

Conflicting Ideologies in Early Childhood Education:

An Exploration of Reggio-Inspired Practice

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Abstract

Within the field of early childhood education, the ideologies of child development and its parent discipline, developmental psychology, dominate both theory and practice. In recent years, educators have attempted to reconceptualise early childhood education by adopting more progressive approaches to teaching and learning. The aim of this present research study was to critically examine the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children. To explore their experiences, an institutional ethnography was employed involving seven educators from a large child care organization in Hamilton, Ontario. In line with the intent of this study, qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant-observations and textual analyses to explore the presence of developmental-psychological ideologies within early childhood education and Reggio-inspired practice. The present study also examined the challenges faced by educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach. The results of this study indicate that ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm dominate the practice of early childhood educators and that the conflicting ideologies that surround Reggio educators may play a role in some of the challenges educators experience. The findings of this study thus demonstrate a need to adopt alternative approaches toward understanding both children and childhood, in both early childhood educational theory and practice.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Research Aims and Questions	3
Situating the Problem	3
Reconceptualising Child Development in Early Childhood Education	4
Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education	4
Deconstructing Developmental Psychology	6
Cultural Messages	10
Don't Say Goodbye to Development	13
CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCHER'S STANDPOINT	14
My Personal Identity	14
My Professional Experiences	16
Theoretical Framework	16
CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	20
What is the Reