political and cultural context. This close participation and collaboration is integral to, and guided by, forward thinking about pedagogical matters. This in turn has influenced other countries to question their approach to education and to therefore implement change in their pedagogical practices (Wurm, 2005). Of importance to this study, is that this system contrasts in a number of ways to the current Western

Australian mainstream state system. These differences include the governance system, the professional role of the teacher and curriculum structure

2.9.1 Organisation of the Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools in Reggio Emilia

The Class

The class is the basis for the educational projects and is open and in constant dialogue with the wider context of the preschool and infant-toddler centre. The infant-toddler centres (0-3 year olds) consists of a group of children varying in number depending on their age, as well as the parents and three teachers who share equal responsibility for the group. The preschool (4-6 year olds) are made up of the children (usually 26 in a class), their parents, and two teachers who share equal responsibility (PICMRE, 2010). Each class group at the preschool and infant-toddler centre is also subject to adult-child ratios defined by national and regional laws. In each class group, the children and the teachers, the *atelierista*, the *pedagogista* and other professionals explore, research and share their experiences to give meaning to the principles of the educational project.

The Community-Early Childhood Council

Each infant-toddler centre and preschool has its own Community-Early Childhood Council formed of parents of the children who attend the centre, educators, the *pedagogista*, and other community members (Barozzi, 2011). This council is elected every three years in a public assembly.

The *Interconsiglio*

The *Interconsiglio* is the context in which the councils are coordinated and meet together regularly. The *Interconsiglio* is composed of representatives from all the Community-Early Childhood Councils of the municipal and the public-private preschools and infant-toddler centres, Reggio Children, the Friends of Reggio Children International Association, the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres

(President, Director, Board of Directors), and the City Council person of reference (PICMRE, 2010).

The *Interconsiglio* serves as a liaison with the city administrators in relation to school priorities in relation to its function, management and administrative choices. It is also convened and presided over by the President of the Preschools and Infant-toddler centres Institute and meets at least three times a year (PICMRE, 2010).

2.10 The Professional Role of the Teacher in Reggio Emilia

New (2007) indicates that although it is the image of the child promoted by the Reggio Emilia approach that has inspired educators world-wide, it is the image of the teacher that has likely sustained their interest and commitment. Dahlberg and Moss (2006) suggest that Reggio Emilia emphasises that theory and practice are connected and in doing so obliges teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions. The teachers' role has four main constructs: as a collaborator and co-learner; as a guide and facilitator; as a researcher; and as a reflective practitioner (Hewett, 2001; Follari, 2007). The professional teacher in Reggio Emilia is highly regarded and the system promotes respect for them and confidence in their pedagogical expertise.

Fraser (2006) and Hendrick (2004) describe the role of the Reggio teacher as an observer who extends to the role of documenter and researcher. The teacher is seen as the creator of *the environment as a third teacher* and a co-constructor of knowledge as they collaborate with children and other teachers to discuss and interpret their experiences (Bullard, 2010).

A key role of the teacher is the element of listening to children while enhancing the collaborative and responsive relationships with children (Goodfellow, 2001). Through the process of *multiple* listening, teachers engage in sustained communication with children about their ideas and experiences. They then use

these ideas to further inform professional judgments about how they best support and extend the children's thinking and learning. In contrast to the Australian system, Reggio teachers do not come to learning situations with possible outcomes in mind (Goodfellow, 2001). The teacher's role in the Reggio Emilia Infant-toddler centre and preschools is to be open and flexible in order to enhance the strong image of the child and the recognition of their emergent thinking.

In Reggio Emilia, the *image of the teacher* emphasises the teacher's ability to make autonomous and trustworthy decisions (New, 2007). The professional role is not dependent on prescribed teaching methods, but rather on opportunities to reflect and implement programs that are based on children's needs, interests and rights.

2.11 The Professional Role of the Teacher in Australia as compared to a Reggio Emilia Teacher

While Reggio Emilia and Australian teachers could share constructivist philosophies based on the works of Vygotsky, Piaget and Dewey, there is a clear distinction between the roles of the Reggio Emilia early childhood teacher and that of a mainstream Australian one.

The Australian early childhood professional is expected to display a range of personal and professional qualities in addition to specialised theoretical and practical knowledge (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu, 2007). In Australia, traditionally teachers have focused on developmentally appropriate practice which suggests the establishment of standards for judgments to be made in relation to the quality of early childhood practice (McLachlan, Fler & Edwards, 2010). These regulatory standards often assume that elements of quality practice are universal and measurable (Fler, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001). Goodfellow (2001) argues that there is growing skepticism in regards to the universality of

standards of quality and practice and the extent to which these standards can be evaluated.

An alternative approach that has been presented to Australian educators is the Reggio Emilia philosophy which foregrounds the strong image and complexity of children (Fleer, 2010). Arthur, Beecher, Harrison and Morandini (2003) concede that reconstructing our image of children and acknowledging the sociocultural nature of children's learning challenges teachers to explore different approaches to learning. Fleer (2010) also argues that a teacher's philosophical beliefs, pedagogy and practice should be different across cultural contexts within the mainstream Australian setting.

Therefore, a universal approach to early childhood philosophy implied by best practice is now considered somewhat inappropriate and in the light of that, the role of the early childhood professional should be reconsidered (Goodfellow, 2001). This shift in thinking is seen in the new early childhood curriculum, the EYLF (2009), which has an underlying philosophy based on a sociocultural approach.

The Australian teacher is seen more as a leader and developer of curriculum *for* the children, where the Reggio Emilia teacher is seen more as a collaborator and co-researcher *with* the children. This is apparent when most Australian teachers make the final choice of what curriculum content is to be implemented, as compared to the Reggio Emilia approach which encourages an emergent and then negotiated curriculum with ownership held by the children. Anning, Cullen and Fleer (2009) suggest that the role of the teacher in Australia is complicated when there is a need to distinguish between teacher directed and child initiated interactions within the traditional linear developmental approach.

Teachers have also reported feeling pressured by the view that young children learn more effectively in a more structured and formalised approach (Briggs &

Potter, 1999; Corrie 2001). Until recently, this has been partly due to the mandated Western Australian Curriculum Framework that governs the education of all children from 3.5 years upward (Corrie, 2001).

In Reggio Emilia, the standards of practice for teachers are set within a philosophical framework that views the child as a knowledgeable and competent learner (Goodfellow, 2001). This view of the child encourages teachers to consider their rights rather than their needs (Hendrick, 2004). This view leads to a supportive and collaborative environment where reciprocal relationships are important. Reggio teachers are bound by a sense of trustworthiness rather than accountability. This sense of trustworthiness is also viewed as a collective responsibility of the school community, rather than an individual teacher's responsibility if expectations are not met (Hewett, 2001).

In contrast, teachers in Australia are bound by accountability expectations in terms of standards and quality in education. In WA, The Competency Framework for Teachers (Department of Education & Training WA, 2004) has guided teacher standards from 2004 until recently. In 2012, this framework was replaced by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Education Services, 2012) developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The AITSL Standards describe the knowledge, practices and professional engagement required across teachers' careers (Education Services, 2012). These standards have a focus on accountability and expectations that may lead to a reduced level of autonomy for teachers.

Therefore, Reggio Emilia teachers are seen as creators of pedagogical theory, whereas the Western Australian (WA) education system seems to portray a separation between theory and practical implementation to some degree. Corrie (2001) suggests that many WA teachers have had to overcome many barriers in order to teach in ways that respond to children's interests and ideas. It is also suggested that the Reggio sense of trustworthiness is lost as teachers are

predominantly accountable for set standards, as well as required to report to principals and parents (Corrie, 2001) all within the regulatory system of the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2012).

Another principle from the Reggio Emilia approach is the collaborative role of the professional teacher within the teaching and learning process. Reggio Emilia teachers acknowledge the importance of collaboration in order to construct learning. Collaboration can occur between children and teachers, teaching colleagues, children and families and teachers and parents. Corrie (2001) suggest that the mainstream WA government system fosters a more professionally isolated approach to teaching where teachers often have fewer opportunities to collaborate with others.

There are additional restrictions on the way an early childhood teacher manages the physical environment. These restrictions can be due to whole school approaches, including different timetables that somewhat isolate the early childhood area from the primary sector, as well as the frequent allocation of small and/or non-permanent demountable (transportable classrooms) settings. Further restrictions arise out of current state system regulations related to class sizes, staffing levels and outcomes for learning, controlled by either the public State School system, the Catholic Education Office and the Australian Independent Schools of Western Australia.

The following table provides an overview and comparison between the two different systems of schooling.

Table 1: A Comparison of Australian Mainstream Contexts and Reggio Emilia Preschools

Australian School System	Reggio Emilia School System
'Projects' or themes are used on a daily, weekly basis	'Projects' may be brief but continue for weeks or months
'Topics' are used to provide information	'Topics' are used to pose problems and provoke thought

Children may acquire limited information on many subjects	Children acquire in-depth knowledge about fewer subjects
Inquiry learning focuses on Science/Society & Environment (Humanities) related activities	Pronounced emphasis on 'provoking' children to propose reasons for why things happen and to solve problems
Children demonstrate what they know by talking to the teacher	Children show what they know by many different forms of expressive media (100 languages) and a listening pedagogy
The individual is emphasised; autonomy and independence is valued	Existence within the group is emphasised with a strong sense of community
Time is rigid and scheduled	Time is flexible and is 'unhurried'
Record keeping is limited to results	Documentation of and reflection on the process of learning by teachers and learners is important
Teachers change their class each year	Teachers remain with their class for 3 years
Staffing consists of 1 teacher and 1 education assistant	Staffing is two teachers of equal rank plus the services of a pedagoga and atelierista
Hierarchy of staffing/position – (i.e., Principal/Line Manager/teacher/ education assistant)	There are no principals – everyone accepts various responsibilities
Conflict of ideas is avoided by teachers and children in respect to professional judgments/discussion & behaviour management	'Confrontation' or a conflict of ideas and debate with differing points of view are encouraged methods of learning by teachers
Teachers tend to be isolated; policy is stringent	Close collaboration between all teachers occurs regularly and frequently

(Adapted from Hendrick, 2004)

2.12 The Impact of Change on a Teacher's Professional Role

It can be argued that the substantial changes currently occurring in early childhood education will impact on the professional role of the teacher. Briggs and Potter (1999) claim that Australian teachers are now better qualified and more experienced to deal with change. However, they note that never before has the Australian teacher been more confused by their changing role and the complexities of responsibilities resulting from educational and economic change.

In addition, recent research has led teachers to question what is appropriate to meet the learning needs of young children (Briggs & Potter, 1999; Fler, 2010). In particular, the shift from theoretical frameworks of child development which have traditionally been employed to guide pedagogy and teaching has influenced this unease. Recent challenges and neuroscience related research have prompted early childhood educators to rethink perspectives on how children learn and think and how curriculum should be implemented (Fler, 2010; Maloney, 1997).

2.13 The Current Study

Despite the potential impact of these changes on early childhood teachers, there is limited research related to their perceptions of the change process and its impact on their professional role (Elliot, 2005). Ardzejewska and Coutts (2004) in an Australian study of primary teachers implementing a Reggio inspired approach noted the importance of knowledge involved in the process of change. To address this dearth of research, the current study intends to explore this process of change related to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, but within an early childhood setting. While there has been research related to an understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the pedagogical considerations of implementation, this study will extend this by identifying the perceived barriers and facilitating factors in the change process. Additionally, it will note the impact of this process of change on a teachers' professional role.

The study will explore what inspires early childhood educators to change their philosophical understandings and beliefs to reflect a Reggio Emilia approach. It will also document the process by which early childhood teachers' transition from a traditional mainstream state system form of schooling to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach while remaining within the same mainstream context. The impact of this change on the role of each teacher will be examined, including how their understanding developed and how the four teachers adapted to the process of change.

The contrasts in the social and cultural contexts of WA and Reggio Emilia, in Italy, and the source of the approach which will be implemented, will also be important in the study. The State of Western Australia is geographically isolated and characterised by wide open spaces with its main population in the south western coastal area as compared to the historically rich and culturally different city of Reggio Emilia (Corrie, 2001).

The difference in the education systems and schools is apparent, and one of the confronting issues for teachers who initiate innovative change is the way in which a new approach is idealised, formed, justified and then implemented. Fullan (2001) suggests that if change is to be successful, then the teacher has to have a deep and shared understanding of the innovation. Fullan's study (2001) recognised that there are always perceived barriers affecting change initiation and factors critical to the success to the implementation of a change process. The barriers and facilitating factors inhibiting and promoting change will be noted and discussed in this study.

Briggs and Potter (1999) suggest that teachers need to be ongoing life long learners in order to innovate and support change within their role. For teachers, this represents the acquisition of new knowledge. The interpretation of that knowledge should be discussed and debated with other professionals. The application and implementation of an innovation and the critical reflection that occurs after implementation are crucial to the success and perceived outcomes of the change in a teacher's role (Briggs & Potter, 1999).

There is also the expectation that teachers will engage in continuous professional development. Research demonstrates that the level of support from the school to facilitate this ongoing learning is crucial if change is to be effective (Briggs & Potter, 1999; Fler, 2010). To be innovative and invite change, the teacher needs to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills required to support change.

The change process also requires consistent collaboration in a supportive environment. This is so teachers can engage in professional discussion about issues and the processes required to implement change. The development of a collaborative learning community is highly respected within Reggio Emilia schools (Wurm, 2005), but in mainstream Australian schools, this is sometimes hard to achieve.

Collaborative critical reflection and open debate are required for innovation and change to occur as frequently seen in Reggio Emilia schools (Fraser, 2006). This is difficult when schools or teachers find themselves isolated or are not part of a supportive professional environment conducive to learning. Briggs and Potter (1999) suggest that part of a teacher's role is to accept constructive criticism and that creative tension can motivate positive change. Finally, this understanding of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the role of the professional teacher and the impact of change, informed this study as it sought to answer the following three research questions.

2.14 Research Questions

This study was framed by the following questions:

1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context?
2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context?
3. How does the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach impact on a teacher's professional role?

2.15 Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The research discussed above informed the conceptual framework of the study which is represented in the following diagram

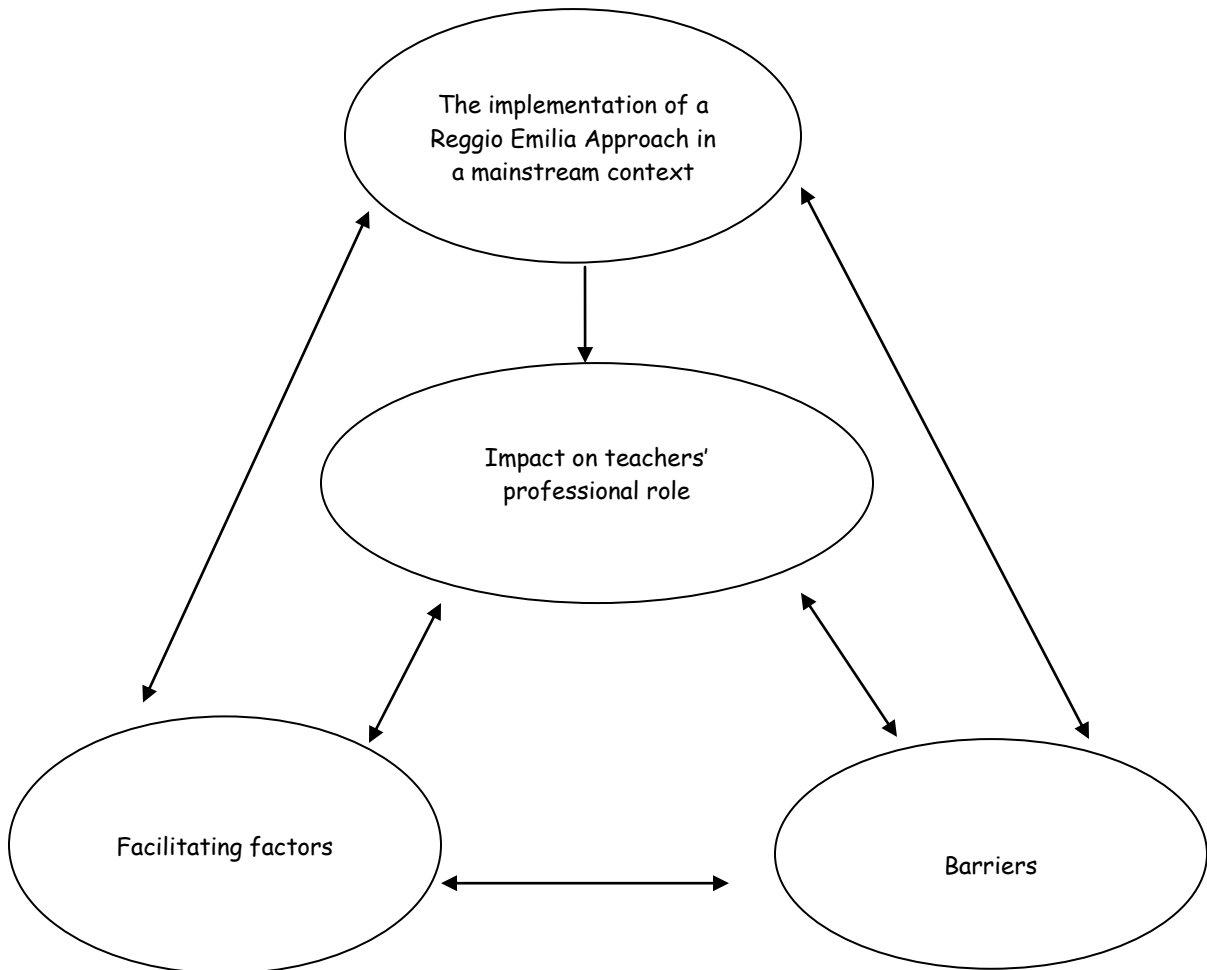


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three describes the theoretical framework and the research methods used to conduct this study as approved by the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee (Approval number 5555). This chapter will include the aims, a description of the participants, the research design and the procedures employed. The method of analysis is also detailed. Finally, reliability and validity issues and limitations of the study are addressed.

3.2 The Aims

The aims of this study were:

- To investigate how pre-primary teachers implement a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a Western Australian mainstream context.
- To identify facilitating factors and barriers to the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context.
- To explore how the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach impacts on early childhood teachers' professional role within a mainstream Western Australian context.

3.3 School Contexts and Research Participants

Qualitative data was gathered from four pre-primary teachers within two mainstream Pre-Primary settings. Pre-Primary settings in Western Australia are children aged 4.5 to 6 years old and were part of the compulsory education system at a state level from 2013. At the time of the study, the four teachers were implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within their settings. One of the teachers (Teacher 1) taught in the first centre (School A) and the remaining three (Teachers 2-4) in the second (School B). In this study, each of these school contexts is examined as a case. The teachers in the study were selected as they

represented a range of pathways to becoming Reggio Emilia inspired and were in the early stages of implementing this approach within a mainstream context. The teachers' contexts were contrasting, with one being a sole implementer in her school and three in the other setting being part of a whole school approach to implementation.

3.3.1 Case Study 1

Teacher 1 in School A

Teacher 1 taught a pre-primary class in School A. This was a private Catholic school situated in a north western suburb of Perth. Established in 1978, the mainstream school catered for approximately 510 students in a double-stream (two classrooms of the same year level), co-educational K-6 community. Teacher 1 was implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in isolation from other pre-primary teachers as there was no current policy within the school to support this approach to early childhood education.

The community in which the school was located had a population of 5,602 at the time of this study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Of these, 62.4% were born in Australia with 1.3% of these being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Of those who were born in other countries, 11.6% were from England and 5% were from New Zealand. There were also people from countries where English was not the first language, including Germany (0.8%) and Poland (0.6%). The children from this community enrolled in kindergarten and pre-primary at the time of this study represented 5.0% of the suburb's population.

Teacher 1 was a specialist trained early childhood teacher. She had been teaching for nine years of which five were spent teaching in the Catholic system and four within the government state school system. She went on a study tour of a Reggio Emilia school in Italy in 2005. She then visited and spent four years living in Reggio Emilia. As part of this experience, she worked in a language school with young children. She also taught English to tertiary level students in an Early Childhood Studies course. This course was designed to assist the

students to gain the skills and confidence necessary to speak English with delegates visiting the educational project in Reggio Emilia.

As part of this experience, Teacher 1 did a six month teaching internship with Nido Scuola Choreia in Italy. The internship was created as part of an educational project initiated by *Reggio Children* in collaboration with Nido Scuola Choreia. It was designed specifically to create a cultural and linguistic exchange between the participating parties. Teacher 1 had been implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in School A for two years at the commencement of this study.

3.3.2 Case Study 2

Teachers 2, 3 and 4 in School B

Teachers 2, 3 and 4 taught in School B, a K-7 school situated in a north eastern suburb of Perth. It had been established in 1998 and became an Independent Public School in 2010. This means that in collaboration with their school community, Independent Public Schools set their own strategic directions, and have authority for day-to-day decision making. Parents and community members have an important and enhanced role in this initiative. Although they are called Independent Public Schools, this school remains part of the public school system. This mainstream school was different from School A in that a Reggio Emilia approach was introduced for Kindergarten to Year One as part of their school policy in 2005 and was strongly supported by the wider school community. This support also included close partnerships with nearby universities.

The community in which the school was located had a population of 7, 480 at the time of this study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Of these, 64.0% were born in Australia with 0.6% of these being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Of those who were born in other countries, 6.4% were from England and 53.0% were from South Africa. There were also people from countries

where English was not the first language, including Vietnam (4.4%) and Italy (2.2%). The children from this community enrolled in kindergarten and pre-primary at the time of this study represented approximately 4% of the suburb's population.

Teacher 2 had completed a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Studies. She had eight years teaching experience within the early childhood and junior primary government school sector at the time of this study. She had been working at School B for three years, with two years spent in the kindergarten level and the year of the data collection, in the pre-primary.

Teacher 3 had completed a Bachelor of Education (Kindergarten through Primary) and had been teaching for five years. She spent the first two years in a country town teaching years K-3 and had been at School B for three years at the time of the data collection. Her knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach was very limited prior to being appointed to School B but she had since attended network meetings and professional development to extend her working knowledge and philosophical understanding of the approach.

Teacher 4 is a permanent teacher who had completed a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Studies in 2000. She began teaching Pre-Primary at School B in 2001, with experience also at a Year One level. At the time of the study, Teacher 4 had four years contact with the Reggio inspired approach and had attended many professional development seminars to extend her knowledge and understanding of the approach. This included contributing to presentations on the learning environment made to pre-service teachers in a university.

3.4 Research Design

A phenomenological research design was chosen to answer the questions that guided this study. This theoretical frame was selected in order to gain an understanding of the true nature of the early childhood setting and enable the

researcher to gain new insights into a particular phenomenon, this being how the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context impacted on the role of teachers. The methods used allowed the researcher to gather information about two specific contexts and the individuals within them (Crotty, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The study used a qualitative approach to research how individuals interact within their social world (Merriam, 1998). In addition, this methodology allows for a greater understanding of individuals' and their perceptions of the world (Bell, 2005). Further, qualitative research is more flexible and open than quantitative design and so suited the phenomenological nature of this study (Wiersma, 1995). The qualitative research methodology used in this study involved both inductive and deductive processes. Deductive processes were used when the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach were used to guide the classroom observations on the premise that the teachers' implementation would be guided by these principles. All the other methods used in this study allowed for inductive processes. These two different approaches allowed the researcher to affirm assumptions, claims, theories and conclusions in order to gather particular information relating to two contrasting contexts (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Wiersma, 1995). The particular qualitative methodology selected for the study was a case study approach.

3.4.1 Case Study Approach

A case study approach was selected as the research methodology for this study because of the nature of the investigation which was context-related and so required a methodology which focused on the situation. That is, this study investigated the implementation of Reggio Emilia inspired approach to pre-primary education in two contrasting mainstream contexts. This methodology also allowed particular aspects of the problem or innovation is to be examined (Bell, 2005; Yin, 1994). In this study, these aspects were the nature of the implementation process in different contexts, the facilitating factors and barriers

to that implementation and the impact of this change on the teachers' professional roles.

Additionally, this approach was suitable because it allowed for careful planning, systematic data collection and for the relationship between variables to be studied (Bell, 2005). The method also allowed for 'responsiveness' (Stake, 1995) to the context which was appropriate given the dynamic nature of early childhood settings.

Further, case study design was appropriate given that the uniqueness of a particular situation was important to the study (Merriam, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). It allowed for the investigation of two distinct cases within two different contexts with the opportunity to develop an expanded awareness of practices and issues that occur within those particular contexts.

The 'cases' identified the nature of the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to early childhood education within a mainstream context and its impact on the teachers' professional role.

3.4.2 Data Collection

For this case study, the data collection methods included:

- Observation (4 teachers with three individual observations each)
- Semi-structured interviews with study participants/school leaders (2-3 for each participant and 1 for school leader/1 focus group)
- Researcher's field notes (journal notes, records of participant interactions, dialogues with other stakeholders, observations and incidentals)
- Reflective journals kept by the four teacher participants (minimum 5 entries over one school term)
- Document Analysis (i.e. curriculum documents, school policy documents, planning documents, newsletters, communication to parents)

The seven Reggio Emilia principles were also used as a guide for the observations and semi-structured interviews, as well as for organising the data collection and data analysis.

Table 2 provides an overview of the data collection methods used as related to the research questions explored in the research project.

Table 2: Overview of Data Collection Methods

Methods	Data Collected (Source)	Research Questions
Observation	Observations of four teachers within their settings (2 Case Studies)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context? 2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context? 3. How does the implementation of a Reggio approach impact on a teacher's perception of their role?
Semi-structured interviews	<p>4 teachers implementing the Reggio Emilia inspired approach</p> <p>Administration representative/1 school leader from each school</p> <p>(Audio recorded with transcripts for each participant to check after the interview/s)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context? 2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context? 3. How does the implementation of a Reggio approach impact on a teacher's perception of their role?
Field Notes	Including notes related to unplanned observation, conversations and discussions, interviews (notes and transcripts of recordings) and the researcher's reflective journal.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context? 2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context? 3. How does the implementation of the Reggio approach impact on a teacher's perception of their role?
Reflective Journal	4 teachers: minimum of 5 entries within journal over a school term (10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western

	weeks). Participants were given questions to guide their reflection as well as the freedom to comment outside the scope of the questions.	<p>Australian mainstream context?</p> <p>2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context?</p> <p>3. How does the implementation of the Reggio approach impact on a teacher's perception of their role?</p>
Document Analysis	<p>system/administrative documents (curriculum, school documentation)</p> <p>teacher documents – planning documentation, philosophy, Daily Work Pad DWP, reflections, communications, newsletter, meetings</p>	<p>1. How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach be implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context?</p> <p>2. What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context?</p>

3.4.3 Observation

Non-participant observations were conducted in the pre-primary settings of the four teachers participating in this study. This data collection method allowed for the collection of “open-ended, firsthand information by observing real people and places at a research site” (Creswell, 2005, p.211).

Two to three teaching and learning sessions were observed for each teacher, over one school term (total of 10 weeks). The seven Reggio Emilia principles (Fraser, 2006; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002), current at the time of the data collection, were used to guide the observations as part of a deductive method.

These principles were:

- The image of the child
- Collaboration and relationships
- The environment as a third teacher
- The expressive arts (the Hundred Languages)
- Progettazione
- Role of the teacher - Teachers as learners
- Documentation

The observations were conducted to gain in-depth information about the teacher's implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach and its impact on their professional role. It also formed the basis of subsequent semi-structured interviews with the teachers about the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach and their changing role related to this change. Where necessary, these observations were followed by discussion with the participant and additional information was recorded as field notes. Observations with following discussion allowed the researcher to capture data as it emerged (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Observation notes were made using a combination of open and structured observation schedules. The structured observation instrument was adapted from Flanders (1970) and Wragg (1999) cited in Opie (2004). It used a category system to guide the recording of particular data relevant to the study questions. It allowed for notes related to the role of the observer to be made (Opie, 2004). This was to make the role of the researcher in the observations transparent and so as to allow others to make judgements about the objectivity of the observations. At the outset of the study, the degree to which the researcher would participate was established with the study participants in order to maintain an unbiased and ethical approach to data collection (Opie, 2004).

3.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview format was chosen for this study as it allowed the flexibility (Bell, 2005) to develop questions and probe new areas of interest (Bell, 2005; Creswell, 2005). It also provided information that written responses can conceal and allowed responses to be extended and clarified (Bell, 2005). The flexibility of this method was important as it allowed for the exploration of issues that were of particular concern to the interviewees (Yin, 2006).

The semi-structured interview process used some of the techniques discussed by Yin (2006) and Creswell (2005) and included interview strategies such as:

- hypothetical questions

- literal questions
- evaluative questions
- open-ended questions
- prefatory statements
- probes and summaries

A questioning guide and prompts related to the three research questions was also used (see Appendix E).

Semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with each of the four pre-primary teachers observed. In Case Study 1, there were two interviews held with teacher 1 and one with the school leader. In Case Study 2, there were four individual interviews held with the three teachers and school leader. At both sites, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed and then sent to the participants so that they could review the content and comment on it if they chose to.

Summary sheets were offered to the participant after each interview. This provided them with the opportunity to reflect on what they have reported and add more detail or comment on what they felt was of note to them. These participant notes assisted in the interpretation of the data.

3.4.5 Field Notes

Field notes were used to collect data that arose incidentally and were not recorded through the formal data collection methods. In this study, that included notes based on conversations with the participants and observations in the field. The collection of this type of evidence contributed to the development of a holistic and naturalistic view of the setting (Opie, 2004). In addition, field notes allowed for a focus on particular aspects of the situation as the study progressed.

The field notes were systematically recorded as soon as practical in the context to avoid inaccuracy and bias (Opie, 2004).

3.4.6 Reflective Journals

Each participant was asked to complete a reflective journal over a 10 week period (a school term) in order to provide insights into their teaching experience from their points of view. The participants were asked to write about the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the barriers they faced and the facilitating factors that contributed to the change. In turn, the reflective journal was used to assist the teachers to develop insights into how this implementation had impacted on their professional role. Each participant was given a choice to hand write, or provide an electronic copy of their journal at the completion of the school term.

The journaling process allowed the participants to have an active voice in an uninterrupted environment (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005) and provided descriptive information about their perceptions of the phenomenon being investigated (Wiersma, 1995).

3.4.7 Document Analysis

There were two particular types of documents analysed in this study; system and school level documents and teacher participant documents. Many research studies involve document analysis in order to examine how the policy and practices recorded in that documentation impact within a particular context (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005). The system level documents, particularly in School B, provided additional information about the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach and the school's philosophical approach for Years K to 1. System level early childhood policy and practice documents (WA Curriculum Framework and National Curriculum) were also examined to provide information about how these influenced policy and practice within the early childhood settings which were the context of this study.

The teacher participant documents included the participants' statements regarding their teaching philosophies, planning documents, class newsletters, communication to parents, daily lesson plans, teaching materials and other related documents. These documents provided an insight into how the participants interpreted the Reggio approach and implemented it within their teaching context.

3.5 Analysis

The data gathered from the qualitative research methods used in this study were analysed based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) three phase guide. These stages include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the first stage, the data was assembled, summarised, coded and sorted into themes and categories. The second stage involved the data being organised to allow the researcher to conceptualise it and in the last stage the data was interpreted (Creswell, 2007).

The participant observations were reviewed and summarised to provide an overview of the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in each context. Observational notes and field notes were used to facilitate discussion during the interviews. These field notes were also reviewed at each phase and contributed to the summary of the context for that observation. Photographs of each context were taken to help to contextualise the observations made. Permission was given by both the teacher and the school for this to occur.

All interviews were analysed in the same way to ensure consistency. Standard qualitative methods as outlined by Crotty (1998) and Patton (2002) were used for the data analysis. The interview data was initially analysed to identify patterns relating to how the seven Reggio Emilia principles were enacted in the different contexts in order to better understand how a Reggio Emilia inspired approach could be implemented in a mainstream situation. The data was further analysed to identify the barriers and facilitating factors influencing the implementation and

the impact of the change on the participant teachers' perceptions of their professional role. The coded items were then grouped into categories and then clustered to form themes. These themes were classified as ordinary, unexpected and major and minor themes (Creswell, 2005). The themes were further analysed from each participant's perspective, providing evidence related to each research question. For each of the three research questions, sub themes were then identified in recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon being investigated.

The data analysis in this study was an ongoing cycle. The coding, categories and themes were constantly modified with successive interviews and data analysis. The reflective journals completed by each teacher participant were also coded using the same data analysis methods as those used for the semi structured interviews. Dialogue (displayed in italics) from the interviews and reflective journals is included in the findings chapters and provides support and exemplifies particular themes emerging from the data analysis. This method of using dialogue is an effective way of "capturing feelings, emotions, and ways people talk about their experiences for qualitative research purposes" (Creswell, 2005, p.250). This analysis procedure involved a triangulation of data sources, including the observations, the following discussions, the interviews, the reflective journals and the field notes to increase the reliability of the emerging themes.

3.5.1 Data Reliability and Validity

Bell (2005, p. 117) states that procedures for collecting data should be "critically examined to assess to what extent the data is likely to be valid and reliable." Reliability is defined by Bell (2005, p.117) as "the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions."

To ensure reliability in this study, the structure of each observation, interview and data collection technique remained constant. Audio recordings of the interviews

were collected and transcribed. The transcripts were then given to the participants to check in order to ensure that their views had been faithfully recorded. Where they noted this had not been done, the transcripts could be corrected. The interviews and observational sessions were directed by an interview guide and observational framework to ensure reliability of the findings.

The methods used in this study were designed to identify the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context and its impact on the teachers' professional role accurately. The process of triangulation assisted in increasing the validity of the study. Of the five data sources, three specific sources (interview transcripts, reflective journal entries and field notes) were used for triangulation purposes. Through using a combination of data collection methods, the findings were cross checked and validated (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005; Patton, 2002).

A method for checking the reliability of the data findings are coding checks. This method was used to check the coding process of an interview transcript from a study participant. A trained rater coded 15% of the interview transcripts with an inter-rater reliability score of 96.92. There was consistent agreement with the main categories with some variation in the sub-categories. As suggested by Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman and Marteau (1997), these differences were "hashed out" and, with a third rater, resolved.

This study was carefully documented during the data collection phases. The teacher participants were observed in their natural setting so the findings would more accurately reflect the normal setting context. To reduce the potential of observer effects, the researchers sat a short distance away from the participant. During interviews, the researcher remained as neutral as possible and asked semi structured and open questions to reduce the potential of unreliable findings and bias. The researcher analysed the data in the appropriate context and

checked with the six study participants to ensure that the recorded interview transcripts had been interpreted correctly from the participant's point of view.

3.6 Limitations

It is necessary to recognise the limitations of this study in terms of scale and context. This study aimed to explore and contribute to an understanding of the way in which implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a different cultural and social context, and the change process involved, impacts on a teacher's professional role. It was an exploratory study which involved four teacher participants, as well as two administrative participants.

A small sample was used to explore the implementation of this approach in a mainstream setting but at an in depth and detailed level. Perceptions of the implementation of the approach may not be applicable to other educators implementing similar changes in a different context. The data collected and analysed involved only two different contexts and therefore, limited the degree to which the findings are representative of educators in other Reggio Emilia inspired contexts. Further, the data collection was conducted over a relatively short time frame and may, therefore, have limitations on the range and depth of data collected.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Teacher Implementation of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three which detail the common themes emerging from the analyses of the data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, journal entries, field notes and document analysis. The three chapters focus respectively on the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the barriers and facilitating factors which influence that implementation and the impact of the implementation on the professional role of the teachers.

In the following three chapters, the participants' identities are protected by the use of pseudonyms. Further, numerical keys are used to refer to participants, data method and transcript page from which a quote is taken. For example, in 01.2.15, 01 refers to the participant's code number, 2 to the data method and 01 to the transcript page (an overview of the codes are available in Appendix E and a sample of a transcript is available in Appendix G).

The first chapter of findings introduces each of the two case studies and within each case, the individual participants. Each case study is based at a different school, but both are within a Pre-Primary (5-6 year olds in a Western Australian system) mainstream context. The main part of this chapter will present the findings that focus on the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach within a mainstream context. The findings draw on a thematic analysis of the data from interviews of the six participants (4 teachers and 2 school leaders), school and class documentation, field notes from the observations of the four Pre-Primary teachers within their setting and from their reflective journals.

The findings were categorised into themes using the framework of the seven philosophical principles of the Reggio Emilia educational project, current at the time of the data collection and analysis.

These principles were the image of the child, the collaboration and relationships between all participants, the environment as the third teacher, the expressive arts (One Hundred Languages), project work (Progettazione), the role of the teacher and documentation of the project work to make visible the learning process (Fraser, 2006; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002). A description of these principles was provided in Chapter 2.

4.2 The Case Studies

The study involved two case studies, each case within a different mainstream school setting. Case Study 1 was a Catholic Pre-Primary (children aged 4.5 to 6 years of age) mainstream setting with one teacher. Case Study 2 was an Independent Public School (IPS) Pre-Primary mainstream setting with three teachers. Each case study also included a school leader (line manager) for the early childhood settings who was interviewed individually. These settings were chosen as all of the four Pre-Primary teachers working within them had varying degrees of understanding of and experience with the Reggio Emilia philosophy and educational project. Further, the teachers within them were all in a relatively early stage of implementing the approach in those settings. Finally, the settings represented the private and government systems so had differing governance and policy structures.

4.2.1 Case Study 1 – School A

The School Context

School A, a private Catholic school, is situated in a north western suburb of Perth. The school was established in 1978 and catered for approximately 520 students in double stream (two classrooms of the same year level) co-educational Pre- Kindergarten to Year 6 classes. The school curriculum

considers the growth of the *total person* with an integrated curriculum and a focus on religious education. The school maintains a whole school focus on planning and collaborative decision making processes that involve the school community and reflects their Christian values (documentation 5.18.4).

At the time of the study and data collection, Kate, the teacher, was implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in isolation from other pre-primary teachers within the school as there was no current policy to support this approach to early childhood education in the school. There was another pre-primary teacher who worked alongside Kate in the same building; however, they did not share the same philosophical approach. Collaboration between these two pre-primary teachers was based on their students' assessment needs as required by the whole school reporting system and school priority plans for literacy and numeracy. Kate had two education assistants (EAs) who worked with her on different days in the setting. The EA who worked with Kate for four days had an understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and principles. The second EA who worked for the remaining day had limited knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The parents of the children in Kate's class were encouraged to participate within the educational setting to support the children's learning. All parents of children in the school, within each specific year level, were invited to an information meeting at the beginning of the year. Due to the pre-primary teachers' philosophical differences, it was decided that an alternative approach would be used so parents would not be confused by the different approaches being taken. In addition to this school initiated formal communication with parents, Kate decided to present overviews of the class project work completed each term for parents to see in order to promote their understanding of the Reggio inspired philosophical approach and how it supported their children's learning. This overview included drama, a video presentation (see documentation 1.4.1), movement or in one meeting, a power point presentation (documentation 1.4.2). Class newsletters

and a daily dairy (documentation 4.1.4) were an integral part of her communication to parents and through this, she offered a daily insight into how the pedagogy particular to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach was enacted. The parent roster for each term was set up for four mornings a week and through this formal arrangement all parents and caregivers were encouraged to participate in the Pre-Primary setting.

The school had a principal and three assistant principals. One of the assistant principals was Kate's line manager and also coordinated the teachers within the Pre-Kindergarten to Year 2 area. This line manager (Pat) was interviewed as part of this study. Pat, an early childhood trained educator, reported that she understood and supported the implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy within Kate's setting. However, document analysis of the school's business plan and operational strategies provided no evidence that the Reggio Emilia inspired approach being implemented in Kate's setting was recognised by the broader school community or provided with any official support.

4.2.2 Case Study 1 - The Participant - Kate

The teacher in Case Study 1, Kate, was a specialist trained early childhood teacher. She had been teaching for nine years and had spent her first four years working within the Catholic school system in a country setting. Kate, the sole teacher in Case Study One, became interested in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to teaching when introduced to it by a school leader in her first country-based teaching appointment. A later change from year three to pre-primary led her to explore the approach in greater depth and to attend her first professional development session focusing on Reggio pedagogy. This, in turn, led to her think that the approach was consistent with her beliefs. As she said, I was, *'What's this?' – I found it really interesting and it linked to my beliefs* (01.1.1). In January 2005, she gained school support to go on her first Reggio study tour in Italy which she claimed *was amazing!* (01.1.1). During this visit, Kate gained an increasingly deep knowledge of the approach through her professional learning

at the public lectures and visits to the Reggio Emilia pre-schools. However, even after the tour, Kate still felt *that [there] was something airy fairy that I wasn't getting – there was still a lot of questions that I had. But I felt that the whole time that this was right.* (01.1.2).

When Kate came back from her study tour in Italy, she recognised that there was much more she needed to learn, in particular about the environments needed for the success of the approach and how the reciprocal relationships worked effectively. She then pursued these interests further and went back to Reggio Emilia for a second time in October that year. On this visit she remained in Italy for three years and continued her professional learning and work connected with the Reggio Emilia educational project. Her time in Italy immersed her in the approach and gave her a *very clear [view] of her philosophy* (01.1.2).

In October 2007, Kate began a six month teaching internship with *Nido Scuola Choreia*. The internship was created as part of an educational project initiated by Reggio Children and in collaboration with *Nido Scuola Choreia*. It was designed specifically to create a cultural and linguistic exchange between the participating parties. As part of this experience, she worked in a language school with young children. She also taught English to tertiary level students in an Early Childhood Studies course. This course was designed to assist the students to gain the skills and confidence necessary to speak English with delegates visiting the educational project in Reggio Emilia.

Kate returned from Italy in June 2008 and began implementing a Reggio inspired approach in School A and at the time of this study had done so for two years in a Pre-Primary setting. She was also a member of the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE) network and subscribed to the national REAIE journal the *Challenge*.

4.2.3 Case Study 2 – School B

The School Context

Teachers Sally, Lia and Elle teach in School B, with Kindergarten to Year 7 classes, situated in a north eastern suburb of Perth. The school was established in 1998 and became an Independent Public School in 2010. At the time of the study, it had nearly 800 students. Each pre-primary teacher had her own setting and support from an educational assistant (EA). One teacher (Lia) had two part-time assistants who worked on different days across the week.

This Independent Public mainstream school was very different from School A in that the Reggio Emilia approach had been introduced for Kindergarten to Year One in 2005 as part of the school policy and was, therefore, strongly supported. This was evident in the data collection, including an analysis of documentation. For instance, the school's webpage (documentation 6.20.4) featured an overview of the Reggio Emilia approach and how it was applied within the school. This webpage made links to the Curriculum Framework (1998), mandated at the time in Western Australia, within the phase of early childhood education. The school was also well supported by and had formed close partnerships with nearby universities.

Evidence of the school's support for the Reggio Emilia inspired approach was found in the allocation of funds to support the implementation from the Global School Budget (2010) (documentation 6.20.1). The school's Business Plan (2010-2012) also detailed the provisions made to its K-1 area. This plan provided an overview of the distinctive curriculum offerings of the Reggio Emilia approach (Business Plan, 2010-2012, p.4) and the *Key School Operational Focus* area under the school management and operational strategy plan (Business Plan, 2010-2012, p.16) reflected its priorities.

Parent involvement and participation was encouraged through various strong community-based projects, parent rosters within the settings and the documentation, the evidence of learning central to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, made available to parents on a daily basis. This documentation was provided through the class journal, the documentation walls within the settings and the project work that ran alongside the pre-primary mainstream educational program. The School Purpose Statement was guided by principles that support participative community and parent involvement which provided further support for the implementation process. Many community and class-based projects centred on the local nature reserve which had a lake and was within walking distance of the school. Parental support for these types of projects was evident in their willingness to give permission for teachers to take their children to the reserve whenever the program required.

The teachers involved in this study, Sally, Lia and Elle, had the opportunity to become part of the national Reggio Emilia Network Group, The Reggio Emilia Australian Information Exchange (REAIE), as a school membership was offered. This membership included a subscription to the *Challenge*, the national journal for REAIE. Additionally, the school was part of the state Reggio Emilia network group that organises meetings for Perth based Reggio Emilia inspired teachers twice a term.

4.2.4 Case Study 2 – The 3 Participants (Lia, Sally and Elle)

Lia, Sally and Elle, the teachers in Case Study 2 were experienced and had had specialist early childhood training. They were all implementing a Reggio inspired approach because the early childhood teaching in their school was based on this philosophy. However, each had slightly different backgrounds in the Reggio approach.

Lia had completed a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Studies. She had eight years teaching experience within the early childhood and junior

primary government school sector. Lia started her journey to become Reggio inspired when she gained a teaching position at School B as *it was pretty much coming to work at the school and being told that this is how it works to be honest* (02.5.2). She was neither Reggio Emilia inspired nor had taught under the influence of a Reggio Emilia philosophy before commencing work at School B. However, Lia had become aware of the approach through her studies at university and remarked that she had *heard about it but it did not mean a lot to me. We had one lecture on it and I remember people saying it was 'airy-fairy'* (02.5.2). She had been working at School B for three years, with two years spent in the kindergarten and in the year of the study, one in the pre-primary.

Sally had completed a Bachelor of Education (Kindergarten through Primary) and had been teaching for five years. She spent the first two years in a country town teaching years K-3. She had been at School B for three years. Sally was not Reggio inspired, nor was she implementing a Reggio Emilia approach in her setting before applying for a position at School B. Sally received a transfer from her country posting to School B and because of the school philosophy being based on Reggio Emilia, did her own research and *found it quite interesting* (03.9.2). Sally realised that the philosophy *was already ingrained in me anyway* (03.9.2) once she had begun the relevant professional development. Her knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach was very limited before going to School B but she had since attended network meetings and professional development to extend her working knowledge of the approach.

Elle was also a permanent teacher who had completed a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Studies in 2000. She began teaching pre-primary at School B in 2001, with experience also at a year one level. Elle's contact with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach had begun four years before the time of the study. Her journey to become Reggio inspired began at university when she was made aware of the approach by her supervisor on her final practicum. So when she got her first job, she did *her own thing for a little while but kept on coming back to*

what I had done on prac (04.13.1). It was not until she gained her position at School B that she was able to pursue her interest and implement this approach in a pre-primary setting. Before this, she taught year 1 and felt there were *more restraints* to implementing the philosophy in the way she wanted to (04.13.1) in that setting. Since that time she had attended many professional development seminars to extend her knowledge of the approach. She had also presented lectures on the learning environment to pre-service teachers attending partnership universities.

Despite the different starting points to their interest in the Reggio inspired approach, all three teachers in Case Study 2 were personally motivated to increase their knowledge of and commitment to the philosophy. Elle's journey had begun earlier than her two pre-primary colleagues and she had attended professional development courses of her own accord. However, she noted that although her previous teaching environment had been supportive, School B had the additional support of an environment that was flexible enough to allow the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. As she expressed it, *there was not a lot of support or other teachers that were interested but when I moved here there was a more flexible environment... and other teachers to talk to* (04.13.1).

Unlike Elle, both Sally and Lia only became actively engaged in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach after they began teaching at School B but like Elle they were not solely motivated by it being a requirement of their employment. Sally admitted to *not knowing much about the Reggio Emilia philosophy* (03.10.1) and so doing a lot of her own research both before and after her appointment to School B. She commented that *it was not something I took on board myself to do. It was because the school was doing it, but it is nothing I am against doing if you know what I mean* (03.9.2). Lia had a similar interest in the approach but only after her appointment at the same school. However, she commented that the approach did match her own teaching philosophy. *I had not done the Reggio*

approach before and when I first came I was overwhelmed...I sat down and looked at the principles. I thought they pretty much matched my thinking anyway (02.5.1). This personal commitment, encouraged by the school's support for them and the approach, encouraged the three pre-primary teachers to attend professional development and willingly collaborate with others in the implementation process in order to increase their understanding of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach.

4.3 Teacher Implementation of the Reggio Emilia Principles

This first chapter of findings reports the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data related to the implementation of Reggio Emilia approach within two mainstream contexts. As described earlier, these themes have been categorised according to the seven principles of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. These are:

1. The image of the child
2. Collaboration and relationships
3. The environment as a third teacher
4. The expressive arts (the Hundred Languages)
5. Progettazione (flexible learning/project work)
6. Role of the teacher - teachers as learners
7. Documentation

(Fraser, 2006; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002)

It is important to note that while each principle is treated separately for the purposes of this analysis, they are interconnected and one cannot function without the influence of others in practice.

In this section, the way in which each principle is perceived and enacted in each of the case study contexts will be presented. This will be followed by a cross case analysis which will identify the similarities and differences in the implementation of that principle across the two cases.

4.3.1 The Image of the Child

The first cluster of themes which emerged from an analysis of the data concerning the implementation process related to the strong image of the child as a capable and powerful learner (Principle 1). This aspect of the philosophy identifies children as active protagonists with unlimited potential who are eager to interact with and contribute to the world.

Case Study 1

Kate acknowledged the strong image of the child in her setting through the recognition of each child as being a capable and curious learner. She viewed the children as being rich in potential with a desire to learn, discover, communicate and relate to other people. Consistent with this principle, Kate recognised the importance of listening and using the ideas that emerged from the children to direct the project work and documentation process for learning.

Kate affirmed that she had a very strong belief that children have much to share in the learning process and that she as the teacher *has much to learn from them* (01.1.1). Kate described her perception of children in her reflective journal.

I continue to amaze by the children's theories and endless curiosity...because we are truly researching their curiosity, the children are so excited to be on this learning journey. This is my biggest motivation (01.2.10).

Learning from the children underpins her philosophy and she acknowledges what the children bring to the learning. Kate then supports and facilitates this learning by being student centred and encouraging the children by providing them with creative ways to express their thoughts through the use of the *Hundred Languages*. She believes that by allowing for choice and negotiation, she encourages the children to become *...critical thinkers, individuals and creative beings* (01.1.7). Kate's commitment to the strong image of the child principle was evident in her interview. For instance, she commented:

I find it quite patronising if we determine everything for the children as you are blocking yourself off to these amazing things that the

children know and bring to your class. You are assuming they don't know (01.1.7).

Kate's line manager, Pat recognised this commitment to the image of the strong and capable child. She described this in her interview.

I loved the way that everything she [Kate] did emanated from the children's interests and their needs. The children actually lead her teaching.... It is inspiring to see (05.17.1).

Kate viewed children as *experts* in the setting, something she had seen encouraged in Reggio schools in Italy. She commented *that teachers (in Australia) seem to be a bit scared of having children who are experts in things or the kids who are seen as the smart ones in maths but that is not the case in Italy* (01.1.3). She further explained this concept by discussing how the strengths of the children are promoted and utilised without hindering the learning of others. Kate further described this view of the expert in her interview.

It promotes self-esteem and I have seen this happen in my class where the children are happy to have the expert working on something and that they will come back later and share things (01.1.3).

Kate recognised the importance of listening to children and having the time to acknowledge their theories, ideas and understandings of the world. She commented that *this time needs to be valued and that the children need time to reflect on ideas, discuss and have time to change ideas* (01.1.7). The importance of *time* in relation to *time to listen to children, time to share and discuss ideas* and *time to have in depth conversations with children* was a common thread throughout Kate's interviews and journal entries. Even with reporting time pressures, Kate remained committed to sharing this scarce resource with children, stating that *time is important for the children to speak and share ideas... that they have the freedom of choice if they do have an idea about something* (01.1.2). She noted the sharing of power with them, saying that children *need lots of time to talk. I ask questions as a guide but I like to give ownership to the children* (01.1.3).

For Kate, the concept of confrontation or a conflict of ideas and debate with differing points of view are valued. She suggested that her study tour visit and her time spent teaching in Reggio Emilia had led her to believe that discussion of differing ideas and theories should be very strongly encouraged. She sees them as providing the *ah-ha* moments of learning. Kate noted that this type of conflict particularly occurs when children are discussing new theories and ideas at the beginning of a project.

They want to talk about it (the idea) or there's conflict – that's a really big 'ah-ha!' moment as it may be something they are really curious about and they want to find out more or they just don't know – you can see the frustration of the 'I don't get that' and then it's like 'let's explore that more' (01.1.6).

Kate suggested it is necessary to acknowledge the ideas from the children (01.1.6) and that she would *never impose what I think they should learn; it emerges from the children* (01.1.6). She recognised that the value a teacher places on their theories and ideas are *their (the children's) right* (01.1.1) and that *we can all learn from these ideas and expressions of wonder*.

Case Study 2

In Case Study 2, the three pre-primary teachers all acknowledged that the Reggio inspired approach demands a socio-constructivist view of learning with the child at the centre of the process. Consistent with this, they recognised the need to listen to children and to provide them with time. Further, they claimed that a teacher needs to value child theories and to use these to pursue learning and as the basis of project ideas for research and collaboration.

The strong image of the child was portrayed in many ways within the three different settings in this case. The teachers and the children shared democratic decision making (04.15.4) and collaborated using the children's ideas. The teachers allow the children to explain their ideas to the class and within small groups. These ideas and theories were documented in many different forms and with many different materials provided including through drawing, writing,

dialogue, movement, painting, construction and the like. For instance, Sally saw that an important role for her as a teacher was to allow time for children to talk and share ideas and that in order for this to happen she needed to take a step back. Sally tried to plan her day with *just an idea of what she wants to talk about with the children and go from there...it is kind of within me to have to let go a little bit (to do this)* (03.9.4).

All three teachers in this context acknowledged that children are capable by allowing them the opportunity to express themselves and explore ideas together. Lia and Sally commented that the recognition of the children's thoughts and ideas involves their use in project work and that this, as Sally stated, requires a *great deal of trust in the children* (03.10.5). Sally also noted that *children are independent workers and are often wiser beyond their years and they are more capable than what we give credit for* (03.9.1).

While Sally acknowledged the importance of allowing time for learning conversations and project work, Elle and Lia both expressed concern about time *being hard to find in order to continue with what we are interested in* (02.6.3). They felt this was due to the many school planned experiences they feel impinged on the flow and creativity of the discussions and creative work within the ongoing project topic. A high level of frustration was noted during a second observation visit to Elle's Pre-Primary setting when the children's conversation and flow of ideas related to their project work was interrupted by the siren to dismiss the children for recess. It was in this and similar ways that 'the flow' of thinking and theorising was lost to accommodate whole school routines and procedures (04.15.12).

Cross- Case Analysis of the Image of the Child Principle

There were common elements across both cases within the cluster of themes concerned with the principle of the *image of the child*. These included the identification of the child as a capable and competent learner, the need for

pedagogy to be child-centred and evolving from a democratic decision making process, and the value of providing time to listen to and share with children.

All four teachers involved in this study demonstrated recognition of the child as competent. This is not to devalue the role of the teacher as opposed to the strong, competent child (Malaguzzi, 1994) as the teachers facilitated and guided the children with thoughtful questions and challenges to help them develop their ideas and theories. In recognition of the strong image of the child, the children were given ownership during the active process of learning and this contributed greatly to the establishment of ongoing collaboration and reciprocal learning between all participants. These findings reflect this principle of collaboration and relationships as described by Hendrick (2004) and Rinaldi (1993).

Pedagogy that encouraged the expression of conflicting viewpoints was evident in this study in the observations and teacher interviews. This type of confrontation around ideas is identified as an important part of the educational process in Reggio inspired pedagogy and reflects a strong image of the child in that it encourages children to think deeply about their understandings of the world (Hendrick, 2004; Malaguzzi, 1994). As was discussed in the literature review, Australian mainstream schools avoid this type of confrontation as they believe that it may inhibit learning (Hendrick, 2004).

The child-centred approach taken by the four teachers was consistent with a social constructivist philosophy as described by Rinaldi (1993). Within each setting, the child was recognised as having potential for learning, including through interaction with other children. A democratic approach saw each child respected and valued for his or her own identity as was consistent with the strong image of the child principle. The teachers in this study considered each child in relation to his or her family, other children, the environment and the school as has been found to be consistent with a Reggio inspired approach in other research (Fu, Stemmel & Hill, 2002; Hendrick, 2004).

The theories and ideas offered by students were listened to and valued and this provided a sense of openness which encouraged socially constructed learning in each context. All four teachers in this study acknowledged the importance of active listening during discussion and encouraged this through a variety of different cooperative learning strategies. This approach is consistent with a pedagogy of listening which supports the child as an active participant within a collaborative setting that is focused on learning (PICMRE, 2010).

4.3.2 Relationships and Collaboration

The second cluster of themes that emerged from the data analysis concerned relationships and collaboration (Principle 2). In this study, the four teacher participants all focused on building relationships and fostering collaboration although in a range of different ways. This was consistent with a Reggio Emilia approach which is described as a 'pedagogy of relationships' as children learn through making connections between things, concepts and experiences. This emphasis acknowledges that children learn by interacting with other people and the environment in which they live and learn.

Case Study 1

Kate focused on building positive relationships from the outset when implementing a Reggio Emilia approach. She often referred to this aspect of her work, including in her interview when she said:

Relationships are to be built with them (the children) and that they are reciprocal – that we can negotiate the spaces, the learning – that is the core of it (01.1.2).

In addition, Kate commented on the learning gained from her second visit to Reggio Emilia. In this context, she questioned her understanding of the environment and so shifted from thinking about what it might look like to considering the relationships the children could build within it. She began to consider how the relationships work together saying, ... *the kids in the environment, the parents and the teachers in the environment and then the*

teachers with the children. It was all connected and it really impacts on the type of learning that they do. It was an ah ha moment (01.1.2). To encourage these relationships, Kate also discussed how she liked to give the children a lot of time to talk and that she asked questions to guide them.

Kate had a strong collegiate relationship with her education assistant who, in turn, played an integral role in building relationships with the children. Kate saw her EA as a *teaching partner* and valued her role as an equal acknowledging its importance in the setting. The EA was aware of the significance of her role and understood the philosophy underpinning Kate's setting practice. She, therefore, collaborated effectively with Kate to build sound relationships and foster collaboration. A high level of collaboration and the effective communication that underpins it was evident in setting observations (field notes; 01.3.6). Additionally, Kate commented about her EA's effectiveness in her reflective journal, writing that *... it makes my job so much easier as she (the EA) automatically takes meaningful photos, scribes conversations and is more than happy to collect materials/change plans on the spur of the moment (01.2.3).*

Relationships and collaboration with the children's parents was valued by Kate. She suggested that the parents of the children in her class supported the philosophical approach informed by the Reggio Emilia project and valued the learning that occurred. In her journal, Kate described the initial reaction from the parents to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach.

The parents have seen me around and have obviously heard I run my class a bit differently. I have noticed many positive reactions to the setting environment and many questions during parent-teacher interviews (01.2.2/3).

Also noted in Kate's journal and interview was that once parents' understanding of the approach grows, the relationships built and the collaboration within the project work and research improve. The parents told Kate that by reading the daily diary regularly, they were helped to understand the *why* in the children's

project work and research. She commented that many then become involved in the children's research and also began to change the nature of their relationship with the children in the setting and at home. In particular, the parents saw the value of not telling their children all the answers to their questions *but rather that they encourage the children to wonder, to seek for themselves and express their theories. This is all very rewarding and encouraging to see!* (01.2.19).

Kate's school leader, Pat also acknowledged the importance of relationships within this pre-Primary setting in her interview.

I think the very close working relationships with each child and a very deep understanding of where every child was at is what Kate did very successfully. It was very deep and she could tell you all manner of things about a child that I don't think most teachers would be able to...she provided such clarity about where each child was at (05.17.3).

Case Study 2

In the Case Study 2 settings, collaboration and reciprocal relationships between all stakeholders were encouraged. The pre-primary settings were child orientated and collaboration was vital to the way the children worked with each other, as well as the parents, the teachers and the wider community. The role of the education assistants (EAs) was important in this process and the teachers commented that their support and understanding of the approach was vital for positive collaboration to exist. These three teachers noted that time to collaborate as professionals was important and a common DOTT (Duties other than Teaching) time allocation allowed for this to happen more easily. The administration team was supportive of this principle and encouraged the parents and the community to become an integral part of their child's learning.

The project work was supported through collaboration which allowed for the genuine sharing of ideas between the children and the teachers. Elle commented in her interview.

There is always a lot of discussion and brainstorming and trying all the cooperative strategies so that we are valuing what we think is important, but also what someone else thinks is important (04.13.3).

Sally commented that children should be able to work in groups, collaborate successfully, take on a role and have ownership within that group. She also reinforced this comment by discussing how the teacher needs to provide opportunities for children to collaborate. She commented that these opportunities can be made available by implementing cooperative learning *strategies but if you don't have a cohesive class, then this can be harder to implement as they fight each other the whole way* (03.9.11).

Elle saw the solution to such conflict as more collaborative work, saying that this *assists in creating a more harmonious setting environment, the development of new friendships and work teams and accepting and critiquing peers' ideas* (04.14.2). The development of class meetings where children revise and revisit ideas was a crucial aspect of the collaboration process in Elle's setting.

Sally was the only participant who used the term *democratic* within her discussion of relationships with children. She encouraged the children *to actually listen to their friends and realise that everyone has a different viewpoint...it is about working together* (04.9.11).

Cross Case Analysis of the Relationships and Collaboration Principle

The social nature of learning, as consistent with this principle, was reflected in the settings of all four participants in this study. Collaboration, reciprocal relationships and ownership were also themes which emerged, as did the role of the children, the teacher, the Education Assistant and parents in the collaboration process.

A participative and collaborative process was a prominent feature of each case study as was consistent with the Reggio Emilia theory of social construction (Millikan, 2003). The involvement of families and children alongside educators in the learning process strengthened and facilitated a strong collaborative approach to learning in each of the settings. The importance of this type of collaboration in a Reggio inspired approach was emphasised by Rinaldi (1993) and Thornton and Brunton (2005).

The teachers recognised that strong relationships were essential for successful collaboration. The collaborative processes were enhanced by listening and questioning which reflected an openness and willingness to value others and their points of view (field notes 1.3; 4.15). Therefore, the relationships in each setting were respectful and further encouraged through the pedagogy of listening, reflecting the Reggio philosophy (PICMRE, 2010).

The teachers' saw their role as supportive and facilitative to learning as was consistent with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach (Thornton & Brunton, 2005). They acknowledged that this approach was based on adults listening as described by Millikan (2003) and the promotion of the originality, creativity and ideas of the children. Authentic experiences were provided in environments that provoked democratic decision making which was dependent on negotiation and listening. In each setting, the participants also recognised the need to revisit ideas in a way designed to move the children on within their project work or build onto previous or current ideas as a crucial aspect of the collaboration process.

The strong relationships and high level of collaboration that the teachers had with their Education Assistants (EAs) featured prominently in each case. In each setting, the EAs were chosen by the school's leadership team because of their knowledge and level of experience of the Reggio Emilia approach. In both cases, the mutual respect between EAs and teachers was evident, particularly in Kate's setting where she referred to her EA as her teaching partner (01.2.2).

All participants in the study valued the role of parents in education and sought to involve them in their children's learning. In order to do this, they developed a shared understanding of the approach to education taken in their setting with the parents believing this enhanced their role in the learning process. This is consistent with Thornton & Brunton's (2005) finding that when parents shared an understanding of the learning approach with the teacher, their contribution was greater. In Case Study 1, the parents' level of involvement was evident in Kate's interview and comments made by her line manager, Pat. Kate had made a considerable effort to explain the Reggio approach to learning to the parents who came to understand and value it. Similarly, the parents of the children in Case Study 2 were seen as collaborating with the teachers in the learning processes and so contributing to their child's education. In this school, some parents were initially unsupportive but this changed as the whole school worked to develop a common understanding of the approach (field notes 3.11, 3.12).

The nature of whole school relationships and collaboration differed across the cases. In Case Study 1, Kate was the only teacher in the school implementing a Reggio inspired approach so felt unable to collaborate as fully as she wanted to because of philosophical differences between her and the other teachers. While she was supported by her line manager, she felt isolated from most of the remaining staff. In Case Study 2, on the other hand, the organisational structure of the school allowed more open negotiation and collaborative relationships between teachers to develop. As part of a whole school approach, the early childhood leadership team provided school time for these teachers to plan their learning programs collaboratively. The teachers reported that they valued the professional dialogue and learning that resulted. The flexible approach to planning taken was seen to enhance the learning of the children (documentation 6.20.2/3).

4.3.3 Environment as the Third Teacher

In a Reggio Emilia approach, the teacher, parents and the environment are considered the three subjects, or elements, of education (Hendrick, 2004). The environment is often referred to as the “third teacher” because it contributes to how children connect and learn by interacting with other people and the environment in which they live and learn (Wurm, 2005). In this study, the four participants emphasised the use of light and transparency, the importance of beauty and aesthetics, the place of materials, the role of documentation, and the connection between the learning spaces and their organisation.

Case Study 1

Kate’s pre-primary setting reflected the importance of the environment. Aesthetically, Kate’s setting was inviting in a warm and natural way with soft transparent fabric draped across the room to divide spaces within the area. The setting was full of natural light with soft tones and colours as well as plants placed in positions to create a natural and home-like setting (field notes; 01.3.8). Documentation boards were a prominent feature throughout the setting, making the learning processes inherent in the range of project work carried out over the term visible. The products of these projects were aesthetically and thoughtfully displayed for the children, parents and community to view, discuss and ask questions about. These included clay work, wire sculptures and a Fashion House design centre and runway, including the weaving, patterning and stitching work of the children which used a variety of fabrics and materials (field notes; 01.3.9).

Materials and resources were made accessible to the children and independent use and care of these was evident (field notes; 01.3.9). Materials that were used by the children on a daily basis were displayed and stored in natural baskets, wooden bowls and containers. This emphasised the connection to the outside environment and reflected an aesthetically pleasing environment related to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Displayed items and materials were also arranged and organised with a purpose and in ways that Kate believed enhanced

and supported the children's learning and independence. Kate asserted that this organisation and positioning of material had a specific purpose that *requires a lot of thinking* (01.1.4). She noted that the room and the furniture should not be changed frequently to allow the children the opportunity and time to revisit chosen spaces and activities. These spaces, however, were open to minor changes in negotiation with the children.

Despite this, Kate commented in her reflective journal that she felt limited by a lack of resources such as a light table, open shelving, a big round mat and more plants and cushions to enhance the spaces in her environment (01.2.1). She discussed in her interview how an appropriate environment was one of the first elements of the Reggio Emilia approach that she implemented. This was a direct result of her time spent in Reggio Emilia environments where she became inspired by their beauty and connectedness and how this encouraged positive relationships. Kate made changes to her environment that were a direct result of *having to think carefully about spaces for learning* (01.1.4) and she reported examining the effect of these changes on the children, families and staff. She believed these changes had a positive impact on the learning of the children by promoting spaces that allowed them to communicate freely and openly with each other. The families of the children and some staff members also commented on the value of an aesthetically pleasing environment that provoked the creativity and research work of the children.

Kate identified that her understanding of the importance of the environment for learning was a significant outcome of her professional learning experiences in Reggio Emilia. She acknowledged that the environments in Italian Reggio Emilia centres have aesthetic beauty *but it is much more than that and that every single thing is arranged with a purpose and is there for a reason* (01.1.4). Kate realised that the environment supported the connection of spaces, relationships, communication and learning. The spaces in her setting were organised in a

strategic manner that provoked and engaged children in the learning with materials and resources that were orderly, accessible and visible to the children.

Light, as a natural element, was also an important feature of the environment in Kate's context. She commented that the windows were never covered with paint or posters so as to allow the natural light to filter through. Light, transparent materials were used to provide spaces and natural barriers in the belief that this encouraged positive relationships between the children and the spaces. As Kate stated in her interview, she believed that the environment *reflects the type of learning that you want to take place* (01.1.4).

The space also reflected the environments that Kate had seen in Italy as enhancing the learning process. Kate viewed the art spaces (ateliers) she saw as inspiring to children's creativity and expression. Additionally, a construction space was seen as important as it supported the use of the Hundred Languages and physical development of the children. Spaces to write messages were prominent in her environment to support not only literacy but relationships and connections between the children and their families. Spaces to role-play or to reflect real life situations (such as in the Fashion House project) were established and other spaces grew or were arranged according to the children's needs and interests at the time (field notes 1.2.4).

Kate spoke about the importance of the outdoor environment to her approach to learning. In her reflective journal, Kate remarked how *tearing down some lattice that covered the windows opens up the space of the room and now means that we can have a more effective and flowing indoor/outdoor program* (01.2.1). She noted that she had made some small changes to the sand play area and had shifted materials to take the learning outdoors. Kate noted that exploiting the potential of an outdoor environment will continue to be an ongoing project for her, particularly when there is clement weather.

Case Study 2

The three settings in Case Study 2 were aesthetically beautiful environments. Sally and Elle were situated in a purpose built building with adjoining toilets, a storeroom and a kitchen. Lia was situated in a demountable (transportable classroom) that was away from the main building with its own toilets and small kitchen and only shelving and cupboards in which to store items, rather than the usual storeroom. All three settings contained elements consistent with environmental aspects of this Reggio Emilia principle. There was natural light and the use of transparent materials to connect the spaces and each setting had its own individual element of beauty, reflecting the approaches of the individual teachers who had designed it. It was interesting to note that only Elle referred to the term 'the third teacher' as it is used in the Reggio Emilia approach to sometimes describe the environment. In her journal she noted that during project work, the ownership of the environment was with *children and that they use it as a third teacher and as a tool for learning* (04.14.3). No other participant referred to this term either in their journal, interview or documentation.

Similar to Kate, all three teachers discussed in their interview how an appropriate environment was the first element of the Reggio Emilia approach to be implemented. Elle claimed she was influenced by her own beliefs as well as the philosophical view that the environment is a provocation to learning that includes the children and parents (04.14.3). For Elle, aesthetic beauty was important but final decisions were based on the children's interests as she *asks the kids what they would like to do in the environment and then we work together to change things* (04.13.3). Also important to her was keeping the environment and spaces *light, open with beautiful things for them to look at, but introducing them with an element of respect and things that we value* (04.13.3). Elle also explained it was important to provoke ideas and thinking for exploration. While she facilitated this, she explained *that the initial explorations are more instigated by me, but then the children gain more control over their environment and the spaces within it as they continue to learn and explore* (04.13.3).

For Sally, the environment was a productive starting point *as you can see it* and she supported this with her views as a visual learner. She commented that the support of her immediate colleagues who were also implementing a Reggio approach *made it easier to think about and work out how to manipulate the environment* (03.9.5.) as they could collaborate and share ideas on its structure.

Even though Lia believed the environment was important, she appeared to be the only teacher who struggled with its design. She commented that *it is one of the things I found hard in creating these spaces. It was a bit of a mental barrier in that I am not the most creative of people and I have to see other people's ideas* (02.5.3). While Sally benefited from the guidance of other teachers in developing her environment, Lia compared herself unfavourably to her colleagues and this seemed to increase her self-doubt as she judged that her room *could never be as good. I feel like I could be doing things a lot better and that is one thing I find hard but I am always looking for new ideas* (02.5.3). However, Lia commented that she was continuing to enhance her understanding of this principle as she consistently experimented with materials and the organisation of space within her setting.

To create a sense of beauty, items were displayed with a purpose and positioned to reflect natural light and a nature-based environment. Materials were stored in baskets or transparent containers that were easily visible and accessible to the learner. Plants were placed at certain points of interest in the rooms and there were mirrors, coloured jars and bottles and items of interest to enhance the aesthetics of the environment (field notes; 04.15.7). These environments also had open shelving at various heights to provide the clear view required to connect various spaces.

Each space was carefully organised to connect to the others. The construction and socio-dramatic play spaces had been created based on the children's

interests and the emerging themes from the project work. The settings also displayed elements of the *Hundred Languages* and documentation boards displayed the process of the project work and documented learning by the children. In contrast to Case Study 1, light tables, open shelving, soft furnishings and a more varied array of aesthetically pleasing materials to enhance the environment and learning projects were evident. All three teachers noted the importance they placed on appropriate materials and their availability to children. They believed that this not only supported children's learning, but also promoted a sense of independence and ownership of the environment within their students.

Sally described how she thought carefully as to how materials were arranged, organised and positioned. For example, the position of the paints, brushes, paper, and consumables were thought about carefully to promote the use of these materials and how the children could use these in many different ways. Lia mentioned that keeping things simple and maintaining a balance between what the children require and do not need is essential to avoid *cluttering* the environment and maintain the environment in an organised manner (02.5.4).

Lia was the only teacher in her setting to discuss the outdoor learning environment as a place for learning. Lia's efforts to provide a positive outdoor learning environment was frustrated by an ongoing building project at her school. In her reflective journal, she remarked on the lack of space and time to use the outdoor area. This had impinged on the outdoor learning available to children, particularly the fitness program. Lia expressed a belief that the outdoor environment was important and that she intended to make use of this area for learning once the building project had been completed. The new outdoor space was to be architecturally designed in collaboration with the teachers and children of the school.

Cross Case Analysis of the Environment as the Third Teacher Principle

All four teachers acknowledged the environment as having an important role in enhancing and supporting the learning of the children. They emphasised the environment as the starting point for implementation of the approach, the collaborative nature of their settings, the place of materials, the importance of beauty and aesthetics and the use of the outdoor environment.

Common to both case studies was the teachers' establishment of a Reggio Emilia inspired environment as the beginning point for implementing this approach within a mainstream setting. Changes to the early childhood setting appeared to them to be the 'easiest' of the principles to implement. It was seen as the beginning point to developing an initial understanding and appreciation of the approach (011.1, 03.3.9, 04.4.13). Kate was impressed by her time spent within the Reggio Emilia school environments and was motivated to re-create aspects of these settings within her own cultural context in similar ways. For Elle, Lia and Sally, this initial change was a direct result of hearing about and researching the Reggio Emilia environments as part of their own professional learning. This was seen as a necessary starting point to implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream setting.

The four teachers in the study agreed that the physical environment and the spaces they create should respond to the strong image of the child and foster the development of relationships within them. The collaborative nature of each setting allowed for rich and meaningful discussion between teachers and children and children with each other. Children were given time to discuss ideas and thoughts and to plan and work together on a group or class project within these spaces. Different individual children or groups could work on different aspects of a project and were seen as capable of making informed and democratic decisions which would be shared with the class (01.1.3; 04.4.13). Teachers and other adults only facilitated and offered guidance when it was needed, as is consistent with the image of the child. These aspects of the environment support

relationships and collaborative learning in a way that is consistent with a Reggio Emilia inspired environment as described by Barozzi (2011) and Rinaldi (2006).

In both cases, the emotional, intellectual and cultural experiences within each setting were influenced by the physical space as Millikan noted in her investigation of Reggio Emilia settings (2003). Further, respect for children and a strong belief in their capabilities were evident in the learning experiences and opportunities provided for the children in the environments in both cases. The learning was made visible in each environment through documentation boards and other documentation which profiled each student.

There were many resources and materials such as wire, glass, pliers, textiles and clay not commonly used or seen within mainstream settings (01.1.3: 03.3.11; 04.4.15) as is consistent with what Millikan (2003) found. The children in both cases were provided with a high level of trust, support and guidance to develop the necessary skills for using these materials appropriately. The students and teachers saw safety as an important issue and protocols were established and followed to ensure no one was harmed. These types of safe, well designed, organised and interactive environments that support learning are central to a Reggio Emilia approach to learning (PICMRE, 2010).

The teachers in this study paid attention to the aesthetic aspects of their environments as was expected in Reggio Emilia schools (Bullard, 2010). They paid attention to detail and organised their environments in a highly personal way (field notes 01.1.3, 04.4.15). Attention to aesthetics encouraged children's learning, particularly as it related to use of the senses. When designing their environments to provoke learning opportunities, the teachers considered the organisational and functional aspects in addition to the aesthetics. The use of transparency and light were important elements in this design process as acknowledged within the Reggio Emilia pre-schools in Italy (Bullard, 2010; Fraser & Gesticki, 2002). The rooms were open with natural light reflected through the

windows and materials, glass objects and coloured transparent material beautified the environment and invited curiosity and exploration. The use of natural materials such as wooden baskets were used to create a natural feel, as happens in many Reggio Emilia settings (Bullard, 2010).

However, there were differences in the level of financial support provided to support the development of the setting environment in each of the case schools. In Case Study 1, Kate identified that she felt financially unsupported by the school and thus felt limited by a lack of resources to enhance the spaces she and her students created in her environment (01.2.1). In contrast, the Case Study 2 teachers were financially supported through the school budget and so were able to purchase resources to enhance their environments' aesthetic qualities (documentation 20.1).

The use of the outdoor environment as a place for learning was raised by two of the four participants in each Case Study. Seen as an additional learning space (Millikan, 2003) and valuable to promote learning, Kate in Case Study 1 and Lia in Case Study 2, expressed frustration in the use of and the various ways in which the outdoor spaces were valued. For Kate it was the lack of time available to spend in the outdoor spaces due to timetable constraints and for Lia, access and use of the outdoor space to provide additional learning opportunities. Both participants considered the way in which their outdoor environment valued and provoked the children's play and questioned how this could be implemented more effectively.

4.3.4 The Expressive Arts – The Hundred Languages

The expressive arts principle requires that children are encouraged to represent and express their theories of learning using many different types of media such as dance, drama, sculpture or writing and the like. This principle is often referred to as the Hundred Languages of expression (Malaguzzi, 1994).

Case Study 1

An important element of Kate's philosophy is that children learn through active learning – *that they learn by doing and being creative through the arts and expressive languages* (01.1.1). Kate's creative approach to learning through the expressive arts was evident in the setting observations and reflected in her planning and assessment documents. Kate reported *loving to experiment with different art forms or whenever there is an idea or there is something they (the children) want to research more about, or explore more about, I would try to think of different art forms we could use to explore the idea further* (01.1.5).

Kate noted that it was important to her to find the appropriate art form to promote the children's further exploration to support their learning. Evidence of the different art forms used in the setting at the time were wire sculptures, clay work, textiles, collage and the use of different construction materials, as well as a dynamic building space. Movement and music were essential elements of Kate's expressive arts (video documentation 1.4.1) and drawing with different mediums such as crayon, oil pastels, different paints and different inks were features at the time of the data collection (field notes; 01.3.11).

In her interview, Kate's line manager, Pat, described how successful the implementation of the expressive arts was in this context.

Her setting is sensational... and her art work is sensational. It is the children's art and not the E.A's cutting out and assembling it. She had kids with wire and fabric and many different forms of art. Very strong in the expressive arts and the kids were able to express verbally what they were doing and learning (05.17.5).

This focus is also evident in Kate's reflective journal (01.2.20/21/22).

Episode 1: The Expressive Arts

This week at school we have our Art Display where our art works from every class have been framed and displayed for selling. Exploring theories through different art forms is a major part of the Hundred Languages and it is something that is always at the forefront of my thinking about how children learn. Our contribution to the show was a small part of our ongoing research about textiles

and fashion. It really shows 'where the children's thinking is at right now.' When you ask the children about their works, they can tell you so much – how it came to be that way and the reasons for their choices. It has been fantastic to get so much positive feedback and comments from staff and parents about our art. It's also given me an opportunity to explain the story of our project so far.

The central role of the children in this approach is seen in their capacity to communicate their thoughts, theories and ideas of learning to a range of adults. This too, links to the principle that notes children are capable and need the opportunity to express their learning in individual ways. The importance of having a participative process is emphasised as well.

Kate noted that it was important to provide opportunities for the children to express and represent their ideas and feelings in many different ways. She explained that even if the children have the same idea about something, they could still represent their interpretation of that idea or concept in different ways. This links explicitly to the metaphoric 100 Languages is that they intertwine and support all others in a child's development. For example, in her interview Kate discussed how some groups of children were researching electric eels. One group chose to represent their understandings of eels through clay work and another through wire sculpture and the attachment of metal objects to represent the electrification (01.1.6).

Kate stated that her role was to support and facilitate the implementation of the arts. She observed that children required a lot of time to think through the process of expressing themselves through the use of many different mediums. Therefore, the opportunity to use different mediums many times for a range of purposes is vital for the children so that they can represent their thinking and later revisit the ideas captured in their representations. For Kate, the role of the teacher was to listen to, guide and scaffold the children and to rely on their expertise in manipulating the different tools and mediums available to express their ideas.

Case Study 2

The Hundred Languages or use of expressive arts was also prominent in Case Study 2. The three teachers were seen to use various elements of the Hundred Languages in documenting the processes and final products of the project work done by their students. They described how they focus on *skilling* the children in first term to provide them with the necessary skills to implement this creative process. This effectiveness of this *skilling* was evident in the children's use of clay, wire sculptures, paint, construct, drawing, writing and other forms of creative expression. The children engaged in a range of research projects that focused on artists or art forms. These projects will be discussed in a later section of the thesis.

All three teachers saw the teacher's role in implementing the expressive arts as important. Sally expressed this view in her interview.

It is probably one of the biggest aspects of the approach that I do. It goes back to research and trying to find different mediums to help the children express themselves and demonstrate their learning (03.9.4).

She spoke of her role in *skilling* the children to use the implements and materials correctly such as the paint, brushes, clay techniques and equipment used in the play dough or sculpture work. She commented that the *Hundred Languages* provided a creative and expressive way for children to enjoy learning and to express themselves. Sally explained that her role is learning alongside the children during the implementation of this principle and that *we all like using the different mediums, experimenting with them and exploring what they do and what they look like* (03.9.4).

Lia, too, suggested that skilling the children to use different forms and mediums of expression was vital so they could express their ideas and thoughts. She admitted that the expressive arts *is not one of my strengths but (I) do not show that to the children*. (02:5:4). The arts were integrated across all learning areas and used by the children to represent their learning. Lia commented that the

Hundred Languages supported different learning styles and provided *some opportunity for children to shine in a different way through the arts* (02.5.4).

The common sub-theme of *skilling* was expressed in Elle's interview, although she incorporated an *element of surprise* which differed from the other two settings examined in this case. She introduced new mediums or tools one at a time and the skills needed were built upon through manipulation and practice with them. Elle discussed the adults' role in questioning and guiding the children in the use of the mediums. Elle explained her approach in her interview in the following way.

We give them lots of opportunity to practice and have a go. They are taught to use the materials in the right way and they like to spend a lot of time on a piece of art work they have done. We spend a lot of time to explore and draw and use different mediums that they want to use. We also sit with the kids and we ask them what they can see and imagine... just to give them a different way of looking at things other than drawing (04.13.5).

Cross Case Analysis

There were common elements within the cluster of themes concerned with the principle of *The Hundred Languages*. These included the role of the teacher and the use of different mediums for children to express their thinking and theories, with consideration given to the importance of skilling the children in using different art forms and materials.

An aspect relevant to all four teachers was the teacher's role in implementing the expressive arts. Each participant recognised the importance of giving value to the verbal and non-verbal means of expressing and communicating the children's knowledge and thinking to support the metaphoric 100 Languages of children as expressed in the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Vecchi, 2001). The educators in each case listened in respectful ways that recognised the capacity of the child to conceptualise their ideas and communicate them effectively (field notes 01.1.3; 04.4.15). Each educator was provoked to provide meaningful and creative ways

for the children to express their ideas. The teachers' knowledge of the expressive arts and their power to represent ideas was evident in both cases. Notably, while some teachers seemed more confident and able in applying this principle, they all provided opportunities that allowed each child to learn in different ways and so accommodated their differing learning styles (Fraser, 2006).

The role of the teacher in skilling the children to use different mediums and tools to express their thinking was also common to both cases. The teachers showed they were conscious of each child's ability to use and understand the materials and tools provided for them to explore different ways of expressing their knowledge. The introduction of the materials and tools and the independent use of them was evidence of a view of the child as capable.

A further commonality was the intricate and detailed drawings produced by the children in each of the settings (documentation 01.1.4; 04.4.16). They used fine line black pens as opposed to the crayons or pencils usually seen in pre-primary settings (01.1.4; 02.2.8; 03.3.11; 04.4.15). When doing these drawings, the children maintained a high level of engagement over extended periods of time (01.4.5). This suggests that children have capacities not recognised in some Australian early childhood settings as Millikan (2003) described in her research of Australian Reggio inspired environments.

Kate's perception of how the *Hundred Languages* supports the use of research within the project work of the setting (01.1.15) featured more prominently in Case Study 1 than it did in the work of the teachers in Case Study 2. Kate discussed how researching theories through different art forms is a major part of the *Hundred Languages*. She was also explicit about how this extends the children's thinking and allows them to re-visit ideas in future learning. Her view of the role of educational research is consistent with that which sees it as an essential dimension of the Reggio Emilia principles. Further, Kate used conflicting ideas to

provoke children's thinking (01.1.5) which is consistent with the view of research as arising out of a "knowledge-building tension that must be recognised and valued" by children and adults (PICMRE, 2010, p.11).

Kate was also more explicit about how the expectations of and feedback from parents influences the role of the expressive arts in her setting. She highly valued the feedback from parents that they valued the arts and how they were used to evoke the children's theories, ideas and understandings in her setting (01.2.20/21/22).

Despite the importance of the arts, neither the use of an atelier (art studio) nor the role of the atelierista (artist) featured in the reflective journals or interviews of any participant. Further, there was no reference to the use of visiting artists to perform this role as is common in Australian based Reggio inspired settings. This is surprising given that the atelier (art studio) and the atelierista (artist) are prominent features of the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia (Fraser, 2004; Vecchi, 2001; Wurm, 2005).

4.3.5 Progettazione

The Reggio Emilia educational project identifies the term *progettazione* to mean "their way of proceeding" (Millikan, 2003, p.87). In most settings, the curriculum emerges through project work.

Case Study 1

Kate appeared to be confident and satisfied with the implementation of the project work in her setting. Kate explained that projects emerged from the children's thoughts, questions and ideas observed in their play or from discussions during sharing time. In this setting, many project ideas evolved from discussion *when the children get excited or really curious about something, or there is a conflict of ideas and they want to find out more and explore the concept or idea further* (01.1.6).

Further, the principle of listening to what the children are discussing, questioning and inquiring about was important to Kate. As she stated in her interview, *it is what the children want to find out about. I never impose what I think we should learn. It emerges from the children* (01.1.6). She recognised the need to listen in order to understand their thinking and how they were expressing their ideas. This active listening was essential to allow Kate to sensitively guide the project work. Kate noted the importance of the environment in the way that the ideas were provoked or revisited to promote or add value to the project work.

In Kate's setting, displays provided evidence of the nature and extent of the project work the children created from their ideas. The learning process was documented on boards, in the daily diary and in a record of the children's dialogue during project related discussions. Folders and books of documentation featured prominently in the setting and were made accessible to children and parents on a constant basis. This documentation aimed to make the learning process visible to the children, teachers, parents and others.

Kate was the only participant to mention the use of this type of documentation within her project work. In her interview, she explained how she used a project hypothesis sheet (documentation 1.4.3) but pointed out that it was a way of documenting the children's questions and ideas for further investigations not a pre-planning sheet. Kate had learnt how to use this strategy during her time in Italy. She records a hypothesis as a tentative statement of what the children might be exploring and how this can be expressed in a *hundred languages* on the sheet. She does not divide the aspects of the project into curriculum areas as is common in mainstream settings (documentation 4.1. 3).

Kate affirmed that her approach to project work was collaborative in nature. This was an approach to project work that had become clear to her whilst in Italy. She preferred to negotiate the curriculum *with* the children and feedback from parents during interviews with them indicated that this had been achieved. This feedback

from the parents also told Kate that she had *succeeded in making the curriculum visible to others*. She saw this approach to curriculum related decision making as important to be aware of in her everyday work, as she expressed in her interview saying it was *another facet of the Reggio philosophy that I'm always aware of* (01.02.26).

Kate discussed how research was used within the project work in her interview and reflective journal. In Kate's view, research was *not finding out things about a topic*, but rather, looking at the children's posed questions to form an inquiry. She claimed that children are curious and want to investigate a question that is posed and, therefore, *they are not researching as a topic, it is finding out the answer to the question* (01.1.6). This suggests a contrast with some other approaches which see a project as having an organising function or as a way to integrate learning.

Case Study 2

In this case, project work featured prominently in all three settings and each class was working on their own individual project in accordance with the children's needs and interests at the time of the study. Sally's project was the research, investigation and creation of a hot house that stemmed from the children's interests in how seeds grew. Lia, who had a pre-service teacher at the time, was working with the children to create dioramas based on Habitats (desert, bush, ocean, jungle) that the children were interested in researching.

In Elle's setting, the project work centred on an investigation of Castles as nominated by the children. Like Kate, Elle took away the home corner to allow the children to use this space to explore their idea. While Sally's and Lia's students were in the creating phase during the observation period, Elle's castle of egg cartons had been completed and the children were working in smaller project groups to enhance the investigation of castles. These groups focused on costume design (queens, knights and kings), jewelry design for the costumes

and interior design (dining room and thrones). There was also an outdoor group that was designing and making a tree, a draw bridge, grass and soldiers to protect the castle. The children also expressed their ideas through drama using the castle environment as a context and stimulus. The overall work was presented to the parents as a play at the end of the project.

In the project work, all three teachers maintained that discussion with the children was the beginning focal point of emerging ideas for further investigation. This connected to the idea of recognising the strong image of the child and the value of their theories and ideas to the project work. Elle, Sally and Lia explained that the work emerged through many discussions, both in the whole group and in smaller groups. As Elle explained in her interview, *we do lots of brainstorming and moving around and sharing our ideas with other people in the class whether they are right or wrong* (04.13.3). The teachers valued how a project emerged from the thoughts and ideas of all the children in a democratic approach which recognised and supported the expression of diversity, including with recognition of children's individual learning styles within the participatory processes.

Cross Case Analysis

The cross case analysis showed some key areas of commonality between the two cases. These included how a project emerged, the need for careful listening to children and teacher flexibility and the use of documentation to record the learning process. Notably, only Kate spoke about or referred to educational project work done in Reggio Emilia when describing the projects done in her setting (01.1.7).

All four teachers identified the process of project work as a collaborative one they shared with children. This reflects a view of the child as strong and capable of generating ideas to guide learning as described by Hendrick (2004). The teachers saw listening to what the children discuss, question and inquire about as central to this process which is consistent with Bullard's findings (2010).

Listening to children was seen as vital to the negotiation of an emergent curriculum with them. The teachers noted that children's different learning styles needed to be accommodated in this democratic process.

All participants recognised the need for flexibility if project work was to be successful, ongoing and highly engaging. Flexibility was needed in relation to the time allocation, the way the project developed and the role of the children in the decision making. Firstly, the time allocation in the teachers' emergent and democratic approach to projects was not restricted but depended on the nature and development of each project. A project may last weeks or a term, or even go from one term to another as was observed during the data collection phase of the study. Research suggests that this is consistent with the allocation of time in other Reggio inspired settings and contrasts with many mainstream settings where a 'theme' may run over a designated period of time as determined by the teacher (Hendrick, 2004; Millikan, 2003). The project work in each setting was focused on supporting children to research their questions in collaboration with other children and guided by adults. The projects were not pre-determined but emerged from the children's ideas and thoughts so as to create optimal engagement.

Each participant also discussed and recorded how the project work fits into the daily timetable operating within the mainstream school where they were located (documentation 1.4.5). They recognised the value of literacy and numeracy and the need to commit time to develop both. However, they noted that literacy and numeracy were better developed through project work, particularly in the creative language aspects, rather than being developed in isolation as some timetable models suggested.

The teachers saw documentation of project work as pivotal in both the pre-planning and post planning stages and to also document the process of learning as it occurred (01.1.2; 03.10; 04.4.15). Careful and extensive documentation was

apparent in the different sources of data in the study (02.4.8; 03.4.12; 04.4.16). The planning of both short and long term projects involved the teachers in making hypotheses and preparing guidelines as well as recording outcomes. This planning was in relation to the environment and the different types of learning materials and resources to be offered. The projects in each setting were based on flexible use of strategies rather than rigid teacher-determined plans. This enabled each teacher to progress and re-visit children's ideas as they developed.

The documentation was shared with parents and allowed them to see the project unfold. In Kate's setting, parents were invited to share in the celebration of the work presented in the form of a video or power point presentation. This form of celebration with the parents of the children is a prominent feature of the educational project in Reggio Emilia (Millikan, 2003; Vecchi, 2001).

4.3.6 The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is as a significant co-learner and researcher in Reggio Emilia schools. Teachers are expected to take a socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning and view their role as a facilitator, collaborator and scaffolder in recognition of the strong image of the child (Bullard, 2010). The process of co-construction or sustained shared thinking within this approach is also very prominent.

Case Study 1

Kate saw that it was her role to be a co-learner with the children in her setting. She noted the importance of conversations as a way of developing children's hypotheses into the basis of learning within this role. She also referred to the differences in role of teachers in a Reggio Emilia compared to an Australian mainstream context.

Kate's view of her role as a teacher reflects that advocated by the Reggio Emilia approach as was evident in the following extract from her interview.

I see myself as a co-learner. Someone who is there on a journey with the children. I am always saying to the kids and they ask something and I say, 'I don't know - that's something we are going to have to find out – I really don't know.' I think it is important for me to model that curiosity and find out to – that excitement for learning (01.1.7).

She believed that as a teacher she learns from the children; a view that is consistent with the strong, competent image of the child. Additionally, she believes that she is not an expert so must continue to learn through research. The following example of where she expressed these views is taken from her interview.

I believe that there is so much that we learn from children. We can't take for granted what we think as teachers and what we think is the right way. We need to be learning ourselves and we should be in a continual stage of research to find out more (01.1.7).

Kate viewed herself as a co-learner who poses open ended questions and provides provocations to stimulate children's thoughts and hypotheses. Kate recognised the importance of questioning within her teacher role and was the only participant who commented on the need to encourage children to ask each other questions and to express ideas during shared conversations.

Kate's recording of these conversations on hypotheses sheets (documentation 1.4.3) provides further evidence that she practiced these beliefs in her classroom. Kate acknowledged that her experience in the Italian Reggio Emilia schools has been influential in shaping her beliefs and practices relating to her role as a teacher.

Episode 2: Kate's Account of Teachers in Reggio Emilia

It is very significant that teachers are co-researchers and learners with the children in Italy and you don't see that here. In Italy the whole town has a culture of everything new thing that the schools do – you can't walk down the street without some evidence of the schools. There's always something advertised but

there is always something as they are always wanting to find out more. The Loris Malaguzzi centre is a centre of research which is the whole reason why they took me on for six months because they wanted to research someone from a different culture who spoke a different language in their school. Everything is research and they never assume they know the answers at all.

Kate viewed her role as a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher to be different from that of a mainstream teacher. She was the only participant to compare her role to a current mainstream teacher. She spoke of mainstream teachers as *talking, giving, providing and answering*. In contrast, Kate viewed herself as *giving, receiving and questioning* (01.1.7). Episode 4.3 to further describes the difference between the two roles and shows the way in which Kate recognises the children as strong and competent.

Episode 3: Kate's Thoughts on the Difference between her Role and that of a Mainstream Teacher (Interview)

It might sound terrible – but a mainstream teacher may be talking and giving and providing and answering whereas I see my role as the opposite of those – giving, and receiving, questioning. You assume all the time about what the kids are interested. I think the kids learn they don't have a choice and they just do the theme because they have no choice. You know, we want our children to be critical thinkers, individuals, creative and I don't think we are doing that if we decide and determine everything. I find it quite patronising to the kids because you are blocking yourself off to these amazing things that these kids know and bringing to your class. You are assuming they don't know.

From her experience in Italy, Kate was able to compare Reggio Emilia and Australian teachers' roles. She commented that the teacher's role in Reggio Emilia is *highly respected and that the city really respects the teachers as these teachers have become world renowned for what they do with children* (01.1.9). Kate did not feel that was the case in Australia.

Kate expressed her thoughts on the issue of the trust in teachers that parents appear to have in Reggio Emilia. She explained how *parents have a high level of trust for them [the teachers] in Reggio which you don't see here sometimes [in Australia]. They immediately trust them and they trust that they know what they are doing* (01.1.9). She noted that parents in Australia *question what you do* and are confused about what is expected of teachers and the system of education in Australia.

Kate identified more closely with the meaning of her teacher role in the process of becoming Reggio inspired. For Kate, she spoke of not adapting to the Reggio philosophy, but being inspired by it. She commented on finding elements and beliefs *easy to transfer over*, such as the daily diary and the documentation. She noted that her key role is to be a co-learner with the children, focussing on listening to students so as to model curiosity and wonder. Kate acknowledged the thoughts and ideas of the children which is consistent with the strong image of the child. Kate inspired and provoked sustained conversations which stimulated thinking in order to co-construct knowledge with the children as was evident in the observations (01.3.10).

Case Study 2

In Case Study 2, the three participants noted how their role had changed as a result of the influence of the Reggio philosophy. Initially the changes were pedagogical and related to planning for and delivering an emergent curriculum, listening to children and using questioning differently. In turn, these pedagogical changes led to a change in role from the teachers as authoritative leaders to the teachers as a *co-learners, facilitators* and *guides*. Some of these changes were difficult for the teachers and others were more easily achieved.

Elle reported finding the changes she needed to make in her teacher role particularly challenging. She had tried to implement a Reggio Emilia inspired

approach in a previous school but found the change process very difficult, particularly as she felt there was no support or interest from other colleagues. However, in her current school (School B), she felt supported by other teachers who shared the same philosophical approach. Further, the change process was supported by access to resources and the constant support of the school leadership team. Elle commented that *I think I have always had it there but never knew how to get it out until the teaching staff and resources came together and we were able to nut it out* (04.13.1). Despite this high level of support, Elle found *letting go* of pre-determined planning was a continuing challenge. However, she recognised the value of an emergent curriculum which she saw as better meeting the needs of children and reported working to overcome her difficulties in implementing it in practice. She came to see her role as a *guider of what is happening* and perceived that she was becoming *a better listener to children* so she could use their understandings and ideas to guide the curriculum.

Sally also described how she was *letting go* of her structured teacher centred role and becoming more *flexible* so she could better meet the needs of the children and use their emerging ideas to drive the curriculum (03.9.4). She spoke of becoming more *relaxed* in her role and of *being okay* with not having every detail in the curriculum planned and structured.

Similarly, Lia noted that she had gradually become more of a facilitator of learning and a guide to children (02.5.5). Like Elle and Sally, she admitted to struggling to *let go* of a more familiar and comfortable authoritarian teacher role. At times, Lia was uncomfortable with the *chaos* in her classroom but came to see *that it is engaged chaos and that it is okay to let go a little bit and go with the flow as much as I can* (02.5.6). She reported that the struggle with the change in her role had gradually become easier as she recognised the need to be more *flexible*. She was the only participant who reported struggling to maintain a balance between teacher and student control of the learning process. She saw that there was sometimes a need for explicit teaching and the *...need to be the*

teacher that is teaching to them (02.5.5). Even though Lia struggled for a sense of balance, she still identified her role as a co-learner and as *part of the group or that extra person that is guiding them [the children] rather than teaching to them* (02.5.5).

The three teachers reported that listening to children had become more important in their role as a result of implementing a Reggio inspired approach. They needed to do be more effective listeners so that the project work which was central to the emergent curriculum could be informed and guided by the children's ideas. They noted that they had to develop their listening skills in order to promote sustained thinking within these student-centred conversations. As Sally noted, this made each of them a *better listener*.

The importance of questioning to stimulate thinking and sustained conversations with the children became more important in the role of the teachers as a result of the implementation process. Elle admitted to a gradual change as she became less controlling and took *more of a back seat* and became *the scaffolder and the facilitator of questions* (04.13.2). She explained in her interview that she now viewed her role as working within a team rather than being a director and as needing to be responsive to the needs of the children. As part of this new role, she reported *thinking carefully about the questions that you ask them* (04.13.3) so as to show the children respect. Similarly, Lia described the importance of her role in listening to children's answers to questions so as to recognise their needs and interests during project work. Finally, Sally dedicated a whole journal entry to noting the importance of skillful questioning. She expressed the view that it was her role to ask questions that provoked children's thinking and then to respond in a way that allows them to lead the project work (03.9.4).

Cross Case Analysis

The participants in both settings noted their roles had changed as a result of implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in their classrooms. This

change process varied among the teachers, but all spoke about how their changing role emerged from changes in their pedagogical practice. Other sub-themes included how they perceived their new role in the classroom and how the change was facilitated on an individual and professional level.

The teachers faced challenges in taking on new Reggio Emilia inspired roles within a mainstream context. Kate spoke of being inspired by the philosophy (01.1.4) and being confident enough in it to face the challenges posed by the mainstream approaches being promoted in her school. The nature of the challenges for the three teachers in Case Study 2 differed from Kate's. The pressure for them came from the need to *let go* control of the curriculum. However, despite this challenge, they all spoke of a willingness to become more student centred and to take a role as guider and facilitator of learning.

The teachers in each case were observed to inspire and provoke sustained conversations with the children and through this interaction to stimulate thinking and the co-construction of knowledge (field notes 01.1.4; 04.4.15). This process of learning is consistent with social constructivist principles based on the works of Vygotsky and Piaget (Rinaldi, 2006). The approach developed a form of interdependence between the teachers, the education assistants and the children; an interdependence based on communication, particularly in relation to listening to children, and collaboration. The emphasis the teachers placed on listening to children was consistent with the Reggio Emilia approach which is "based on adults listening rather than speaking" (Millikan, 2003, p.83). All four educators in the study acknowledged that authentic learning experiences are possible when educators and children collaborate together, with an emphasis on listening to students and negotiating. Rinaldi (2006), too, noted the importance of listening and negotiation to authentic learning.

4.3.7 Documentation

The teachers in the two case studies noted that the documentation of children's learning was an important requirement of a Reggio inspired approach. They saw documentation as a continuous process that is intended to make a child's learning *visible*. It demanded that they observe, document and analyse a child's learning journey and make informed decisions about how to guide their future learning as is consistent with a Reggio Emilia approach (Rinaldi, 2006). However, the teachers met this requirement in different ways.

Case Study 1

Kate discussed in her interview how documentation is *making the learning visible* and how it *leaves traces of the important learning that is taking place (1.01.5)*. She stated that there were many ways to document learning and noted how it portrayed a strong image of the child in the way that *their voices are being heard* through the evidence collected.

Kate referred to the use of documentation as a form of teacher accountability and reported being influenced in this view by her time in Italy. In Reggio Emilia schools, the documentation is displayed on very large wall panels with photos, art work, diagrams and transcribed dialogue describing the work of the children to the parents and citizens of the city. These wall panels or documentation walls are accessible to all in most areas of the school and the classrooms. According to Kate, teachers in Reggio Emilia keep all the work that the children do while in Australia only certain pieces are kept for portfolio examples (01.1.9). Another difference was the learning products and documentation panels are kept for many years. In Australia, portfolios, work samples or learning products would generally be given to the child to take home at the end of a school term or year and *not seen again (01.1.9)*.

Kate described the many ways in which she documents the children's learning, including through the use of photography and the *Hundred Languages* (drawings,

sculpture, drama, paintings and the like) in her interview and reflective journal. She commented that it is important for the children and others to have access to the documentation so they developed a sense of what learning is taking place over time. In turn, this allowed them to revisit ideas and to make links to learning that has already occurred so as to extend their thinking. Further, this documentation allows parents to observe the process of learning and to, therefore, value the process as well as the products. Kate noted the additional role of the documentation in helping parents to better understand the Reggio inspired approach to learning. She did this through strategies such as by making a daily diary available to parents either through a link on the class webpage or the hard copy placed in the room (documentation 1.4.4).

In addition to the daily diary, transcripts of the children's conversations and different forms of work products, such as a collection of drawings based on a project question, were displayed on a table accessible to parents. Documentation walls or panels displaying project work and the processes they used were evident in this pre-primary setting. Photographs, drawings, sculpture and textiles were used to document the learning process occurring at the time of the data collection in this study.

Kate commented that the daily diary and the project documentation have a role in helping parents understand how project work contributes to their children's learning. Kate described one instance where the daily diary had recorded the development of two projects which were documented in a class video and PowerPoint and presented to the parents (documentation 1.4. 1 & 1.4.2). In her reflective journal she described how the parents use the daily diary and documentation process to be able to better understand the nature and purpose of project work.

I can see that my parents are forming a better understanding of how our projects emerge and transform. I have many parents tell me that they read the Daily Diary regularly and this helps them to

understand the why in our projects ... why we are following a particular path of research (01.2.18).

Case Study 2

The use of documentation walls or panels was evident in all three settings in school B. The teachers reported using a variety of strategies to document the learning as in Case Study 1. These strategies were the use of photographs, the Class Journal (documentation 6.20.2), portfolios (referred to as Personal Journals) (documentation 6.20.3), newsletters, drawings, paintings, research questions and many other forms of the *Hundred Languages*.

The Personal Journal had two aspects; one side contained documentation of the project work and the other a collection of materials related to literacy, numeracy and physical development. These journals were given to parents twice a year in addition to the formal report sent annually. In all three settings, the 'Class Journal' was always available to children, parents and the school community outside their classroom (documentation 6.20.2). Sally expressed the view that it was essential for children to self-assess and to use documentation for the purpose of self-reflection on the what, how and why of the learning project. Elle stated in her interview that documentation was used in her setting to *move the children ahead* by reference to what has been already documented in order to *solve problems they may have or even to provide conclusions to the project or research work* (04.13.4).

The process of documentation of the process of the project rather than the end product was important to all three teachers. Documentation recorded the journey in order to *share the learning of the children with others*.

All three teachers commented on the role of the education assistant during the process of documentation and how it added value to the learning process. The EA collected and recorded information essential to the project work in all three settings. Elle commented that her EA recorded information, *whether it is useful or*

not and both she and Sally noted how it was important to record the information *exactly as the children say it, including mispronunciation and prompts*, to ensure accuracy.

Elle and Sally commented in their interview and journal that the process of scribing can be time consuming and difficult at times. They both recognised this difficulty in terms of not wanting to miss an opportunity to record the children's ideas and thoughts during the learning process. Elle noted that it was important for her and her EA to develop this skill as *the children talk quickly*. She also commented that the opportunity for children to express their opinions and see them validated through the documentation was vital for their learning and to be consistent with the principle of the strong image of the child. Documentation for Elle was *beginning to collate a wonderful snapshot of individual children's capabilities, thought processes and a love for learning* (04.14.2).

Accountability to parents was the main purpose of documentation in these settings. Lia saw this accountability in terms of justifying the children's learning to their parents. All three teachers believed that the parents value and recognise the purpose of the documentation, particularly the class journal (documentation 6.20.2). Lia commented that they *do find it really valuable as it informs the parents about what they are doing ... it is a starting point for parents to discuss with their children what has happened at school. It is important* (02.5.7).

Cross Case Analysis

The documentation of learning was an essential part of project work in both case studies. All four participants referred to the term documentation, which translates the Italian process of *documentazione*, to refer to the recording of the process and products of learning. The key role of documentation was to share the children's learning processes and products with others, including the children themselves, parents, teachers and the community. This was linked strongly to

accountability purposes. In both Case Studies, different strategies were used to document learning and that documentation was used for different purposes.

In this study, documentation of the child's learning process was viewed as fundamental to the role of the teacher. The four participants in the study described how they observe, document and analyse the children's learning journey and use this documentation to make informed decisions about future learning. This is consistent with Rinaldi's (1993) view that documentation has an important role in guiding children's learning within a Reggio Emilia inspired approach.

While documentation was seen to have a range of purposes, there was an emphasis on its role in communication with the children, teachers, parents and the school community. All four teachers commented that documentation should make the learning in the project work *visible* to others so that children's *voices can be heard* (01.1.10) and so that they can *share their learning with others* (02.5.8). The communication role the teachers in this study gave to documentation included an emphasis on accountability. The teachers saw that documentation provided public evidence of the children's learning and so helped them to meet their obligations as regards accountability.

Documentation of the process and the products of learning took a range of forms in the different settings within the two case studies. Recording the children's thoughts and ideas so that their theory development during the learning process could be noted was a key aspect in each of the settings. This documentation involved verbatim scribing of the children's talk on paper, the whiteboard or a laptop computer. Other means of documenting the everyday learning experiences included photographs, digital recordings, teacher notes and the products of the project work. The daily diary (Case Study 1) and the class journal (Case Study 2) which were updated every day and made available to the children, teachers, parents and the school community were particularly important

in each setting. These documents provided a public record of the development of the projects and the learning processes that happened within them. They had the added value of helping the parents to understand and appreciate how learning occurred through research-based projects.

The teachers acknowledged in their journals and interviews that the recording of information and the process of documentation was a complex, time consuming process. They felt this effort was worthwhile, however, as documentation allowed them to reflect on the children's learning and to use their interpretations to inform future practice, including by re-visiting and extending the children's learning where necessary as noted by Kate and Elle in their interviews (01.1.1; 04.4.13). Documentation was viewed as essential to make the children's learning visible and to meet teachers' accountability obligations. These findings are consistent with the view that in a Reggio Emilia approach educational documentation is a complex process and is viewed as a *public place* that provides a forum for viewing the work of the children and the educational projects (PICMRE, 2010; Vecchi, 2001).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS:

The Facilitating Factors and Barriers to the Implementation of a Reggio Emilia Approach in a Mainstream Context

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the facilitating factors and the barriers to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia approach in a mainstream context. Firstly, an overview of the facilitating factors and barriers as identified in each case study will be presented. These findings are based on a thematic analysis of the data from six semi-structured interviews with the four teacher participants and two administrators, the teachers' reflective journals, field notes from ten observation sessions and document analysis of teacher planning and assessment documents, as well as whole school documentation. This overview will be followed by a cross case analysis which will compare and contrast the findings from each case.

5.2 The Case Studies

Case Study 1 Overview

In Case Study 1, the informants were one teacher (Kate) and one administrator (Pat). Kate taught pre-primary in a mainstream Catholic school. She was the only teacher to implement a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within her school. Pat was a deputy principal in the school and was Kate's line manager at the time of the data collection.

In this context, the factors identified as facilitating the implementation of a Reggio inspired approach included the:

- participant's commitment, knowledge and understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and approach;
- support of the children's parents;

- quality of the children’s learning;
- support of the education assistant; and,
- support of the Associate Principal.

The barriers to the implementation included:

- a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach in Kate’s school community;
- a lack financial support to purchase resources and materials;
- a mandated curriculum that imposed restrictions on the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach; and,
- Kate’s sense of isolation within her mainstream setting.

5.2.1 Overview of Facilitating Factors in the Implementation

The findings suggest that Kate’s most influential facilitating factor was her own *self* and her *self-determination* not to change her Reggio Emilia inspired philosophical approach to teaching and learning. Her sense of *self* related to how strongly her belief system was influenced by her understanding of the philosophy which had been influenced by the time she had spent living and teaching in the city of Reggio Emilia. The self-determination she reported was evident in how she responded to the barriers and adapted to accommodate them. In her interview, Kate discussed an overwhelming desire to *stay true to her philosophical beliefs* and to rise to the challenge of any obstacle that impacted on the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in her setting. She reported accepting that a lack of understanding and support from colleagues in her context was inevitable. This confidence in her capacity and the value she placed on a Reggio Emilia inspired approach helped Kate to resist the constant curriculum demands she faced.

The parents in Kate’s setting were an influential factor and their support encouraged her to continue with a Reggio Emilia inspired philosophical approach. Her school line manager, Pat, commented in her interview that Kate

was highly respected by the parents and that the children in her class *adored her*. She noted that Kate was seen as a teacher within the school who the parents *wanted their child to be with* (05.17.1). The mutual respect and high level of communication between Kate and the parents of the children was evident in observation data and field notes (01.3.6). The environment Kate had created and the documentation provided to the parents made the children's learning visible to all. From excerpts in Kate's journal, it is evident that the parents valued and supported the rich learning program she provided. It was her ability to constantly communicate the children's learning and the expressive way the children themselves chose to display this, that won the support of the parents in this setting (01.2.6).

Kate recognised that the quality of the children's learning and the work that they produced in the program was a facilitating factor. She nominated the children's high level of engagement and the subsequent quality of their learning as her *biggest motivation* (01.2.10) to continue the Reggio inspired approach. In her reflective journal, Kate acknowledged that she was continually *amazed by the children* (01.2.10) and their *thinking, theories of the world and their endless curiosity* (01.2.10). She was able to see these qualities through the children's involvement in the research component of an emergent curriculum that reflected the strong image of the child and was student focused.

Another facilitating factor was the support of Kate's Education Assistant (EA) who had an in-depth understanding of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Kate commented that the understanding, knowledge and support of her EA were vital for her to fulfill her role, support the children and facilitate an emergent curriculum. Kate referred to her EA as her *teaching partner* (01.15) which acknowledged their strong collaborative relationship and the value in which she held the EA role. The EA's knowledge and understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach was evident in observational data and field notes. In her interview, Pat reported that the school sought to support Kate by placing an EA who had

knowledge and expertise in the Reggio inspired approach in her setting (05.17.3).

The level of support provided by Pat, Kate's line manager, was recognised as a facilitating factor. Kate noted that in her view Pat was the only staff member who had a reasonable understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Pat understood the difficulties Kate faced in a mainstream context where her approach was not understood or valued. She allowed Kate to implement school policy in a flexible way that was consistent with her philosophical beliefs. Pat respected Kate and in her interview spoke highly of her approach to teaching and learning and of her in-depth knowledge and understanding of each and every child in her setting. Pat saw this as a true indication of Kate's passion for teaching and learning (05.17.2). However, Kate recognised that there were constraints on the degree to which Pat could support her in her implementation of the Reggio inspired approach in a mainstream context. Kate noted, "*Pat had her barriers, too*" (01.1.11). Some of these constraints were related to other school leaders and staff who did not fully understand the approach, and did not want to be deemed *to be doing anything different* (05.17.4). The differences between the Reggio Emilia inspired and mainstream approaches and the perception of the mainstream oriented teachers that the Reggio Emilia inspired class was receiving special treatment posed issues for Pat who had to manage scarce resources.

5.2.2 Overview of Barriers to the Implementation

For Kate, there were more barriers than facilitating factors in a context where she was the only teacher implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. The most significant barriers were that the broader school community and her colleagues did not understanding her philosophical approach, she had to meet curriculum demands that were not compatible with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach and she was isolated from colleagues in the implementation of this approach.

Kate identified the main barrier as a lack of understanding and support from her school community and colleagues. This was a setting where only her EA shared or understood her philosophical approach. The school was aware of her approach before she was employed; however, Kate felt that opportunities to develop, enhance and promote the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach were not provided by the school community as a whole (01.1.5).

Kate claimed that because of this limited understanding of the approach, there were no provisions made for physical resources (furniture, access to ICT, plants, materials and resources) to enhance the learning and aesthetic qualities of the learning environment. Nor was there evidence of added financial support for the implementation of this approach in any of the school documentation analysed. In contrast, Kate's line manager, Pat, indicated in her interview that she felt Kate was supported financially in the term of resources and materials made available through school funding allocations (05.17.2).

A further barrier was posed by the demands of a mandated curriculum which prevented Kate implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a way she felt was consistent with the philosophy. Kate and her line manager, Pat, both acknowledged that the school imposed a more structured, results-driven curriculum in the pre-primary area (01.2; 05.17) than is typical in a Reggio inspired approach. This prevented Kate implementing a program fully consistent with her philosophical principles. Kate reported that she felt constant *pressure* to implement teacher-driven or structured commercial educational programs. This conflicted with her belief in Reggio Emilia principles based on a student-centred approach to learning. She reported resisting these demands as she perceived them not to be in the best interests of the children in her setting (01.2.12).

Finally, these barriers had given Kate a sense of isolation in her implementation of the approach. She felt the barriers could have been overcome if her attempts at promoting the approach had been recognised and an understanding of it

successfully shared. Some of this resistance may have come from colleagues who, according to Kate's line manager, were concerned that the differences between their and Kate's programs may give rise to issues of equity of provision in the community (05.17). Also exacerbating her feelings of isolation was a lack of collaboration with other teachers who shared her philosophical approach to education.

5.3 The Case Studies

Case Study 2 Overview

Case Study 2 involved three pre-primary teachers, teaching in a school where a Reggio Emilia inspired philosophical approach to teaching and learning had been implemented from kindergarten to year one (K-1). The school principal and the K-1 line manager understood and were supportive of the approach. Of interest in this case study was that some factors were perceived as barriers in some contexts but facilitating factors in others.

In this school context, the factors that were seen to facilitate the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach included the:

- high level of support of the administration and leadership team;
- support of colleagues who were also implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach;
- support of the education assistants;
- teachers' willingness to gain further professional knowledge of the philosophical approach; and,
- support of parents and the community.

The barriers to the implementation included the:

- demands of a mandated curriculum and time constraints;
- perceived gaps of the teachers' own understanding and knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach;
- lack of professional networking;
- limited level of parental support and involvement;

- implementation of the project work; and,
- sense of isolation in a mainstream setting.

Barriers which were salient for one or more of the teachers but not all were a lack of support from some EAs and for one teacher, taking an alternative approach to early childhood education within a Western Australian context. This teacher noted that she felt isolated because of limited awareness and promotion of the Reggio Emilia approach within mainstream settings in Western Australia.

5.3.1 Overview of the Facilitating Factors in the Implementation

For the three teachers in this setting, there were both common and individually salient factors that assisted in the implementation. As was described more fully in the Case Study 2 context in Chapter 4, the three teachers valued the support from the administration, the staff (in the K-1 level) and their pre-primary based colleagues. The leadership team in the school demonstrated an understanding of the Reggio Emilia inspired philosophy and this was reflected in the school documentation. This high level of support was reflected in the financial provisions made for the program from the school budget. There were common provisions made to each teacher from the school's Financial and Business Plan (2010-2012) to provide for resources, materials and teacher development to enhance the implementation of the approach. The teachers perceived the administration as very supportive and saw the financial provisions they made as evidence of this support.

Two of the teachers were assisted in their implementation by strong support from their education assistants. These assistants understood the approach and this increased the value of their work in the setting and assisted the implementation process. These teachers also reported that they wanted to understand the approach more fully and that this motivated them to undertake further professional learning. Only one teacher, however, noted the level of parental support she received as a facilitating factor.

5.3.2 Overview of Barriers to the Implementation

Although feeling supported, the teachers in Case Study 2 faced barriers to the implementation of this new approach. As in Case Study 1, they faced the demands of a mandated curriculum with time constraints that impinged on the implementation. Of considerable impact was the barrier relating to *their self*. In this context, *their self* related to self doubt or locus of control in the way they were conscious of *doing justice to the philosophy* or *doing things right*. Two of the participants felt their students' parents were not very supportive and they lacked understanding of the approach. They also found a lack of professional networking and the implementation of the project work challenging. One teacher noted the lack of support from her EA made the implementation more difficult. Another teacher reported that even though her immediate school colleagues were supportive, she felt isolated from the broader professional community because of implementing a different approach.

5.4 Cross Case Analysis of the Facilitating Factors to the Implementation

In this study, the factors which were found to support change in educational practice were complex and interrelated. These included the teachers' belief in themselves, their access to professional learning and the support of the school's administrative team, their colleagues, parents and community members in relation to the change.

5.4.1 Self and Professional Learning

The four participants in the study identified their perception of *self* as related to strength of character, knowledge of the approach, resilience in the change process and strength of beliefs. Kate in Case Study 1 referred to her 'self' as a significant facilitating factor in implementing the approach. Similarly, two of the three teachers in Case Study 2 referred to their *self* as a facilitating factor, but in a different way that related to their pursuit of professional learning. Kate frequently spoke about her personal qualities and how she perceived her

strength of character and reluctance to compromise her beliefs as the main factors facilitating change within her isolated setting. Despite feelings of frustration and discouragement, Kate felt increasingly determined to remain consistent with her sense of *self* and her beliefs related to a Reggio Emilia philosophy. In her interview, Kate described herself as an agent of change strongly influenced by her philosophical beliefs.

I believe in what I am doing. I was determined and I was not going to change – even if it was a silent fight in my room – I was not going to give up what I believe in (01.1.11).

In her journal there were entries that reflected her determination not to abandon her current approach in favour of the more formal structure encouraged by the school (01.2.9). The pressure to conform to the formal approach used in the other pre-primary class had increased at the time of the data collection and was noted by her line manager, Pat, during her interview (5.17.3).

As was detailed in the Case Study One context overview in Chapter 4, Kate accepted some aspects of the curriculum changes imposed by the school, but adapted them to more closely align with a Reggio inspired approach. For instance, she followed a whole school approach to a phonics program and reporting format that in consultation with the school deputy, Kate changed to suit her philosophical approach. Kate felt able to meet the needs of both the school and the needs of the children in a way that allowed her practice to reflect her philosophy and diminished the threat that the whole-school demands posed to the way she taught. In her two interviews, Kate commented that *the biggest factor has been the determination that I was not going to change for anyone [laugh]* (01.1.11).

In Case Study 2, although Lia and Sally spoke of their *self* in a different manner, it was seen as facilitating the implementation process. For instance, Lia recognised that her interest in the approach had encouraged her to engage in professional learning. She reported how she accessed professional readings to

further her understanding of the philosophy and noted the value of the national Reggio Emilia networking journal. She commented that access to the journal, the *Challenge*, enabled her to develop her own understandings of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within an Australian context. She said that it *has helped me to perceive things correctly and it has broken a few myths for me too* (02.5.9). Lia recognised that a deeper understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach had given her more confidence to implement elements of the philosophy with the children in her setting (02.5.11). However, despite this increased confidence, her tendency to want to control what was happening in her setting remained a barrier to her implementing certain elements of the Reggio Emilia philosophy such as allowing the students to lead the learning in an emergent approach.

Sally, too, discussed how her own interest in the philosophy and her pursuit of knowledge in order to understand it more deeply facilitated the implementation of the approach. As with Lia, deeper knowledge increased Sally's confidence. However, while Lia reported that her increased confidence led to trying new strategies in her setting, Sally's increased confidence led to her greater belief in the efficacy of the approach. Another facilitating factor identified by Sally was how she used reflection to improve her pedagogical practice (03.10.8).

While Lia identified the Reggio Emilia Australian Information Exchange (REAIE) and the WA based Reggio networking groups as supporting her to implement a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, Sally saw these organisations as a barrier which will be discussed later in the chapter. The remaining two teachers in the study did not mention these organisations.

This analysis suggests that a strong sense of self and firmly held beliefs are critical for facilitating innovative change within a mainstream context. These teacher qualities seemed to be motivated, developed and reinforced by the professional learning related to the innovation in which they engaged. This finding is consistent with Overton's (2009) research which examined the personal

and professional identity of teachers during the process of educational change. This research found that the teachers' active pursuit of professional knowledge developed and reinforced their sense of self and belief in the philosophy which, in turn, supported the implementation process. In the current study, the active role the teachers took in accessing professional learning may have facilitated the implementation process as suggested by Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin & Llamas-Sanchez (2006) who found that it was important for teachers to be involved in creating positive conditions for change.

The teachers' commitment to and involvement in a sustained change process suggests they could be viewed as leaders in their educational setting. According to Stamopoulos (2012), teachers are identified as leaders in educational change as they co-construct a shared vision of change and make decisions about educational practice. However, a shared vision of change was only evident in Case Study 2. In this setting, all three participants were able to collaborate to develop a shared understanding of their Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a supportive school environment. Australian early childhood settings are guided by a *National Quality Framework*, the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Early Years Learning Framework*, which encourages organisational change for quality improvement (Stamopoulos, 2012). In contrast, Kate in Case Study 1 was not given the opportunity to co-construct a shared vision, nor to lead as a teacher for improvement as she was implementing the approach in isolation with a lack of support from her colleagues in her school context.

For the four participants in this study, intrinsic motivation appeared to facilitate their adoption and implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in a different cultural context. This self-motivation encouraged them to persist with the innovation despite facing many challenges. These findings are consistent with those of Hargreaves (1997) who found that a person's positive attitude can contribute to the successful implementation of proposed change.

As described in the case studies, the change process was supported by the teachers' access to professional development and professional networking with teachers implementing or using a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Other research has found this type of professional activity supports educational change (Briggs & Potter, 1999; Fleer, 2010). The teachers in the current study reported that professional learning contributed to the development of their understanding of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock's study (2008) of early childhood teachers coping with educational change also found a facilitating role for professional learning. In Case Study 2, professional learning contributed to the development of a shared vision and a sense of direction which, in turn, built confidence and motivation to sustain the change process. This finding is consistent with that of Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock (2008) who noted the value of professional development for developing a common vision and direction as well as promoting a positive attitude to the change.

5.4.2 Administrative Support

This study suggests that a supportive school administration team is important to the success of the change process. The perceived value of administrative support was particularly evident in the teachers' interviews and reflective journals.

In Case Study 2, administrative support was perceived as an essential facilitating factor. All three teachers in this context commented that without support from the principal and administrative team, the implementation of the new approach would not have been successful. The administrators' in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy facilitated the provision of appropriate support. Elle commented in her interview that the team *is aware of this need for support and it is not sort of left for you to try in isolation*. The teachers felt the administrative team valued them and the way that they were implementing the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in their settings.

The teachers recognised that the leadership team understood what they needed to implement the approach successfully and how to provide that support. This was evident through school documentation that allowed for the provision of aspects such as whole school planning and common DOTT times. The administrative team led the development of a shared vision of a Reggio Emilia approach that could be implemented within their mainstream context and a mutual understanding for how that implementation could be managed. Lia reflected in her journal how the principal had affirmed and showed he trusted them. This level of trust also assisted the teachers as they struggled to find the right balance between meeting school curriculum demands and those of the class project work which was part of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Natasha, the deputy principal for the K-1 area, noted the leadership from the school principal that had inspired the passion needed to implement the approach. She expressed the view that the principal of a mainstream school needed to embrace and understand the philosophy of any new approach in order to promote its adoption (06.19.3).

Another way in which the administrative team facilitated the implementation of the approach was to provide an appropriate level of financial support, as documented in the school's Business and Financial Plan (2010) (06.20.1). By making this provision, the school leaders acknowledged that the successful implementation of a Reggio Emilia approach relied in part on appropriate resourcing. Elle noted that support was also given on a personal level that reflected the administrators' understanding and valuing of the approach. She commented that *as well as the level of funding, they [the administration] enjoy coming into our rooms and see what we are doing and they listen to the kids and what they have been doing in the setting*. This level of involvement was seen by the teachers as evidence of the school leaders' support for them and commitment to the implementation.

An additional way the administrative team in Case Study 2 demonstrated their commitment to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach was by employing teachers with professional knowledge of and experience in this approach. Natasha, the line manager in this context, described how the school was an Independent Public School (IPS) and as such had an opportunity to employ teachers whose educational beliefs were consistent with those of the school community.

Because we are an IPS school, we have a staffing pool and that would be a contributing factor for employment purposes. We can facilitate staff who come in with the experience, qualifications and knowledge we need. You need to have the passion to keep it [the approach] going, so getting the right people is essential (06.19.9).

The recruitment of suitably qualified and committed staff further supported the building of a shared vision and consistent school wide approach to the implementation of change.

In Case Study 2, the administrative team provided a framework for change through the building of a shared vision and whole school planning. This notion of leadership support and developing a shared vision suggests that it influenced the level of teacher commitment and the effectiveness of the educational change in this context. This finding supports Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin & Llamas-Sanchez's (2006) claim that a shared vision is vital for developing a common purpose. Fullan (2001) also suggests that if change is to be successful, then administration leaders and teachers have to have a deep and shared understanding of the innovation. In contrast, the lack of a shared understanding between the administrative team and the teacher implementing the change was nominated as a barrier to the success of the innovation in Case Study 1.

These findings affirm that the implementation of an innovative approach requires a school leadership with the capacity to inform and engage teachers in the change process (Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008).

5.4.3 Collegial Support

The four participants in this study identified collegial support as a key factor in facilitating change. In Case Study 2, the teachers referred to the benefits of collaborating, sharing their ideas and reflecting on their teaching. Through this process, they developed a shared vision and team approach to the implementation.

Whilst collegial support was recognised as a facilitating factor in both case studies, the level of support differed greatly for each participant. Kate, who was implementing the new approach in isolation in Case Study 1, had less collegial support than did the teachers in Case Study 2. However, Kate did value the support of her deputy principal, Pat. She reported that as her line manager, Pat, understood and valued the approach and the way she was implementing it. However, she also felt that Pat's support was constrained by circumstances in the school context beyond her control. This was confirmed by Pat in her interview.

We or I had to manipulate things a little bit at times for her [Kate] to implement what she wanted to do given the dynamics of the school. I had to support her as it would have been hard for her to have gone alone. We had to negotiate quite a bit with the curriculum demands, which was difficult for us both. Kate wasn't allowed to do as she completely wished but she adapted quite well. I think if she had been given what she wanted, we would have seen more incredible results (05.17.2).

Although there was a general lack of support for the implementation in Kate's school community, there were some colleagues who showed an interest in her work. Some teachers within the school, in particular the ICT, library and music teacher, had shown interest and had asked questions about Kate's approach to teaching and learning. Kate reflected that this interest *was very affirming* to her and provided the determination to continue with her implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach despite being currently in an isolated context.

In Case Study 2, all three participants confirmed that collegial support was an important facilitating factor supporting the Reggio Emilia inspired implementation. The knowledge that staff members from Kindergarten to Year One were supportive of each other was important to the teachers. As Elle commented, knowing *that we are all on the same page makes a difference* (04.13.7). Supported by the administrative team, all three teachers in this context were provided with time to plan, discuss and collaborate. The opportunity to talk, share ideas and seek advice from each other was a significant facilitating factor that, in turn, supported a high level of collegiality and self-direction. As Sally reflected in her journal:

I feel lucky to have colleagues around me embracing this philosophy. I was able to use their knowledge and experience to help develop my own skills. I observed their settings, project work, questioning techniques, mat sessions and work samples. If I did not have people around me implementing this philosophy I feel I wouldn't have been able to develop my own skills as well (03.10.2).

Lia acknowledged that this type of support was essential to implement an approach that was different from the mainstream. Her colleagues provided her with the advice and knowledge required for her to develop confidence in her implementation of the approach. She acknowledged that *everyone is at a different stage but being able to talk to others and see what they are doing, seek advice or share ideas has been fantastic* (02.5.8). Elle commented that *even when things are not going well*, the collegial support she receives is essential for continued guidance and the ability to move forward as a professional.

In this study, collegial support was nominated as a facilitating factor as was the importance of a shared vision and dialogue with like-minded professionals. These findings are consistent with Fullan's research (2001) which found there was a need for a shared understanding of the change to be made and the development of shared perspectives in order to encourage and support successful implementation.

5.4.4 Role of the Education Assistant

The education assistants (EA) in both case studies played a significant role in the change process. All but one of the participants indicated that their EA not only provided them with the day to day practical support required for the successful implementation of curriculum change, but more importantly, they shared the teacher's vision of how the new approach could enhance children's learning.

Kate, Sally and Elle all commented that the understanding, knowledge and support of their EAs were essential to meet the demands of an emergent curriculum. Lia was the only teacher to comment that she felt that her EAs (she had two part time EAs) had been a barrier to the implementation. This was due to philosophical differences that will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Kate reflected in her journal that having an EA who had worked in a Reggio Emilia inspired context before being appointed to her class had been an advantage. She commented on the supportive role her EA had adopted and her level of understanding and how it enhanced the pedagogical process in her isolated setting.

It makes my job so much easier as she automatically takes meaningful photos, scribes conversations and is more than happy to collect materials if I change plans on the spur of the moment (01.2.3).

The support of the EA was further described as a positive influence by Kate's line manager, Pat. Pat commented in her interview that the placement of that particular EA was a school-based decision made to support Kate's implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach.

We had an EA who was very interested and she actually asked if she could be placed there. She had experience with Reggio, too. It was a very good mix and it worked brilliantly. She was willing to change routines and go along with Kate and become a co-teacher (05.17.6).

Similarly, Elle recognised that her EA was *on board with this approach* and had attended professional learning that had enhanced her understanding of the

approach. Both Elle and Sally recognised that their EAs were supportive of the children's learning, particularly in providing a stimulating environment and implementing documentation strategies that assisted the teachers to record the learning in many different forms.

5.4.5 Level of Parent/Community Support

The final facilitating factor to emerge from the thematic analysis was the support of parents and community members. This was not surprising given that this support is important to all school organisations and the process of innovative change (Fleer, 2010). Further, in Reggio Emilia, parent and community participation is seen at every level and is central to the life of the school (Rinaldi, 1993). Interestingly, in this study whilst parent and community support were deemed important to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the nature and perceived value of the support they gave differed among the teachers.

All four teachers commented that they perceived parents' attitudes to the approach as a barrier initially, but noted that over time their level of support and interest grew. In Case Study 1, Kate commented in her journal that parents had heard that she ran her class *a bit differently*. Despite this concern, she had noticed many positive reactions to the environment with the parents asking questions that demonstrated a genuine interest in the approach. As Kate's *biggest motivation* was to see the children researching their own questions and their subsequent excitement to be on a learning journey, she was concerned that parents would *see this learning is valuable, precious and deep* (01.2.10). It would seem that from her comments and those of her line manager, she was successful in communicating this vision to the parents of her students.

In addition to reacting positively to the environment, the parents in Kate's setting were excited by their children's interest in learning and the questions they asked at home as well as the documentation of the learning process. Kate saw the

challenge of convincing parents of the value of a Reggio Emilia approach as a positive factor in that it provided an opportunity to *open up their minds* as well as the children's. Though despite this, she questioned the parents' level of understanding and wondered if they would have valued the approach more if they understood it better.

Pat, Kate's line manager, also discussed the high level of parent support for Kate's implementation of a Reggio Emilia approach. She described how the parents wanted their child to be in her setting.

There were a lot of requests and a lot of interest from parents for their kids to go there. There was much accolade from the parents about what she was doing in there. The parents loved her interactions with the kids and saw that the children absolutely adored her. The parents who spent time in her room could see the wonderful things that were happening and I guess the journal was another thing that they were exposed to (05.17.7).

Sally, in Case Study 2, reported that it was easier for the teachers in their collaborative working context to receive support from the parents and community. As this was a whole school approach, the pre-primary children and their parents had already had exposure to the philosophical approach in Kindergarten. Sally noted that making the philosophy *open to parents as it is advertised on our school website* ensures that they have an awareness of this different approach within a mainstream context (documentation 6.20.4). Elle also commented that once the parents began to come into the setting and offer their assistance, they better understood and supported the implementation.

In Case Study 2, the use of documentation assisted the parents to understand *how it all works and how you are going to implement it as they describe and record the process of learning* (04.13.6). This understanding and support was also triggered by the interest shown by the children who talked more at home about what they were doing due of their high level of engagement with the project work. Parents in each case study were invited to provide support in and outside

of the setting and were *encouraged to ask their children open ended questions to provoke and inspire learning.*

The participants in both case studies noted that parent understanding of and support for the implementation of a Reggio approach in their settings was essential to the implementation process. There was a reciprocal relationship between teachers and parents consistent with the view held in Reggio Emilia that parent participation is an important educational strategy (Fraser, 2006). In contrast, Kate in Case Study 1, found the level of parent support she felt was needed difficult to gain as she did not have the school or administrative support she needed to promote her philosophical views. In contrast, the level of parent and community support was enhanced by a whole school shared vision in Case Study 2.

Common to both cases was a lack of parent support in the early phase of the implementation. The teachers addressed this by using different forms of daily communication and the documentation of children's learning to develop a reciprocal relationship with the parents. Over time, this process helped the parents to gain more knowledge about the approach and the level of support increased. This finding is consistent with Fraser's research (2006) which found that reciprocal relationships with parents require mutual understanding and time committed to meaningful dialogue and documentation of the children's learning on a daily basis.

5.5 Cross Case Analysis of Barriers to the Implementation

One of the important aims of this study was to investigate the barriers that inhibited the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a mainstream context and how they constrained the change process. If change is to be successful, it is critical for educators to understand factors that may inhibit philosophical and pedagogical change (Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin & Llamas-Sanchez, 2006).

In this study, the barriers to change included the teachers' self-doubt related to knowledge about the Reggio Emilia approach, the demands and time constraints of a mandated curriculum and a lack of parental support and involvement. The barriers also included feelings of isolation and a lack of knowledge and understanding of the approach from colleagues, limited financial support, a lack of professional networking and implementation of the project work that was important to this philosophical approach.

5.5.1 Self-Doubt Related to Teacher Beliefs

While Kate's self-belief was a significant facilitating factor in Case Study 1, the three teachers in Case Study 2 perceived their lack of knowledge reduced their confidence and was a barrier to the implementation. All three participants acknowledged that they had improved their understanding and implementation of the key principles but regardless of this, they reported self-doubt that was connected to locus of control, self-efficacy and personal mastery. Feelings of self-doubt related to their struggle to further develop their knowledge of the approach were expressed in the teachers' interviews and reflective journals.

Sally experienced self-doubt despite her growing knowledge of the philosophy gained through research and professional learning. As she stated, I *never quite feel that I can get there* (03.9.2). She was very concerned about serving the children's best interests and expressed high expectations of herself *not to do a disservice to the children in the way I'm teaching* (03.9.14). This high level of self-doubt made the implementation process very difficult for her as she indicated in her interview.

I do it the way it is meant to be implemented and that I am doing it the way it should be looking. I wrote that in my journal – that probably one of the biggest barriers is myself. Yes – it is getting past my self-doubt I think because this wasn't a natural thing for me, elements were... One of the hardest things is getting past myself... is this how I am supposed to be doing it? (03.9.2)

Sally recognised the need to develop confidence in her capacity to implement the main principles of the approach. She worried about her self-doubt and was concerned as to how others may perceive what she was doing in the setting.

Only Sally and Elle spoke of the barriers associated with the implementation of a different cultural approach and its adaptation to fit into a Western Australian mainstream context. Sally reflected on this aspect in her interview.

It's hard to explain...it's taking something from a different cultural context as well and trying to implement and adapt it and it's hard with all those time constraints. You look at other teachers and think- they're doing that really well, I want to work hard on that (03.9.14).

In addition, Elle spoke of struggling to understand the philosophy and the principles of the approach. She reflected on how she struggled with this initially and questioned the adaptation of an approach developed in Italy and *how it would be done* in an Australian context. In addition, Elle was concerned about her role as a teacher and the need for her to shift the locus of control to the children by *letting go*. This required her to give ownership and a high level of control over the emergent curriculum to the children and to no longer rely on pre-determined outcomes and pre-planned learning programs. She recognised the need to plan with the children and listen to them more. While she knew it was a matter of *going with the flow*, she still wanted reassurance that she would be able to meet the learning needs of the children as well as to integrate elements of the philosophy in her context. The *process of pushing my ideas aside to allow the children's to come through* was a difficult barrier for Elle to overcome as this challenged her usual level of control in the setting. She recognised that she needed to *find a balance* between meeting the needs of the children and being consistent with her philosophical beliefs. She claimed it *had taken her four to five years to let go and feel comfortable to know what we are doing is perfectly normal*. Elle was a long time in *letting go of that control and doubt* even though she acknowledged that the approach had improved her teaching, been

supportive of the way that children learn and had enhanced her relationships with the children (04.12.7).

Lia also suggested that her lack of confidence and level of self-doubt was a barrier. She identified that this contributed to the difficulty she experienced in finding a balance between her personal and professional life and led her to question whether her *whole self* was committed to this philosophical approach. She recognised that this lack of confidence may be a barrier to her career even if she was not implementing this approach in a mainstream context. However, she noted that her confidence and ability to become more creative had increased over time as she researched and engaged more in professional learning with others. She commented on this sense of progress in her interview.

I still don't feel I am perfect at it and there is still a lot of other things I need to try but I feel I am getting there with it and that is what I believe in [the philosophy], so I believe I am doing it but not perfectly (02.5.2).

In this study, the way the change process challenged the teachers' existing philosophical beliefs was identified as a barrier. The value of the teachers exploring and critically examining their philosophical beliefs was particularly evident in the teachers' interview and reflective journal data. In Case Study 1, Kate reported that she already held beliefs that were very similar to those that underpin a Reggio Emilia approach and that they were confirmed and developed through her experience of the approach in Italy. While these strongly held beliefs were a facilitative factor, for her the tension was the way the mainstream demands challenged these beliefs which will be discussed later in this section.

In contrast, the teachers in Case Study 2 questioned their beliefs during the change process and expressed feelings of self-doubt, a lack of confidence and concerns about the locus of control in their settings. For these participants, reassurance that they were meeting the learning needs of the children through the adaptation of the Reggio Emilia approach in a different cultural context was

important. Although these factors were identified as challenges in the change process, all three participants remained positive that they could adapt their beliefs and overcome these difficulties. Important to this study, was the participants' ability to adapt the implementation process to suit their personal and professional needs. They maintained their belief system had changed over time as a result of them being proactive in seeking professional information and engaging in the change process.

These findings suggest that the participants' identities and teaching practice were significantly affective in nature and guided by a personal belief system. The teachers also reported being strongly influenced by their personal belief systems during the change process as were the participants in a study by Rath (2001). Further, the current study found that making changes in a belief system can be a difficult and challenging process which can cause feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty. This was certainly the case for the three teachers in Case Study 2 and confirms findings by Grootenboer (2008) and Stuart & Thurlow (2000) in other contexts.

5.5.2 Curriculum Demands/Accountability (Time restraints)

The four participants in this study identified that meeting the requirements of a mandated curriculum and the time constraints imposed by these demands as a key barrier to change. The participants had to find a balance between meeting the expectations of the school and those related to implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in their context.

In Case Study 2, even though the administrative team was supportive of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the teachers still had to meet curriculum demands that conflicted with elements of the new approach. The teachers were particularly concerned about how the mainstream commitments interrupted the flow of project work, which was not generally an issue in most mainstream contexts. Elle described this barrier in her reflective journal.

I feel that meeting the demands of the admin and the school is not easy (reporting, literacy, numeracy, meetings) and the project work gets pushed aside. This makes it tricky for the children when you start and stop the project as it cuts into their thoughts and ideas and we spend more time trying to refocus on what it was we were trying to achieve, rather than getting on with exploring our ideas further (04.14.2).

Lia suggested that one of the most influential barriers was *all the stuff that needs to get done*. She, too, commented on the interruption to the *flow of learning*. She attributed this interruption to children's learning to the school's timetable constraints. She experienced a *feeling of pressure* to constantly complete a certain amount of formal literacy and numeracy content and having to *squeeze everything else in*. Lia felt that conforming to the school timetable interrupted the children's thoughts and ideas about what were immersed in at the time in their project work. She did acknowledge that this could be a barrier that teachers face at times in any school environment.

Lia and Kate explicitly wrote about constant administrative demands and the requirement for testing in their reflective journals. Both expressed concern about the pressure for teachers to provide more structured programs for literacy and numeracy and the belief that these types of formal programs in early childhood would lead to better NAPLAN results for children in Year 3. Lia and Kate perceived this to be an isolated and segregated way to learning that did not suit a Reggio Emilia approach which favoured an emergent, integrated and learning through play pedagogy. The Australian Curriculum's setting of higher achievement standards than what had previously been achieved, particularly in Western Australia, was viewed as a similar type of barrier. The line manager in Case Study 2, Natasha, expressed concern over management of the National Curriculum and the current pre-primary on-line testing mandated for all government schools. She questioned how the school within the Kindergarten to Year One area, was going to find that *right balance* and still remain true to the

philosophy that currently guided their practice. She described her concern about the mandated curriculum in her interview.

It needs to be a balance of mandated things and the balance of the Reggio inspired practice.....let's see how it all sits or doesn't so it compliments what we are doing and not destroying what we are doing. It's just finding a balance (06.17.13).

While the principal in Case Study 2 emphasised that he wanted the teachers to continue with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach *and it was up to them [the teachers] to find a balance*, in Case Study 1, Kate faced a continuous battle to stay true to her own beliefs and philosophy. She felt that her principal and colleagues had no understanding of her *silent fight to stay true* to her philosophical beliefs and her determination not to change to a formalised and structured approach that she perceived as a challenge to a Reggio Emilia approach.

A further shared barrier was the issue of accountability in each case study. Both Elle and Kate saw the accountability demands as a barrier to the implementation of a Reggio Emilia approach. Kate commented that the school community appeared to be *test driven* and questioned whether the school administrators and her colleagues perceived her as achieving the results they required. She felt constantly pressured to complete testing and Portfolio pieces which she recognised as not compatible with her approach to learning. Kate also questioned the type of professional development sessions she had to attend and reported that they were as a *waste of time and for schools that are only data driven* as she explained in her journal:

I question the message this is sending to the staff about what the school values [results only] and that secondly it makes my job so much harder (01.2.7).

Kate's line manager, Pat, also recognised these constraints in her interview. Pat recognised that a main barrier for Kate in the implementation process was the formalised testing that challenged her philosophical beliefs. She recognised that

for Kate, these demands were very difficult; however she did compromise to meet the school's expectations effectively. Pat commented that Kate *had to go along with it but it was certainly hard for her to do. She had to cover what we had to do but Kate was able to adapt it to her own approach* (05.17.7).

In Case Study 2, the level of teacher accountability was a barrier for Elle and Sally as they questioned the requirement to plan ahead. For them, flexible learning and project work demanded post-planning to allow the project to be responsive to the children. They recognised the need to then document the learning to ensure that it was integrated across a variety of learning areas. Both Elle and Sally commented that their Daily Work Pads, apart from the more structured literacy and numeracy sessions, were virtually blank until the day had been completed. For them, this barrier was complex because of their self-doubt related to their *loss of control*. While initially, pre-planning was a more comfortable mode, they recognised that it was not compatible with an emergent curriculum approach as discussed earlier. As they continuously observed and documented the children's high level of learning and engagement within the project work they came to feel more comfortable post-planning and to defend this approach in face of the demands for accountability.

This study found that meeting school demands, including those related to accountability, can be a barrier to implementing change and, further, that school administration plays a vital role in supporting teachers to overcome these types of challenges. These findings are similar to those of Stamopoulos (2012) who found that school leaders had a key role to play in supporting teachers to implement change. Additionally, the findings confirm that Australian teachers are continuing to adapt to the demands made by recent educational change (Briggs & Potter, 1999; Flear, 2010).

5.5.3 Support of Parents and Community

Another barrier highlighted in this study was the participants' need to be understood, supported and trusted by parents in the change process. This type of relationship with parents has to be built in Western Australia where the approach is still not widely understood, particularly by parents. This contrasts with the situation in Reggio Emilia where the social construct of the professional teacher is based on notions of trustworthiness and an understanding of the philosophy (Teriz & Cantarelli, 2001). While all the teachers in the study reported that they valued the involvement of parents and viewed them as vital partners in the educational process, Sally and Elle in Case Study 2, did not feel that their students' parents were sufficiently involved or understood the approach well.

Sally and Elle shared the view that parent and community involvement was an integral part of any school system. The difference for these two teachers was the parents' level of involvement and understanding of the Reggio philosophy which they felt was not sufficient to support the implementation of the approach. Sally spoke of community involvement and the importance of relationships in connection to the philosophy and her own teaching philosophy. She discussed in her interview that a strong part of her beliefs was gaining community involvement and developing a shared vision but she found that this was so difficult in her context that it became one of the most influential barriers to the implementation. Although Sally recognised that most parents were supportive of the children's learning and the approach used in the setting, she maintained they did not truly trust her approach as they did not understand the philosophy, particularly as it related to the image of the child and the role of project work.

Elle also reported dissatisfaction with the level of parent support based on their involvement in the project work in her setting. She commented that this *is one of the biggest barriers- in the ability to get them on board and in getting them to truly understand where we are going and why we are doing what we do* (04.12.6). Elle discussed how more understanding and a shared vision of the

approach would add to the value of the project work and assist the children to better achieve.

Added to this concern, was the growing pressure they both felt from parents to become more structured and formalised in preparation for transition into Year One. Sally commented that there was a lack of understanding of how children learn in early childhood. She expressed the conviction that the children were still being prepared for Year One, but in a less formalised way that better matched their learning needs and interests at a pre-primary level. She identified in her reflective journal that the parents appeared to lack trust in the teachers' judgments about meeting the children's needs and that they questioned some aspects of the project work.

Both teachers acknowledged that the documentation, as well as the meetings and workshops held at the beginning of the school year, supported the parents' understanding and built higher levels of trust, but they did not think this was sufficient to address the issue. Sally likened the level of support and the reciprocal relationships to those developed in Italy where collaboration between all involved is a crucial element of the philosophical approach and the project work. Both teachers felt a certain amount of pressure to meet or conform to expectations imposed on them by the parents and this, in turn, conflicted with their Reggio Emilia inspired philosophy. Both Elle and Sally struggled to make the process of documentation of project work important to parents, rather than have them focus on an end product or the results of a test. In spite of these efforts, they felt that the parents remained more interested in accountability measures as opposed to developing the reciprocal relationships and understanding required by the approach. This finding that parents tend to focus on the accountability aspect of documentation is consistent with what Sisson (2009) found in a USA based study of the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in an early childhood setting. In contrast, documentation is only one form of communicating the progress of a project in Reggio Emilia where

parents there are more involved in discussions as projects evolve and understand how they can be further enhanced and supported by their involvement (Millikan, 2003).

In summary, this study found that parent understanding and support of a new approach is important to teachers involved in the change process. This is consistent with Sisson's (2009) study which found that parent support was important to American early childhood teachers implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. However, the teachers in the current study felt that gaining this support was more complex in a mainstream context because parents had to adjust to understanding children's educational needs as well as how these were met within an unfamiliar approach. Therefore, when that parent support was not given, it could prove to be a barrier to the implementation. Although the teachers' concern about a lack of parental support was persistent, they acknowledged that as parents became more familiar with the new approach, their relationships with them became stronger and higher levels of trust were built.

The teachers' recognition that parents are an important tool which can determine the success of any innovative educational change is consistent with research by Fler (2010). This finding also supports the view that educating parents and creating a shared vision with them is essential to overcome barriers and adapt to current pressures that inhibit philosophical change (Sisson, 2009).

5.5.4 Lack of Understanding and Feelings of Isolation

A lack of understanding of or support for the Reggio Emilia philosophy in some contexts gave rise to feelings of isolation for some of the teachers. In Case Study 1, the main barrier for Kate was a lack of understanding and support from her school and colleagues. In Case Study 2, while there was understanding and support for the philosophy from most colleagues, one teacher felt unsupported by her education assistants.

Kate perceived that her position implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in isolation from her colleagues was a constant challenge. This was a setting where she was passively supported, but where most colleagues did not share or understand her philosophical approach. Kate described her perceptions of the barriers she faced in the interview.

My biggest barrier is being in a school that doesn't share your philosophy or doesn't understand your philosophy. It is probably the understanding – they [the school] may support what you are doing – but they don't understand it and they are not willing to give you the physical support. Along with that comes the other teachers you work with who don't share your philosophy – they don't understand it – you are in complete isolation. You are by yourself and no one really understands why you are doing it (01.1.9/10).

Kate's line manager, Pat, acknowledged that a main barrier for Kate was that she was not provided with the level of freedom or the resources she required to implement the approach. Pat noted that there was a lack of consistency in the level of support that Kate received from the school leadership. She described this in her interview.

Kate would be verbally supported but when it came to the level of implementation, things would be taken back on what would be supported. She [Kate] found this very difficult to deal with in thinking that she had his [the Principal] support. This was very frustrating for her. There was also a lot of indecisiveness in what she could do (05.17.7).

This indecisiveness caused Kate to lose trust in the leadership of the school. While Kate felt support from Pat, the varying degrees of support and levels of understanding from other school leaders further increased her feelings of isolation within this context.

Kate identified that a consistent level of financial support would have supported the implementation of the philosophy in her setting. She claimed that the limited supply of resources impacted negatively on the learning program and aesthetics of the environment. Even though particular items were requested, they were

deemed *not necessary or needed* which further supported Kate's feeling that there was a lack of support for and understanding of the approach.

Kate felt that her approach to learning was not being communicated to other staff members or the community. She commented that this barrier or elements of it could have been overcome if her approach was communicated to others in a way demonstrated how it supported children's learning. Kate's sense of isolation was increased by what she perceived as the conformist nature of the other teachers. This was evident in the way Kate was viewed as different and her program was seen as not conforming to the norm for that school. Her partner teacher described Kate's program in terms of it not meeting expectations when she said, "*We don't do that here*". A further comment related to how this difference threatened Kate's colleagues in the same area of the school was, "*We don't want the parents talking*". This suggests that partner teacher feared that parents would compare the different programs being offered in the pre-primary area.

Kate's line manager, Pat also supported Kate's views in her interview discussion. Pat acknowledged that other staff members were concerned about Kate's implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. There seemed to be a perception that the school was being too flexible if one teacher could implement a philosophical approach that differed from the norm and there was a level of uncertainty in relation to Kate's role within the school. Pat recognised a lack of understanding and support from staff when they constructed the flexibility that Kate was given as an equity issue related to her being excused from expectations they felt they had to meet. Pat described this concern in her interview.

We had a school philosophy and here we had one teacher that was given more flexibility to not follow or given a little bit of flexibility to say well this is what we're doing and you can do it this way. In the early days, there was a level of disgruntlement from the staff and different expectations from different staff members. She did manage to win some of them over once they saw what she was doing (05.17.3).

For Kate, this pressure to conform was evident in the school's mandated curriculum and assessment requirements that did not allow for the recognition of an approach that required flexibility and assessed learning differently. Kate viewed her isolation and the lack of understanding from colleagues as impeding her development as a professional educator as she commented in her interview.

You don't have any room for growth...you are doing it alone. You can't talk to people about what you are doing and bounce ideas off each other – you grow professionally as you find out more about yourself and what other people are doing and you go on a journey together. I get excited by that learning. There are a few teachers who have mentioned their interest but there is no real interest really (01.1.11).

These findings are consistent with those of Anning, Cullen and Fler (2009) who noted that significant tension can arise between staff because of differences in theoretical perspectives and expectations involved in innovative change.

Another participant to discuss a feeling of isolation was Sally, although the nature of her feelings differed from Kate's. Where Kate felt isolated from her school colleagues, Sally felt isolated from colleagues in other mainstream contexts in Western Australia. She commented that implementing a Reggio inspired approach was *not common ... not at all* (03.9.17). While she identified this feeling of isolation as a barrier, she considered herself *lucky* that she was employed in a school with colleagues who supported and understood the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Lisa's sense of isolation was different again and related to a lack of understanding and support from her education assistants. In her interview, she described how she had two part time assistants working within her pre-primary setting. While she noted that her assistants were *lovely people*, Lisa perceived them both to have a lack of understanding and a limited amount of enthusiasm for the Reggio Emilia approach. This had impacted negatively on Lia's adaptation and implementation of the approach and how she perceived their role in supporting the children by provoking and creating interest in their learning.

Lia explained in her interview that she was confused as to why the education assistants were not supportive. She questioned whether it was that they lacked understanding or that the changes being made did not match their own philosophical understandings of how the Reggio Emilia approach should be implemented within the setting. This uncertainty caused Lia to doubt her decisions which further eroded her confidence. Lia spoke about her education assistants' responses to the change in her interview.

I know the enthusiasm is not there. It is not a personal thing but it makes you question yourself and if you are doing things the right way or not. I think, 'Do I need to adapt what you are doing too?' (02.5.7).

This concern was not mitigated by the professional development the teacher assistants had completed but rather, Lia thought it would be an ongoing issue for her for the remainder of the school year.

In this study, a feeling of isolation from colleagues because of a lack of understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach was identified as a barrier in Case Study 1 and to a lesser degree in Case Study 2. The two participants who felt the most isolated noted that the differences in the philosophical underpinnings that informed the mainstream and Reggio Emilia approaches meant that support from other professionals was needed for innovative change to occur. In Case Study 2, the feeling of isolation Lia felt were mitigated by the high level of support from immediate colleagues and the school administrative team.

5.5.5 Lack of Networking

All four teachers wanted more collaborative working relationships within their school and beyond at a local and state level in order to promote their personal and professional growth. Kate noted that she had no other colleagues with whom to share her views and mentioned in her interview that a professional membership to Reggio Emilia related networks such as ReMida (Recycling Educational Centre) and the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE) were not provided or supported by the school. In Case Study 2, all three

teachers commented on their professional membership of both these associations, paid for and supported by the school. What all four participants found limiting was the nature of the professional development provided within the school and the lack of time provided to attend available professional learning and networking outside the school.

Sally and Kate admitted to having to be more *proactive* in attending courses that were provided needing to regularly attend the Perth based Reggio Emilia network group that met at a designated school twice a term. During the observation period and data collection phase, a Perth Reggio Emilia network meeting was held at the school site of school B. While these meetings were attended regularly by the three teachers in school B, all felt that *there is never enough time to talk and ask questions, or a common time to meet*. Sally particularly felt strongly about this and commented that there *needs to more professional development and networking based on the Reggio Emilia philosophy and [there was a need to] make Reggio more well known*. She discussed how *they [she and her colleagues] are ready for the next step now and they are trying to get more people involved and expand the network* (03.9.19).

A lack of professional networking to promote the participants' level of professional growth was identified as a barrier to the change process in this study. Other research has found that support structures and ongoing professional learning are essential to lead change when new perspectives are implemented (Stamopoulos, 2012). As described in both case studies, opportunities and time to develop shared understandings within network groups were considered essential for educators to pursue change. This finding supports Evans and Stone-Johnson's (2010) claim that effective networks that promote sharing of professional knowledge empower educators. Further, they found that supportive leadership is critical in promoting networking as it is difficult to sustain because of the challenge teachers face when asked to re-conceptualise their beliefs (Evans & Stone-Johnson, 2010).

5.5.6 Project Work

Implementation of the project work was a barrier for two teachers in Case Study 2. Sally and Elle described project work as *sometimes difficult*. Sally, in particular, found that having the flexibility and time to begin and progress project work was a challenge. However, she found this less so when programs such as formal literacy and numeracy components, which took time from projects, could be modified. This type of flexibility allowed Sally to implement project work more effectively as she described in her journal, *It has been like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders and now the children and I can freely explore our projects with more enthusiasm and the ideas are flowing more freely* (03.10.3).

Sally also discussed how the daily timetable and routine of the school impacted on project work in particular. She acknowledged that time is a factor for all teachers, but commented that it is harder when implementing a Reggio inspired project of work where time constraints limit the flow of ideas and the project itself.

It is hard to find that balance that is different to other mainstream schools – completing the things we need to get done and maintain the project work. We have to find that balance and we must learn to be flexible in how we teach (03.10.3).

Elle and Sally both shared similar view of project work as difficult and requiring a high level of teacher skill to manage. They noted that projects needed to progress at a pace where appropriate time was given to the children to develop their thoughts and ideas, while at the same time maximum engagement was maintained. Both teachers agreed that *skilling* the children was vital so they could express their ideas which then needed to be documented so that their learning was visible to others. They both commented in their reflective journals that this process was difficult with only the teacher and an EA available to help the children gain skills, particularly as they emphasised the process of the project work, rather the finished product.

Elle stated that a challenge for her was to design effective provocations to start projects. This concern related to the challenge she found in gaining control of the learning agenda for her students, as was discussed earlier. Elle discussed this difficulty in her journal.

The hardest part [of project work] is listening to all the children's ideas and plans carefully and not setting in your own mind how you want the project to move. The biggest challenge for me is letting go of all the pre-planning and going with the flow. It's hard to start the day not knowing what to set up or have all ready for the children to do. It is a matter of being on standby with resources ready.....Following their ideas and putting them into practice is not always easy (04.14.1).

Elements of self-doubt related to project work emerged as barriers for all three teachers in Case Study 2. For Elle, there was the constant self-doubt in relation to the project work that *it may not work out* or that *it can be a barrier. It may start and then it just falls flat and it's, well, where do we go from here?* (04.13.6).

Documentation of project work was identified as a difficulty by the teachers whenever they discussed project work. One of the key issues was limited time to do justice to the demands of documenting the children's learning. Sally and Elle noted it was frustrating trying to get all of the children's thoughts and ideas recorded and to collect all the documentation required. As Elle reflected in her journal, *It is collecting their thoughts and ideas that becomes quite a time consuming process as it is important to document every comment precisely in order to convey the children's messages in the right context* (04.14.3). She recognised this type of recording was a teacher skill that required time and practice to develop. She commented *as the children talk quite quickly, writing fast and recording their language is an important skill for my assistant and me to learn* (04.14.2). Despite these difficulties, Sally and Elle viewed the ongoing process of documentation as valuable for informing the learning process and providing evidence of the children's learning for the parents, children and the school. As Elle noted, *it is worth the time as it provides a wonderful snapshot of*

individual children's capabilities, thought processes and love for learning (04.14.2).

The teachers in this case study, reported that changes in their belief system, use of time and management of the project work challenged them but helped them to become more open and flexible and to move away from pre-determined planning, schedules and outcomes. This finding supports Millikan's (2003) research that found that the implementation and interpretation of the project work is complex and requires teachers to understand the social nature of the process and to commit time to it. It differs from the common type of project work undertaken in Australian schools which focusses on set topics and finding out facts in that it is about supporting children to find good questions to stimulate their learning in collaboration with others. As has been found by Fraser (2006) in a different context, teachers doing this type of project work in a different cultural context require support and time to cope with challenges that they face as they research and support children.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS

IMPACT ON THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL TEACHER

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to research question three which examines the impact of the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a mainstream context on the professional role of the teacher. These findings are based on a thematic analysis of six semi-structured interviews, one with each of the four teacher participants and two administrators who participated in the study, the teachers' reflective journals and field notes from observation sessions. The themes which emerged were further analysed and grouped into categories based on the four key roles taken by teachers in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach as identified by Hewett (2001) and Follari (2007). That is, a collaborator and co-learner, a guide and facilitator, a researcher, and a reflective practitioner.

The four teachers' perceptions of how they fulfilled each of these roles and how the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach had influenced this will be presented and compared and contrasted. This will be followed by a cross case analysis that will include an exploration of the influences on these changes in role and the impact this has had on the teachers' practices.

6.2 Teacher as Collaborator and Co-learner

All four participants perceived themselves as a collaborator and co-learner with the children in their settings, although with some differences in the way they saw this role. The participants identified themselves as learner-centred and as co-learners as they collaborated and explored new understandings together with the children in their classes. The themes in this category included how the teachers

viewed themselves as active listeners, questioners and collaborative learners with the children, colleagues and parents.

The four participants noted in their interviews how they perceived their role as different to that of a mainstream teacher in that they were collaborators and co-learners. Kate assumed that some teachers who were not Reggio Emilia inspired may *talk, give, provide and answers* for children during the teaching and learning process. In contrast, she described her role as *giving, receiving and questioning* with children as they co-constructed knowledge together (01.1.8). Kate perceived her role to be that of a co-learner and collaborator alongside and *with* the children which strongly reflected the collaboration and relationships principle of the Reggio Emilia approach. She asserted that a crucial part of this role was to model curiosity and excitement about learning. Kate saw this as reflecting the socio-constructivist approach that underpins the Reggio Emilia philosophy (01.1.9).

Lia, in Case Study 2, noted that her perception of her role as a teacher was different since becoming Reggio Emilia inspired. She reported that she had changed from being a structured teacher directing children who learnt *from her*, to being one who was more flexible and whose role allowed for co-learning *with* children. She reported that she had had to *force* herself to become a *better listener and guider of children during the learning process* (02.5.4). Lia initially struggled with this notion of participative practice where children are encouraged to collaborate and learn from each other. In contrast to her current beliefs, she held the view that the teacher should have *total control* over the learning in the setting.

Similarly, Elle noted that her role as a co-learner with the children had evolved and changed as she implemented a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. She spoke in her interview about how she was previously an *assertive* leader who directed children and their learning, rather than collaborating with them to decide the

direction of a learning project (04.13.2). Elle acknowledged that the implementation of this approach had challenged her perceptions of her role as a teacher and her own beliefs related to *how children should be learning*. She commented in her interview how the philosophy had impacted her belief system and made her a *stronger teacher* and one who is now more comfortable with her role as a co-learner in the setting. She perceived her new role as a more *natural way of teaching* that reinforced her view of children as strong, competent learners, a key principle of the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Consistent with her new role as a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher, Elle had created a culture in her setting that promoted relationships between all learners and encouraged collaboration in many different ways. This was evident in the way that children discussed, listened and questioned during whole class meetings, small group work and in shared partner experiences (04.15.2). Elle's role as a co-learner was particularly important to her as she commented in her interview.

My role involves listening carefully to the children, guiding their thinking with questions and collaborating with them as to where their ideas may want to go. It is important that we do this together and learn from each other (04.13.4).

All four participants identified *a pedagogy of listening* as an important element of this particular role. They reported they were active listeners who acknowledged children's ideas as worthy of attention as opposed to *talking to* children (01.3.4; 04.15.3). This was evident in how the teachers encouraged children to lead discussions during daily class meetings or small group work. Kate believed this was essential to promote and support the children to offer emergent thoughts and ideas.

Kate identified that as an active listener, her role was to encourage a conflict of ideas between learners during conversations and *that confrontation provokes higher thinking and defined moments of learning* (01.2.7). She reported that this

aspect of her role had been influenced from her time in Italy where this type of conflict was encouraged in order to promote the provocation of new questions and thinking.

Elle found her role as co-learner and explorer with the children more interesting than the alternative *transmitter of all knowledge* approach. She saw listening to and acknowledging the input of all learners as important aspects of the role, particularly during project work.

The four teachers identified questioning as an important strategy to provoke, model, guide and extend the children's thinking. They identified questioning techniques that encouraged sustained shared thinking and within this, the exploration of new concepts and ideas related to the project work, as particularly important. Kate noted that it was the children's questions that led the project work as they researched together as co-learners (01.1.6). Sally viewed the skill of questioning as important in her role of encouraging children to co-learn together. She had seen her role previously as directing the questions and leading the children in a teacher-imposed theme. Sally noted how her role had changed and that she was now more *in tune* with the children's interests provoking her to question children differently. This had influenced Sally to examine how she questioned children and how it challenged children to *think differently and become more accepting of other people's ideas and thoughts in order to learn together* (03.10.5). Kate and Sally also noted that it was the responsibility of the teacher to become skilled at planning, developing and using questions.

The participants in both case studies noted the importance of their collaborative role as co-learners with colleagues and parents, as well as their students. Elle noted that in the context of her school, collaboration was essential among staff members to ensure effective implementation of the approach and for her, to ensure that she *was doing the right thing*. This collaboration encouraged reflection and contributed to project work when it stimulated new thinking and the

exploration of new directions. Sally and Elle's collaboration was facilitated by the administration team providing them with common DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time. Further, this support from the school's leadership team was perceived by the teachers to be an endorsement of their collaboration and an indication of the trust placed in them. This view was reflected in how the line manager in this setting, Natasha, described this collaborative approach to teaching and learning within their school.

We really believe in this approach and the idea that the teachers require time to do this in their collaborative role. We realise that to support collaborative learning in the settings is important and that the teachers need the skills and resources to do this properly. Who is sitting in the big chair [the principal] is also important to assist the teacher's role in how they wish to implement the approach. It comes from his drive and how he trusts and supports the teachers (06.19.14).

The collaborative effort of their colleagues provided affirmation for Sally, Elle and Lia that what they were doing *was right for the children* as they adopted the role of co-learners with children. Sally asserted that listening more to others, as well as reflecting on her practice, *helped* her to develop her role as a teacher. This, in turn, inspired her to continue with this approach to education.

Kate saw her role as a collaborator and co-learner as extending to the parents of the children she taught and her line manager. This role included provoking and leading significant others in the process of learning together. The project work and documentation books provided the parents with an insight into their children's learning processes and the role of the teacher as a co-learner and collaborator. This approach to learning was recognised and valued by her line manager, Pat, who noted her views in her interview.

I loved the way that everything Kate did emanated from the children's interests and their needs... her interactions with the parents and how she documents the students' conversations. The children lead her teaching and she co-learns with them. It is inspiring to see (05.17.1).

What was different for Kate, compared to the other teachers in this study, was the lack of collaboration with her school colleagues. Though she felt supported by her Education Assistant (EA) and her line manager, there was minimal opportunity to collaborate with other teachers. She noted that working with colleagues who held a shared vision and who understood her role as a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher would have affirmed her role within this mainstream context. Kate believed this lack of collaboration with colleagues further increased her feelings of being isolated and of not being valued within her teacher role.

6.2.1 Cross Case Analysis of the Role of Collaborator and Co-learner

The findings in this study confirm that the teacher as a co-learner and collaborator is an important construct for the effective implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, as has been argued by Bullard (2010), Follari (2007), Fraser (2006), Fu, Stremmel and Hill (2002), Hewett (2001) and Millikan (2003). All four teachers saw their role as co-learner and collaborator as central to a child centred learning approach. They recognised their role as crucial to establishing and maintaining a co-learning process and noted how this contributed to the ongoing collaboration and reciprocal learning among all participants.

While all agreed on the importance of this teacher role, the manner in which they developed and fulfilled it, differed across the cases. Kate, in Case Study 1, identified her current role as a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher as similar to her previous one. She claimed that the philosophy underpinning the role of the Reggio Emilia teacher was consistent with her initial beliefs as a teacher. Her time teaching in Reggio Emilia (Italy) served to reinforce and develop these beliefs into a more coherent approach to teaching as her understanding increased. Even though she was only passively supported and did have to adapt her approach at times, Kate firmly believed that her role remained consistent with that expected of a Reggio Emilia teacher. While she did not have the opportunity for collaboration with other colleagues during the implementation process, her confidence and self-belief were sufficiently strong to allow her to resist the

pressure to adopt mainstream practices or to compromise her role as a Reggio Emilia teacher.

In contrast, the participants in Case Study 2 noted that their role had changed as a result of their increased knowledge of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and changing belief system. Prior to this change, they reported taking a role as an assertive leader who did not co-learn together with children but rather directed them to what should be explored or used in thematic work. This could appear to contrast with the social construct of the professional teacher in Reggio Emilia which is based on a view that teachers are partners who co-learn with their students (Millikan, 2003).

This change in role would seem to be influenced by a number of factors. Firstly, the school had adopted a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in early childhood as a school-wide policy. This meant that the teachers were expected to engage with the philosophy as part of the terms of their employment. Further, they were provided with support and encouragement to develop their professional knowledge of the approach and the roles they needed to adopt within it. As their understanding of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach grew, they came to understand and value the socio-constructivist view of education and this, in turn, impacted on their beliefs. Finally, the facilitation of collaboration meant that the three teachers were able to co-construct a shared vision of their role and support one another to make the changes required.

These findings are consistent with the view that it is the role of a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher to create a partnership with the learner as they actively listen, question and collaborate in a participatory process (Fraser, 2006; Hewett, 2001). The teachers recognised that communication was essential for successful collaboration. These collaborative processes were facilitated by the listening and questioning processes that all the teachers identified as an important component of their teaching practice. In taking this approach, the teachers were responsive

to children's evolving ideas and interests and able to extend their learning through open ended questioning and feedback that challenged their thinking during the project work. This approach to teaching is consistent with that described by Follari (2007) and Hewett (2001) as a Reggio Emilia teacher role.

The role taken by the teachers in this study is consistent with that advocated in the teaching and learning principles of *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009). The elements of early childhood pedagogy and practice in the framework emphasise collaboration between all participants. This collaboration requires the educator to take an active role in children's learning as they co-learn with them. Additionally, the framework advocates responsiveness to children's ideas and play and asserts that relationships are strengthened as teachers and children learn and share the decision making process together (DEEWR, 2009).

6.3 Teacher as Guide and Facilitator

The second cluster of themes that emerged from the data analysis concerned the role of the teacher as a guide and facilitator of learning. The four participants all identified that their role in the learning process was changing as a result of implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. They noted that they were shifting from a teacher-directed role to one where the children's questions and interests determined the shape of the curriculum. Some of the teachers found this change in their role to be very difficult, particularly where it required them to develop an emergent curriculum in collaboration with their students. This change required them to take on a more flexible role as they guided and facilitated their students' learning.

This flexibility was needed as the teachers could no longer presume to know what the children were interested in or to organise their learning around a specific theme which they had chosen to focus on for a particular length of time. Instead, they viewed their role as facilitators, who negotiate, listen to and scaffold

the children's learning based on their interests and as part of this process, develop project work that has no time constraints. This project work is actively researched by the children who are guided to express their thinking and learning in many different ways through *The Hundred Languages*. The teachers viewed this new role as an effective way to promote critical, independent and creative thinking and not to pre-determine learning outcomes for the children.

The emergent curriculum not only challenged the teachers to be more flexible in their role, but also required that they share power with their students. They had to relinquish their role as the planner and manager of learning and allow the students to lead the learning. They found that this took conscious effort. Elle commented that she was *having to put the planning aside and push my own ideas aside to allow the thoughts of the children to come through* (04.13.5). Kate and Lia, like Elle, took on a role where they viewed planning as occurring *with* the children rather than *for* the children. Kate asserted in her interview that she found it *patronising to the children if we presume to know what the children are interested in and if we decide and determine everything for them* (01.1.6). The participants acknowledged that in the role of a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher, they should not see themselves as the sole source of information but rather, must play an active role in providing the children with provocations so they are motivated to explore new ideas. Both Kate and Elle noted that this was not to impose ideas, but to support and scaffold children in the process of building and constructing knowledge together. This is how Lia described the changes this view of learning had led her to make in her role.

My role is to facilitate the learning based on their interest, either through a provocation by me or the children, or a discussion I have had with a child or observed. I am much more flexible in altering and adjusting the original plan according to where the children want to take the topic, but I don't have themes and pre-plan (02.6.8).

The role of facilitator and guide adopted by the four teachers, however, made it difficult for them to meet the external demands for accountability and

responsibility within their teacher role. The greater need for flexibility meant the teachers had to provide more evidence of the children's learning to justify this alternative pedagogical approach.

Despite the similarities between the teachers' roles, the ways in which they found a balance between meeting the mandated mainstream curriculum demands and those of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach differed. Although the line managers in both contexts identified that the facilitative role taken by the teachers was supportive of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach and necessary for the project work that underpinned an emergent curriculum, their understanding of how this could be achieved while still meeting mainstream demands was different. The administration team in Case Study 2 were concerned about the impact of mainstream demands, but trusted the teachers to find an approach where these could be managed without compromising their role as Reggio Emilia inspired teachers. Natasha, the teachers' line manager, described her concern about balancing the demands and the possible impact on the teachers' professional role. She questioned how the school, within the Kindergarten to Year One area, was going to find that right balance and still remain true to the philosophy they believed in. She described this concern in her interview:

Their role involves a balance of mandated things and the balance of Reggio inspired practice.....let's see how it all sits or doesn't so it compliments what we are doing and not destroying what we are doing. It's just finding a balance (06.17.13).

Whilst the principal in Case Study 2 emphasised that he wanted the teachers to continue with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, Natasha reported that he had discussed with her that *it was up to them [the teachers] to find a balance within their role* (06.16.14). This allowed the teachers the flexibility required to develop their role in relation to the Reggio Emilia philosophy while still meeting mainstream demands within this context.

Finding a balance between the competing demands of mainstream and a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in relation to her role as a teacher was different for Kate, in Case Study 1. She reported facing continuous conflict as to how she wanted her role to be and how the school wanted it to be. She felt that neither the school community nor the principal had any understanding of her *silent fight to stay true* and only passively supported her role in this mainstream context. She perceived the school's formalised and structured approach to be a challenge to her philosophical beliefs and to her role as a professional teacher. It was, however, her determination not to change and to *stay true* to her belief system that earned trust of her line manager, Pat. Pat enabled Kate to follow her philosophical beliefs, but at the same time expected her to adapt her professional role where necessary to suit school expectations related to curriculum and reporting outcomes. Pat described this in her interview.

I was inspired to support her role as it wasn't compromising what we were offering in our school. I gave her flexibility in her role when trying to meet a more regimented phonics approach, which was difficult for Kate. She had to compromise effectively (05.17.2).

These pre-determined outcomes that demanded a more structured teacher directed role conflicted with Kate's preference to facilitate and guide children's learning. Kate commented on this challenge in her journal.

I am constantly going to PD [professional development] days and being at a school that promotes direct teaching methods – it makes my job so much harder! It is so disappointing too – is my principal going to force me to change the way I teach? Is a direct teaching approach going to be enforced? I will be fighting all the way (01.2.8).

This determination to remain *true* to her role as a guide and facilitator of children's learning would seem to be influenced by the time Kate spent living and teaching in Reggio Emilia and the deep understanding of the approach she developed as a result. Her valuing of the way this approach inspired the children and their parents, as acknowledged by Pat (05.17.1), also encouraged her to persist, despite the difficulties she faced.

6.3.1 Cross Case Analysis of the Role of Guide and Facilitator

In this study, all four teachers recognised their role as guide and facilitator as important to the process of co-learning. They reported that taking on this role required a fundamental shift in the way they worked. That is, they identified a change process as they shifted from a teacher directed role to one where they guided and facilitated their students' learning; a role consistent with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. They noted that managing this new role that was less structured and flexible, whilst still meeting the requirements of their mainstream context, was challenging. These findings are consistent with those of Harden and Crosby (2000), whose investigation of teacher roles found that a more student centred view of learning required a shift in the role of the teacher, including a need for greater flexibility. As with the present study, they noted that many teachers find it difficult when their role of authority and expertise is questioned as they adapt and change to a different role that is facilitative to learning (Harden & Crosby, 2000).

In Case Study 2, the teachers reported experiencing conflict in their belief system as they adapted their role to be consistent with a philosophical approach that was new to them. As part of this process, the teachers, at first, questioned whether they were able to engage and communicate with children in an informal way where open exchanges of ideas were provoked to guide the learning. They initially struggled with a shift to a facilitative process where more freedom and responsibility was given to the learners. However, as they grappled with their new roles, the teachers felt supported by the school leadership and their colleagues who had a shared view of the value of the approach. Additionally, they had the opportunity to develop greater knowledge of the role and confidence in their ability to manage it. Kilgallon, Maloney and Lock (2008) identified a shared vision, motivation and commitment from an administrative team as facilitative of change in the pedagogical beliefs and practices of early childhood teachers.

In contrast, it was Kate's strong belief system and her knowledge and understanding of the approach from her time spent in Reggio Emilia which largely supported her development of a facilitative role. It helped her resist the pressure to conform to more direct teaching pedagogy when there was only passive support from the school leadership. As compared to the participants in Case Study 2, Kate's approach to her professional role was more confident and assured. Even though she had to make adaptations to her practice and was more isolated in her setting, Kate's strong beliefs and professional knowledge largely sustained the change process. This finding is consistent with Stampopoulos' research (2012) which identified that a positive professional identity and knowledge can empower early childhood teachers to lead change in a successful manner.

6.4 Teacher as Researcher

In this study, the teachers saw themselves as active researchers. They reported that this role emerged from the related roles of guiding and facilitating learning and co-learning with children. Further, that it was a product of building shared research pedagogy that required a particular teacher knowledge and skill set.

The teacher as researcher role was evident in each case study as the teachers actively facilitated the children's research work and documented the learning process. The analysis of the data identified student centred approaches to learning that provided children with experiences *to share meaning and discuss personal theories together* (01.1.7). All four teachers noted the importance of their role as researchers as they worked closely together and engaged in open discussion with colleagues, parents and school leaders. They perceived that as part of this role, they had an obligation to *become knowledgeable* and to understand how they could guide the children as they *researched together*.

Kate noted that as a researcher she was also a co-learner as she learnt alongside the children. She noted the importance of her role in the research process in her interview.

I don't assume I know everything. The children do require direction and I see my role to facilitate and as the children research together; they can discover the answers to their questions (01.1.8).

Kate identified that the daily class meetings provided her with the opportunity to discuss, organise and monitor a class or small group research project with the children (01.2.6). In recognising the importance of the research work, Kate noted that *all theories and plans are acknowledged together by myself and all the children* (01.1.7). As a co-learner with children, she commented that it was the children's questions that led the project work and, therefore, was the basis of the research in her setting.

Like Kate, Elle saw that her role was to *co-learn with children and provoke and create wonder* through researching what the children's interests. She noted the importance of her role in helping the children to learn the skills they needed to obtain new information during the research process (04.13.6). This view that the children should lead the research and that the teacher should work alongside them was shared by Sally, who commented about it in her interview.

I am learning alongside the children as they research together. It is amazing to see them so excited about what they are learning, the skills they need to do this and their new discoveries (03.9.4).

The teachers identified that their role in the research process was changing as a result of implementing an emergent curriculum based on the children's interests. They noted a shift from a teacher led curriculum to a child initiated one as they provoked the children to become active participants in the learning. This change also challenged the teachers to consider new pedagogical knowledge and teacher skills. Elle and Lia described how the nature of shared research demanded a teacher become skilled at listening and responding carefully to the children's questions in order to identify a starting point for a research project. Lia

claimed that an important aspect of her role as a researcher was to model how to *ask questions, inquire and seek new information* for the children in her setting.

This shift in role challenged the participants to reconsider their pedagogical knowledge and to think about what teaching strategies they employed in order to facilitate the research process with children. Elle noted that she implemented a pedagogical approach that was inquiry led and that this required her *to think carefully about the different strategies which I could use to pursue their [the children's] interest in order to begin the research project*. The teachers recognised that in order to make these changes in their practice, they required greater professional knowledge related to child centred pedagogy in early childhood. In particular, they needed to understand how they could use different strategies to direct, guide and scaffold children's learning.

Sally noted that the research process and the skills required to *find things out*, challenged her to shift from her previous role where she directed the learning of the children. She commented on this aspect in her interview.

I would have done all the research beforehand and then told the kids what they needed to know – or presumed to tell them what they need to know. I didn't think they had the skills to research together and that I could facilitate this process properly (03.9.7).

Kate and Elle noted that different strategies were required in their researcher role depending on the how the children chose to initiate and proceed with their research. Kate commented on the complexities involved in guiding the children and in *taking the time to acknowledge those defining moments of learning and when to take it to the next level* (01.1.8). Elle acknowledged that her role as a researcher had evolved as she too had to consider *the most effective way to move the children along or even when to find a new direction...or even go back sometimes!* (04.13.4). Kate identified her role in the learning process centred on dispositions of *research, creativity, curiosity and uncertainty*. She identified the importance of implementing strategies that supported the research process and

that providing children with an opportunity to debate and discuss how their inquiries could lead to further project work. Kate commented on this in her interview.

It is important for children to feel safe when they discuss their ideas and put them forward and that it is okay for others to challenge the ideas of others when we research together (01.1.8).

Kate described how this *tension of knowledge building empowered children* and the importance of her role in facilitating this process of learning. She felt comfortable in her role as a researcher and noted that her view of the importance of this had been influenced by her experiences in Reggio Emilia. In this context, the teacher's role as a researcher was deemed to be very important and research was used prominently to enhance learning within every school. Kate also commented in her interview that this research was valued to the extent that it was displayed on documentation boards in the city for all the citizens to see as *a celebration of the learning by the children* (01.1.7). Kate also noted that the research work of the educators and children in Reggio Emilia was accessible to others through publications and annual study tours.

As part of the change process inherent in adopting the role of researcher, the teachers were challenged to develop a particular skill set. These skills involved searching for, collecting, interpreting and documenting information needed as part of inquiry based pedagogy. The participants noted that they had to reconsider their understanding of how to be a researcher and the skill set involved in facilitating this effectively when taking a co-learner role. Elle noted the challenges this held for her in her interview.

I had not seen my role as a researcher before this and I had underestimated the skills involved to not only allow the children to lead the research but how I would facilitate this process and the skills I needed to do this (04.13.7).

Like Elle, Sally reported that it *took time to adjust my role for a research process to happen with the children and this was difficult at first as I had to learn new*

skills as a teacher (03.9.6). Lia, too, acknowledged a shift in her role as she moved away from teacher directed strategies to developing new skills that allowed her to co-learn with children through research based inquiry learning. These new skills were required so she would *know how to search, collect and facilitate children to interpret information and the different ways in which this knowledge could be shown using the documentation process (02.5.7)*. Kate noted that these skills were *learnt along the way during the process*, particularly as she documented the research process for students, colleagues and parents.

The teachers noted that they had to consider the issues related to changes in the education assistants (EAs) pedagogical practice and roles, as well as their own. This was because the EAs supported the teachers in their role as researchers, particularly in the documenting of the children's learning.

6.4.1 Cross Case Analysis of Teacher as Researcher

The four teachers in this study recognised the importance of their role as researchers within a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to education. A role they reported finding challenging. This is not surprising as the difficulty of the role is widely acknowledged and seen to be due to its complexity and the time and deep thinking that it demands (Fraser, 2006). The participants in both settings noted that it was engagement with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in their setting that prompted them to develop a role as a researcher. They reported that there was a relationship between their role as researchers and the pedagogical practices they adopted as they became researchers with children, with each of these aspects influencing the other in the change process. The teachers identified that while this change process was challenging, it had enhanced the co-learning and facilitative approach to learning they had adopted in their settings.

For Kate, a deep understanding of how research enhanced learning inspired her to co-learn alongside the children as they investigated questions together or in

small independent groups. She noted in her reflective journal that the rich learning of the children from this research and the positive reaction from their parents affirmed her commitment to develop her role as a researcher. Similarly, the teachers in Case Study 2 were motivated to replace more teacher directed pedagogy in recognition of the importance of research in co-learning with children. They recognised, however, that to be successful in the researcher role they assumed as a result of this pedagogical change, they required further knowledge and skills.

All four teachers recognised that the teacher's role as a researcher is an integral part of the educational theory and teaching practices of the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Millikan, 2003; Vecchi, 2001). The way they viewed that role is consistent with Malaguzzi's description in that it involved gathering information, analysing it, and reflecting on it in collaboration with other teachers and the children themselves (cited in Millikan, 2003; Follari, 2007). The teachers recognised that they needed to acquire new skills in order to guide children and to observe and record their research findings to provide a *visual memory* of the learning process. Hewitt (2001) also found that the researcher role motivated teachers to learn new skills.

6.5 Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

All the participants in this study believed they had become deeper thinkers and were more critical of their teaching practice since adopting a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Their new roles as co-learners, facilitators, guides and researchers challenged them to critically evaluate their work, both individually and collaboratively. In this reflective role, they sought to understand alternative teaching pedagogy and reflected critically on their current practices and the theoretical positions that underpinned them.

The four participants reported questioning their understanding of teaching and learning in their search for pedagogical practices which would best support

children's learning. The implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach both stimulated this reflection and provided a framework for it. Through implementing this new approach, they had become *deeper reflective thinkers*. The participants recognised that this type of reflective practice was a form of ongoing learning which encouraged them to make positive changes in their pedagogical practice. They all noted that they found this level of reflection challenging.

Kate and Elle asserted that they had always been reflective practitioners but that under the influence of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, this reflection was more concerned with developing *a deeper understanding of how children learn* (01.1.7). Further, Elle was particularly concerned about her *understandings of each child in relation to this philosophy and practice* (04.15.4). Kate claimed that reflective practice helped her to better understand her role in the learning process. As with Kate, Lia and Sally focused their reflection on the learning process but additionally noted how this motivated them to build their professional knowledge. Like Kate and Elle, they acknowledged that adopting a Reggio Emilia inspired approach encouraged them to become deeper and more critical, reflective thinkers. This, in turn, had helped them to accept the change that was part of engaging with a different philosophy of education. As Elle described in her interview, the capacity to reflect more deeply and share ideas and problems with colleagues had *made it so much easier to accept and take on a different philosophical approach* (04.14.9).

Elle, Sally and Lia noted that making time for reflection was challenging despite seeing it as crucial to the change process. Kate, too, suggested in her journal that with deeper reflection and a shift in pedagogical practice, *more time was required to do this thinking* (01.2.6). In Case Study 2, the school leaders acknowledged the importance of collaborative reflection and the time it requires and, therefore, provided the teachers with common DOTT time to facilitate this

type of collaboration. The line manager, Natasha, noted in her interview how the school provided a common time.

a common DOTT [Duties Other Than Teaching] day for all the teachers, which allowed them to reflect, recognise their own limitations and make decisions as to what changes they could make in their everyday practice to improve (06.19.15).

This provided the teachers with time to share challenges, offer suggestions, question, debate and re-evaluate their current approaches. Sally commented that the time provided for collaborative reflection supported the participants to become *more open minded and more accepting of others' points of view* which she claimed further enhanced her collaborative relationship with colleagues. Sally and Elle also discussed how they were able to see the different perspectives of both the children and their colleagues as they became more open to change and to adopting the student centred approach of the philosophy that guided their teaching. Lia and Sally both noted that professional development, personal research into the Reggio Emilia approach and collaborative reflection with colleagues supported their development as reflective practitioners.

Natasha, their line manager, commented on the teachers' ability to reflect and, so, to become more open to change and to adapting their teacher role as they began to implement this approach. She expressed these thoughts in her interview.

I feel that the teachers with time and more teacher knowledge from research and the PD [professional development] they have done, have certainly become deeper thinkers and are able to discuss, question and even debate what they think is best practice and that this is based on making informed choices and evidence from the documentation they observe, collect and discuss (06.19.8).

As Kate was teaching in isolation, she noted that much of this reflective process was carried out internally, or with her Education Assistant (EA) before or after

school. Kate noted that this reflection was essential to allow her to critically examine her decision-making about the children's learning. She claimed that her reflective role as a teacher would have been further enhanced had she *other like-minded colleagues to share my thoughts, problem and ideas with* (01.2.5). This lack of shared reflective thinking and discussion with teaching colleagues challenged Kate and added to her feelings of isolation.

This process of reflective practice provided the participants with the opportunity to seek further answers to questions about their practice and the philosophy that underpinned it. It also provided affirmation that they were implementing the approach *in the right manner* (02.6.8) and *with respect for the Reggio Emilia educational project* (01.1.6). The professional dialogue that was part of the reflective process was noted by Lia and Sally as increasing their level of confidence in their new roles as Reggio inspired teachers.

6.5.1 Cross Case Analysis of Teacher as Reflective Practitioner

The participants' perception of themselves as reflective practitioners was important to the change process explored in this study. This process required the development of knowledge and skills and a willingness and capacity to see issues from different perspectives, to inform decision making and to justify their approach to learning. The findings from this study suggest that the teachers were able to use new evidence to document and reconsider theoretical positions, a capacity identified by Fu, Stremmel & Hill (2002) as essential to the role of a reflective educator. The participants' reflective practices were consistent with a social constructivist view of education and with the philosophy of Reggio Emilia which advocates reflection and questioning within a social context of discussion and collaboration with others (Fraser, 2006; Millikan, 2003).

These findings confirm that reflective practice is an important aspect of a teacher's professional role. The analysis of the data in both case studies showed that critical reflective practice was challenging for the teachers, particularly as

they were adapting to a different philosophical understanding of their role as teachers. However, it should be noted that they found that deeper and more critical reflection became less challenging as they gained knowledge about the approach and became open to discussing their theoretical position with others.

The central role of reflection in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach is consistent with one of the guiding principles of *The Early Years Learning Framework* (2009) which advocates that educators be ongoing learners and reflective practitioners. This principle suggests that it is the role of the educator to consider ways to build on their professional knowledge as they become co-learners with others (DEEWR, 2009). As was the case with the role of the Reggio Emilia inspired educators in this study, this framework encourages educators to critically reflect and examine their practice, as well as to consider and debate current theories of practice related to early childhood education (DEEWR, 2009).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will report the major findings of the study and the implications these have for early childhood practice. Additionally, the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will be discussed. The major findings of this phenomenological study concerned the factors which influenced the pedagogical change and the impact this change had on the role of the teacher.

7.2 Main Findings

This study examined how four teachers in two contrasting settings implemented a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to early childhood education. As the teachers developed new knowledge about this philosophy, they were challenged to change their pedagogical practices. Over time, these practices conformed to the seven main principles of Reggio Emilia (Fu, Stemmel & Hill, 2002). While this process was consistent across the two case studies, there were differences in the nature of the changes made and the influences on them in each setting. The three major findings related to the influence of educational policy and governance; the impact of philosophical change on pedagogy and then, in turn, on the role of the teacher; and, the way teacher characteristics both facilitated and inhibited change.

The first of the major findings related to the influence of educational policy and school governance on the change process. As was discussed in Chapter Five, policy and school governance in Case Study 1 impacted negatively on aspects of the implementation process despite the teacher's extensive knowledge of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach and commitment to the pedagogical changes it inspired. In contrast, in Case Study 2, supportive school policy and governance promoted rather than constrained the implementation process even though the

teachers reported having less knowledge of the approach and more self-doubt than the teacher in Case Study 1. The influence of school policy and governance on pedagogical change has been noted by Stamopoulos (2012), although her study investigated the influence from the point of view of professional leadership rather than from a teacher's perspective.

The current study found that the change process was supported when the school community shared a common understanding and vision of the changes to be made and documented these in school policies and governance, as was the situation in Case Study 1. Where a shared vision was not developed or reflected in the school policy and governance, there is a negative impact on the change process as was found in Case Study 2. This finding is consistent with that of Anning, Cullen and Flear (2009) who noted that where different theoretical perspectives are held within an educational context, innovative change is impeded.

The key role of policy and governance has implications for school leaders who are charged with responsibility to develop and implement these processes. In this study, school leadership was found to influence the process of pedagogical change. In Case Study 2, the leadership team and the teachers involved in the change process had a shared knowledge of the approach being implemented and the school policy and governance was consistent with it. This in turn, provided a framework for change and fostered the development of collegial support and collaboration. In contrast, in Case Study 1, the school leadership, with the exception of the deputy principal who was the teacher's line manager, were reported as knowing little about the Reggio Emilia inspired approach. In addition, the school policies and governance were not supportive of this approach to pedagogy and this, in turn, led to the teacher reporting that she felt very isolated in the change process. It should be noted, however, that this isolation was mitigated to some extent by the support of her line manager in the school.

Another aspect of school policy and governance which impacted the change process was the allocation of resources within the school. The study found that where this allocation took into account the pedagogical changes being made, the change process was supported. In Case Study 2, it was clear that staffing decisions and the allocation of resources facilitated change. This included staffing recruitment processes, staff allocation, providing teachers with time to meet to plan collaboratively, the availability of special funding for resources, including funds allocated to providing an aesthetically pleasing physical environment, and professional learning opportunities.

On the other hand, the teacher and her line manager in Case Study 1 reported that the allocation of school resources in their setting did not support the implementation process, except in the case of the allocation of the education assistant (EA) who understood and was supportive of the Reggio Emilia approach. The teacher noted that there were insufficient resources available to provide the learning environment she wanted to create for the children and that the professional learning opportunities available focused on pedagogy advocated in school policy, which mostly was not consistent with a Reggio inspired approach. Further, the line manager noted that other staff perceived any differences in the nature of allocations made to support the implementation as unfair even when the same level of provision was involved.

This finding extends other research (Fullan, 2001; Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin and Llamas-Sanchez, 2006; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008) which has found that the support of a leadership team and colleagues can facilitate pedagogical and educational change.

The second major finding of this study relates to how philosophical and pedagogical change led to changes in the teachers' professional role. All four teachers involved in this study identified the importance of their role and how this had changed over time due to the influence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and

the pedagogical changes it inspired. However, the nature of the role change differed across the two cases as each teacher sought to respond to the challenges they faced.

In Case Study 1, the teacher noted that her role was consistent with that expected of a Reggio Emilia educator, but had changed as she sought to adapt and conform to practices and governance within her mainstream setting. This setting challenged her as she received only passive support to teach in a manner consistent with a Reggio Emilia approach. Indeed, the teacher experienced conflict when she was forced to implement some pedagogical practices which were part of school policy but were inconsistent with a Reggio Emilia approach. She reported that these types of practices compromised her role as a Reggio Emilia inspired teacher. However, the teacher's high level of confidence, self-reflection, commitment to and knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach helped her to resist most of the pressure to compromise her role as a Reggio Emilia inspired educator. As a result, she only changed those practices which were necessary for her to be compliant with school policy and, wherever possible, she adapted the requirements to be more consistent with her philosophy.

The findings in Case Study 2, noted the ways in which the three teachers in this setting were learning to become Reggio Emilia inspired educators as part of the terms of their employment. The teachers reported that their role was impacted as they learnt more about the philosophy and consequently changed their pedagogical practice. This change in role was facilitated by whole-school policy and governance that supported the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach and provided the professional learning required for the teachers to develop their new role.

As the teachers' knowledge increased and their pedagogy and role changed, so too did their belief system. They reported that the change process encouraged them to reflect deeply on their beliefs and they recognised how these had

changed from those they held in their previous mainstream-oriented role. Finally, the change was further facilitated by collaborative processes as they co-constructed a shared vision of their role and reflected together. The teachers, therefore, became more committed and more resilient in the face of feelings of self-doubt as they supported each other to make the changes required. This finding is consistent with that of Harden and Crosby (2000) who found that teachers adapt and change their roles when implementing student centred practice.

As can be seen in the description of these two main findings in this study, the change process was influenced by teacher characteristics related to commitment, knowledge, self-belief, resilience and self-reflection which facilitated not only a process of pedagogical change, but also changes in the roles the teachers adopted. The ways in which these characteristics impacted on the change process were found to be interrelated.

In Case Study 1, these teacher characteristics were particularly evident and helped the teacher adopt a role consistent with the Reggio Emilia philosophy despite a general lack of support from the school's administrative team, policies and governance structures. In contrast, in Case Study 2, commitment, knowledge, and resilience were less evident, but were seen to have a role in reducing the impact of self-doubt which arose despite the high levels of support within this setting. Earlier research highlighted the important influence of these teacher characteristics (Harden & Crosby, 2000; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Overton, 2009) although not in the context of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach.

A commitment to the Reggio Emilia philosophy was found to be an important characteristic as the teachers responded to new knowledge by making pedagogical changes and adopting a new teacher role. The teacher in Case Study 1 noted that her high level of commitment to the approach sustained her

when changes that were incompatible with her philosophy were enforced by school policy and governance. Commitment motivated the teachers in Case Study 2 to pursue greater knowledge of the philosophy and to make pedagogical changes and adopt roles that contrasted sharply with those they had fulfilled previously.

This study found that commitment to pedagogical change relied on knowledge of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach. Knowledge, as an important teacher characteristic, was found to be critical for the teachers to recognise how they had to change their role in the setting in order to successfully implement the new approach. While the teacher in Case Study 1 had extensive knowledge of the approach, the three teachers in Case Study 2 were aware that they needed to increase their understanding through personal research and professional learning. In both cases, the teachers' knowledge reinforced their sense of self and belief in this philosophy which further increased their level of commitment to implementing pedagogical and role changes.

This study suggests that a strong sense of self and firmly held beliefs are critical for facilitating a process of change. The four teachers noted that as their belief systems changed, they were motivated to change their role in the setting. In Case Study 1, the teacher reported how school policy and governance challenged her philosophical beliefs and, at times, conflicted with her Reggio Emilia inspired role as a co-learner and facilitator with children. The parents in her setting and her line manager acknowledged it was her strong belief in the approach which encouraged her to persist in implementing pedagogical change, despite the difficulties she faced. In Case Study 2, the teachers reported experiencing conflict in their belief system as they adapted to a new philosophical approach. After the initial struggle to cope with change, the teachers' practice shifted to a student-centred approach with the support of the school leadership and their own growing self-belief.

As their self-belief strengthened, the teachers became more resilient in the face of challenges within the change process. Although already confident in her role, the teacher in Case Study 1 needed to become even more resilient as she faced challenges to her pedagogical approach from the broader school community. As has already been described, in this setting, the school policy increasingly promoted teacher centred approaches, including explicit teaching. In Case Study 2, the teachers needed to adopt a more adaptable and flexible role in order to implement new pedagogical practices. This change was difficult, especially as they lacked confidence in their knowledge and capacity. In this setting, the support offered by the school leadership and their colleagues helped them to build resilience and make difficult changes. Kilgallon, Maloney and Lock (2008) also found that a shared vision and commitment from school leadership helped early childhood teachers manage change.

Further, the current study found that the teachers became more reflective practitioners as they adapted to a new philosophy and were inspired to change their practices. All of the participants in this study noted that the change process was challenging but that the capacity to reflect critically became easier as they gained knowledge about and experience with the approach. This was evident particularly in Case Study 2, where the school administration allocated the teachers a common time for collegial discussion regarding their theoretical position and the impact the changes had on their teacher role. The teachers reported that this time supported them to both collaborate and reflect more successfully and that this, in turn, supported them to make the changes demanded by their adoption of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. This finding is consistent with that of Fu, Stremmel and Hill (2002) who found that collaboration and reflection were key influences in successfully implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. This is not surprising in light of research which suggests that the social-constructivist nature of the Reggio Emilia philosophy promotes reflection through collaboration with others (Fraser, 2006; Millikan, 2003; Vecchi, 2001).

7.3 Implications for Early Childhood Practice

The findings of this study have implications for early childhood practice, particularly in the area of pedagogical practice and the role of the teacher involved in a process of change. First, they suggest that it is important not only for teachers involved in innovative practice to understand how change may be implemented within mainstream contexts, but that the school leaders and school policy and governance be supportive.

As reported in the findings, early childhood leaders and educators need to understand the process involved in pedagogical change. The teachers undertaking the change require the support of the school leadership and policies that allow for innovation. In this study, it was clear that the teachers in Case Study 2 were able to make considerable changes in their pedagogical practices and roles because of the support of the school leadership team and school policy and governance that facilitated the change process. As part of this support, they had opportunities to collaborate with peers and to access professional learning related to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. With this support, change was possible despite the high levels of self-doubt and awareness of an initial lack of knowledge they reported. The teacher in Case Study 1, on the other hand, did not have the benefit of these facilitating factors and reported only being able to persist because of the quiet support of her line manager, high levels of commitment and personal and professional characteristics that supported her during the change process.

Secondly, the main findings suggest that the role of the teacher was impacted by philosophical and pedagogical change which, in turn, was influenced by professional learning. This process has implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education courses and professional learning courses that develop teachers' knowledge about pedagogical practice in early childhood settings, consider change processes or explore the development of philosophical beliefs. It was apparent in this study that the change process was driven by the

teachers' exploration of their own teaching philosophy in the light of new knowledge in this area of their practice. Their engagement with the Reggio Emilia philosophy led to them questioning and changing their own beliefs about learning and teaching. In turn, this prompted them to examine their pedagogical practice and to make changes to align it be more consistent with these new beliefs. This study found that these new practices were consistent with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to education as described by Fu, Stremmel and Hill (2002).

As part of this process, the teachers also questioned the role they took in their settings and made changes to this so it better matched their changed pedagogy. Professional learning was at the heart of this change process. This learning included collegiate networking, professional reading and formal professional learning courses. The development of network groups, such as the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE), could be further extended and accessed to support collaborative inquiry by teachers and their leadership teams as they engage with different cultural theory within their local context. In the case of the teacher in Case Study 1, there were no learning opportunities available in her current context, but she relied on previous, extensive learning experiences and her continued self-motivated learning to sustain the change process. She reported that a lack of collegiate support and further formal learning opportunities impacted on her work and personal welfare. In contrast, in Case Study 2, the teachers received support from collegiate networking, professional reading and formal courses. However, they reported wanting more as they found professional learning very supportive of the change processes in which they were engaged. This provision would recognise and address the feelings of isolation that teachers in this study reported feeling when implementing change.

Further, the findings from this study have implications for early childhood employers in mainstream contexts who plan to undertake a change process. As was the case in Case Study 2, some school administrators employ new staff with

the intention of having them participate in a planned change process. The findings from this study suggest that the teachers who successfully implemented change had the personal characteristics of high levels of commitment to change processes, knowledge of the new approach to be implemented, self-belief and a capacity to be reflective. Where there was a weakness in any one of these characteristics, strengths in others or the support of the school leadership could compensate as long as the commitment to change was present. In Case Study 1, the teacher persisted with the change process despite negative conditions in her context because of these personal characteristics. In Case Study 2, where the conditions in the context were very supportive, some of the teachers successfully implemented change despite high levels of self-doubt.

Finally, the study has implications for regulatory, as well as government and independent bodies responsible for the development and implementation of innovative practice and the change process this demands. This is particularly pertinent at this point in time when there are major Australia-wide changes occurring in early childhood education and care, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum. The findings suggest that effective communication, knowledge of the changes required at the setting level and an awareness of issues faced by teachers will assist in the change process. This includes clear communication between the education authorities, employers and teachers in regulated centres and schools. This study suggests that when teachers engage with the change process, it impacts on their pedagogical practices and their roles and that this is a demanding process that has positive outcomes when appropriately supported by policy at a local level.

7.3.1 Influences on Pedagogical Change

The findings from this study add to knowledge about how engaging with philosophically driven approaches to education, such as Reggio Emilia, can lead

to pedagogical change and, in turn, to changes in the role of a teacher. The study found that there were a number of factors that influence this type of change process. The central factor influencing change was the nature of the relationship built between the teacher and the children in the setting. This was strongly influenced by the teacher's philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning, particularly those related to how the child is viewed as a learner. This was particularly evident in Case Study 1 where the characteristics of the individual teacher were more influential to the change process than school or policy influences.

The learning environment, including other educators with whom the teacher interacts to facilitate the learning program, the school leadership team, the children's parents and the broader school community, were influential. This, in turn, was influenced by the policy framework guiding the decisions made in the school. These include curriculum policies, developed at both school and wider education system levels, and those policies related to governance, such as staffing and room allocations and budgeting.

The final factor found to influence change concerned decisions imposed on schools by the education system, such as national testing, and those prompted by research. This research may or may not be consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the change being implemented. The way these factors influenced change in two cases was described in this study and they are represented in the diagram below. The factors are represented in the diagram in terms of their relative influence on the change process in the context of this study. As discussed in the findings chapters, the relative influence of these factors changed through the implementation process.

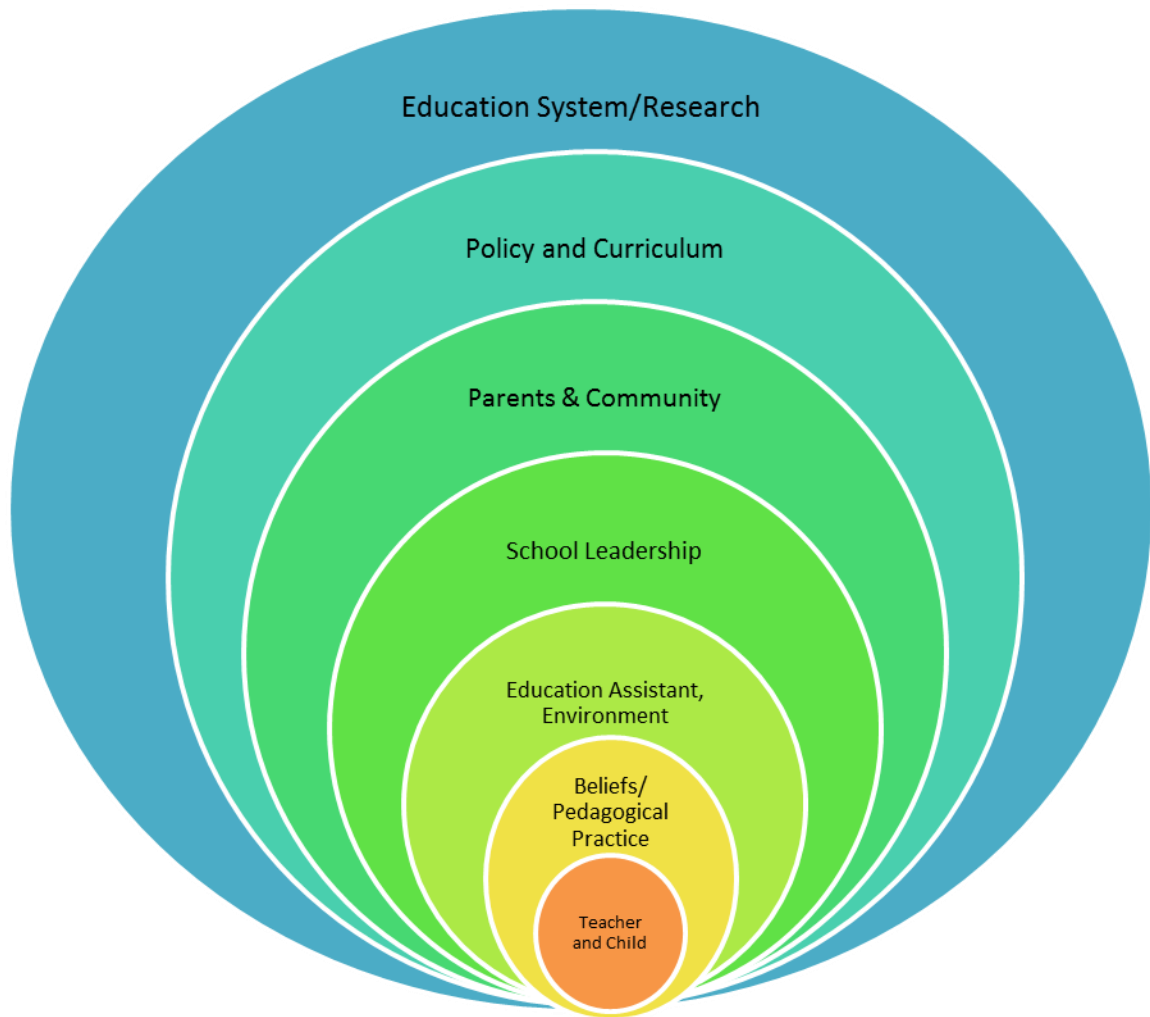


Figure 2: Influences on pedagogical change

This type of situational analysis of factors in the context influencing change as identified in this study may be used to assist others to systematically examine the factors which influence that process in their own contexts. Such an analysis would need to be on-going as these factors have been shown to be dynamic and inter-related, changing in influence over time. Therefore, this type of analysis could apply to system, school or setting (classroom) levels as ultimately any change regardless of the level where it is initiated will impact the learning of children. This study suggests that where these factors are sensitive to and reflect the changes being made, they facilitate the process. Where, on the other hand, they promote an approach to education that is in conflict with the innovation, they are barriers to change.

7.4 Recommendations

Findings from this research add to knowledge about pedagogical change at the setting level. These findings have implications for teachers, school leaders, governance processes, professional bodies, teacher employers and universities. The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings from this study.

Recommendation 1: The role of a shared vision of change

If employing bodies are committed to implementing pedagogical change, a clear articulation of the philosophical approach to teaching and learning which informs the change needs to be communicated to the school and its wider community. This will encourage the building of a shared understanding and vision for the change. Additionally, where educators are being recruited to engage in change processes, the job descriptions should be clear and specific in order to clarify what knowledge and level of commitment is required.

Recommendation 2: An understanding of the principles of the new approach

The success of the implementation of pedagogical change, such as with the implementation of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach as was the case in this study, would seem to require that all involved have a clear understanding of the principles of the approach to be adopted. This study suggests that the teachers involved and the principal and leadership team should have a common understanding of the principles that guide the implementation of the new pedagogy and that this needs to lead to a shared vision of how the change will occur. This vision should then be shared with the broader school community, including the parents of the children in the settings where the change is to be implemented.

In addition, the policy and governance structures of the school need to reflect the change planned so that the teachers are supported in the change process.

Thus, principals have an important role in providing leadership for successful change. It is suggested that school leadership teams and educators who implement change have knowledge of the particular teacher characteristics that may support or impede a process of change. These teacher characteristics may include commitment, knowledge, self-belief, resilience and reflection.

Recommendation 3: Curriculum flexibility

The success of pedagogical change depends on the degree to which teachers have the flexibility to respond to their students' learning needs with pedagogy that is consistent with the philosophy underpinning the approach being implemented while still meeting the school requirements. This degree of flexibility will be determined by state and federal levels of educational regulation together with the policy at school level. This study found that where teachers are able to determine, in consultation with their school leaders and communities, what pedagogical approaches best match the needs of their students and their school context, change processes are enhanced. Principals would seem to have a key role in determining how much pedagogical decision making is placed in the hands of teachers. Further, the study found that the change process is supported where teachers have the opportunity to make pedagogical decisions, share a vision for change with the school community and are part of a school-wide approach to change.

Recommendation 4: Access to professional learning

Professional and employer organisations, both government and private, should provide ongoing professional learning for teachers who implement pedagogical change. If professional organisations and schools are supportive of pedagogical change, this support needs to be evident in school and financial management policies and through provision of quality professional learning and resources to support the changes. This includes networking opportunities both within and across schools.

7.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this exploratory study suggest that there is a need for further research in this area of educational change. This research would need to be longer term so that it could focus on the implementation of pedagogical change over time. Additionally, the way this change process impacts pedagogical practice and the role of the teacher needs further investigation. The model developed from the findings of this study could assist in this process.

Further research is required in relation to the scope of the study. This exploratory study precluded the perceptions of parents, other colleagues (such as the education assistants or principals) or the children with whom these early childhood teachers worked. Their views would add greatly to the current understanding of the process and impact of change processes, particularly in relation to a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to early childhood education.

Finally, research should further investigate the perceptions of teachers who are teaching within a context that is not a mainstream setting. This could include teachers who are Reggio Emilia inspired working within independent settings or day care centres that are Reggio Emilia inspired as part of their centre policy. Additionally, the teachers' understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach within the political and social contexts where they work could be further investigated. The process of change in these types of settings has been investigated in other countries, but not in Australia.

7.6 In Summary

This study has made a contribution to an under-researched aspect of change in early childhood practice, particularly in Australia. It examined the process of implementing change prompted by adopting a Reggio Emilia inspired approach. It found that engagement with the Reggio Emilia philosophy led the teachers to implement pedagogical and then role changes. This study adds to knowledge about pedagogical change at the setting level and the impact of this process on

the role of early childhood teachers that creates both limits and possibilities for educators working towards more inclusive and engaging curriculum at the local level. The implications, recommendations and directions for further research which arose from the study provide insights for those who seek to understand the implementation and impact of a Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a different cultural, social and political context, and for those who seek to understand pedagogical change in its broader sense.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter for Participation in the Study



Claire Hall - Masters of Education

Implementing a Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach in a Mainstream Western Australian Context: the Impact on Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Role

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I acknowledge that I have sighted a copy of the **Information Letter** explaining the research project. I have read the information and any of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am confident that I understand the information provided. However, if I have any further questions I know I can contact the student investigator: Claire Hall.

I know that I may change my mind and withdraw my consent at any time, without explanation or disadvantage.

I understand that all information provided will be treated as confidential. I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published or used at conferences for educational purposes, provided names and other information which might identify me are not used.

I, _____ consent to participate in this research project.

(Please print First and Surname)

Participant's signature: _____ **Date** _____

Student Investigator:
Claire Hall
Faculty of Education and Arts
Edith Cowan University
Ph: (08) 6304 5489
c.hall@ecu.edu.au

APPENDIX B: Information Letter for Prospective Participant



Claire Hall - Masters of Education Implementing a Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach in a Mainstream Western Australian Context: the Impact on Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Role

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Dear Participant

The purpose of the research project is to investigate the impact on Early Childhood Teachers' professional role of a Reggio Emilia inspired teaching and learning approach.

As a participant in this study you will be observed in a teaching context and field notes will be recorded as a form of data collection. These observations will also be used to develop 2-3, one hour semi-structured interviews which will provide the researcher with information to help understand the facilitating factors and barriers in implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context. These interviews will be audio recorded with your permission and the student investigator will only have access to them. These will be stored on an ECU locked site and destroyed once the research project has been completed. A summary sheet at the completion of each interview will also be completed with your permission. You will also be asked to share information through a reflective journal (minimum 5 entries over one school term) and provide teaching and learning documents (eg curriculum documents, school policy, planning documents, newsletters, communications to parents) for analysis.

This project is supported by an Edith Cowan University Faculty of Education and Arts as a Masters of Education research thesis. The research project has received ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

You do not have to take part in this study. If you do, you may withdraw at any time without disadvantage. All participants will be provided with a letter that acknowledges their involvement in the study.

All information that is collected will be protected and treated as confidential. All information is stored under secure conditions and your name or any other identifying information will not be used. Participants can obtain a copy of the results of the project from the student investigator or supervisor in the form of a thesis publication. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Claire Hall on <c.hall@ecu.edu.au> or on 6304 5489. Claire is happy to clarify any matters and discuss any concerns you may have about how this research project is being conducted. If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to speak to an independent person, please contact Edith Cowan University's Research Ethics

Officer on (08) 6304 2170 or <research.ethics@ecu.edu.au>. Please also be informed that this research project has the approval of the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to participate in this research project, could you please complete the attached document headed 'Informed Consent for Participation'.

Yours truly,

Claire Hall
Student Investigator
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
Ph 6304 5489
Email c.hall@ecu.edu.au

Dr Yvonne Haig
Supervisor
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
Ph 6304 5491
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Mrs Sue Sharp
Associate Supervisor
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
6304 5484
Email s.sharp@ecu.edu.au

APPENDIX C: Information Letter for Participant – School Leader



Claire Hall - Masters of Education

Implementing a Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach in a Mainstream Western Australian Context: the Impact on Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Role

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT – SCHOOL LEADER

Dear Participant

The purpose of the research project is to investigate the impact on Early Childhood Teachers' professional role of a Reggio Emilia inspired teaching and learning approach.

As a participant in this study please note that the teacher participants will be observed in a teaching context and field notes will be recorded as a form of data collection. These observations will also be used to develop 2-3, one hour semi-structured interviews which will provide the researcher with information to help understand the facilitating factors and barriers in implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context. These interviews will be audio taped with participant permission and the student investigator will only have access to them. These will be stored on an ECU locked site and destroyed once the research project has been completed. A summary sheet at the completion of each interview will also be completed with permission. Teacher participants will also be asked to share information through a reflective journal (minimum 5 entries over one school term) and provide teaching and learning documents (eg curriculum documents, school policy, planning documents, newsletters, communications to parents) for analysis.

As a school leader, you will also be asked to participate in a one hour semi-structured interview to provide the researcher with information to help understand the facilitating factors and barriers in implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context. This interview will be recorded (written notes) as well as audio recorded with your permission. The student investigator will only have access to them. These will be stored on an ECU locked site and destroyed once the research project has been completed. A summary sheet at the completion of each interview will also be completed with permission.

This project is supported by an Edith Cowan University Faculty of Education and Arts as a Masters of Education research thesis. The research project has received ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

You do not have to take part in this study. If you do, you may withdraw at any time without disadvantage. All participants will be provided with a letter that acknowledges their involvement in the study.

All information that is collected will be protected and treated as confidential. All information is stored under secure conditions and your name or any other identifying information will not be used. Participants can obtain a copy of the results of the project from the student investigator or supervisor in the form of a thesis publication. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Claire Hall on <c.hall@ecu.edu.au> or on 6304 5489. Claire is happy to clarify any matters and discuss any concerns you may have about how this research project is being conducted. If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to speak to an independent person, please contact Edith Cowan University's Research Ethics Officer on (08) 6304 2170 or <research.ethics@ecu.edu.au>. Please also be informed that this research project has the approval of the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to participate in this research project, could you please complete the attached document headed 'Informed Consent for Participation'.

Yours truly,

Claire Hall
Student Investigator
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
Ph 6304 5489
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APPENDIX D: Information Letter for Principal



Claire Hall - Masters of Education Implementing a Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach in a Mainstream Western Australian Context: the Impact on Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Role

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PRINCIPAL

To the Principal

The purpose of the research project is to investigate the impact on Early Childhood Teachers' professional role of a Reggio Emilia inspired teaching and learning approach.

This letter is to inform you with the details of the research project to be conducted within the school. The participants in this study (the teacher/s) will be observed in a teaching context and field notes will be recorded as a form of data collection over a 10 week school period. These observations will also be used to develop 2 to 3, one hour semi-structured interviews which will provide the researcher with information to help understand the facilitating factors and barriers in implementing a Reggio Emilia inspired approach within a mainstream context. These interviews will be audio taped with permission and the student investigator will only have access to them. These will be stored on an ECU locked site and destroyed once the research project has been completed. A summary sheet at the completion of each interview will also be completed with participant permission. The participants will also be asked to share information through a reflective journal (minimum 5 entries over one school term) and provide teaching and learning documents (eg curriculum documents, school policy, planning documents, newsletters, communications to parents) for analysis. A school leader, with permission, will also be interviewed (and audio taped) during the research project for data collection purposes. This information will also remain confidential and stored in the same way as the teacher participant information.

This project is supported by an Edith Cowan University Faculty of Education and Arts as a Masters of Education research thesis. The research project has received ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

The participants do not have to take part in this study. If they do, they may withdraw at any time without disadvantage. All participants will be provided with a letter that acknowledges their involvement in the study.

All information that is collected will be protected and treated as confidential. All information is stored under secure conditions and names or any other identifying information will not be used.

Participants can obtain a copy of the results of the project from the student investigator or supervisor in the form of a thesis publication. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Claire Hall on <c.hall@ecu.edu.au> or on 6304 5489. Claire is happy to clarify any matters and discuss any concerns you may have about how this research project is being conducted. If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to speak to an independent person, please contact Edith Cowan University's Research Ethics Officer on (08) 6304 2170 or <research.ethics@ecu.edu.au>.

Yours truly,

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APPENDIX E:

Table 3: Example of Questions and Prompts for the Interviews

Research Questions	Example of Prompts to Use in the Interview/s
<p>How can a Reggio Emilia inspired approach implemented within a Western Australian mainstream context?</p> <p>What factors facilitate and what factors inhibit the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in a Western Australian context?</p> <p>How does this implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach impact on a teacher's perception of their role?</p>	<p>What are your philosophy and beliefs as an early childhood teacher?</p> <p>How does this philosophy of teaching and learning connect to the Reggio Emilia approach?</p> <p>Please tell me about what motivated you to implement a Reggio inspired approach.</p> <p>What elements of the approach do you currently implement within your teaching practice?</p> <p>How do you decide which principles you will implement? Can you provide evidence of this?</p> <p>I have observed particular principles of the approach being implemented such as..... Can you tell me more about this?(Refer to the 7 Reggio Principles here)</p> <p>How do you decide on which principles to re-create within your own context? (relate to the 7 Reggio Principles)</p> <p>How difficult has this been?</p> <p>What barriers have you faced in implementing the approach within a mainstream context?</p> <p>How do you manage the factors that limit you in implementing the approach?</p> <p>What barrier has been the most difficult to overcome?</p>

	<p>What factors have assisted you in making this approach successful within your setting?</p> <p>Are there resources available to you to assist you in implementing this approach? Have you had the opportunity to complete any professional development related to implementing the approach?</p> <p>In what ways does the school /administration team support your Reggio inspired approach?</p> <p>How has this implementation affected your philosophical views as an early childhood teacher?</p> <p>How has your role changed as a professional since the implementation of the approach?</p> <p>What do you perceive happening to your future role as a teacher within this mainstream context?</p> <p>Do you have any suggestions for promoting the Reggio Emilia inspired approach within WA based mainstream contexts?</p>
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APPENDIX F: Coding for the Data Collection used in the Findings (interview transcripts, reflective journals, observation/field notes & document analysis)

Participant	Coded Data Collection
1.Kate (Case 1) Teacher Participant	1.1 Interview Transcript 1.2 Reflective Journal 1.3 Field Notes/Observations 1.4 Documents: 1.4.1 Video Presentation 1.4.2 PP Presentation to Parents 1.4.3 PP Presentation to parents 1.4.4 Daily Diary 1.4.5 Dialogue/transcripts of Children
2. Lia (Case 2) Teacher Participant	2.5 Interview Transcript 2.6 Reflective Journal 2.7 Field Notes/Observations 2.8 Documents
3.Sally (Case 2) Teacher Participant	3.9 Interview Transcript 3.10 Reflective Journal 3.11 Field Notes/Observations 3.12 Documents
4.Elle (Case 2) Teacher Participant	4.13 Interview Transcript 4.14 Reflective Journal 4.15 Field Notes/Observations 4.15 Documents
5. Pat (Case 1) School Leader	5.16 Interview transcript
6. Natasha (Case 2) School Leader	6.17 Interview transcript

Appendix G: Sample of Semi-structured Interview (Teacher A – Kate in Case Study 1)

1. 1. 1

Interview with ~~Kate~~ – Teacher 1 (School A) September, 2010.

Interviewer

Can you tell what your about your beliefs and philosophy as an early childhood teacher?

~~Kate~~

Change
It has changed a lot during my time of teaching. Now I have a very strong belief that the children who come to me in the class have so much to bring and have so much to share And me as the teacher - I have so much to learn from them. I think probably this underpins everything I do as well as them learning from me I am learning from them as well they are learning form each other – that is always n mind that their theories are there about the world and not to squash that. That is what they bring and then I try to bring more out. I believe they learn form doing and from creative things through the arts and expressive languages.

Image of Child
underpins philosophy

This philosophy had evolved as I have learnt more about my self and as I have spent more time with children so it has changed over time. It was always there under the surface but I always had the belief that children learn form doing and form multi-sensory things but it certainly more fine tuned.

Change - impact role

Interviewer

How did you become Reggio Emilia inspired teacher?

~~Kate~~

I was teaching in Kalgoorlie and had year 3 for 2 years but didn't get an opportunity to explore that creative side as it was more formalised. The principal at the school, she was very interested in Reggio Emilia and was encouraging the PP that was there to find out about it. I didn't really know much but we had a lady come and talk to us about it and straight away I was, 'what's this?' I found it really interesting and it linked to my beliefs. The following year the PP teacher left and they moved me down to PP. I said if I go, then I would like to find out more about Reggio Emilia. So I went to a PD at Meerilinga for 3 days and I think that captured everything and I become inspired then. But still it was so big I think it was almost too big and didn't know where to start but I knew it felt right.

Start of being RE inspired

I started changing the environment and doing things like encouraging the children to express themselves through drawing and valuing their theories and wonder questions and really valuing their theories and ideas as their right – we can all learn form this idea or theory rather than me saying , 'that's not right.' The expressive arts was important with the image of the child. The initial projects came from the children and I understand more now about how to reign it in more and not have it so huge - you need some containment about where you are heading. I also tried the diary through photos and I was experimenting with a lot of things.

How started
- environment
- image
- E. Arts
- Project work
- Document
rights

The principal actually left the year I started PP, but the principal who came in really supported what I was doing as no one else was doing it and I was the only PP. He supported me enough so that I could go to Italy.

Interviewer

So tell me about your time in Italy, in Reggio Emilia.

~~Kate~~

The first time was the study tour and that was amazing. The things I learnt most from that time was how to set up the environment because we got to see so many different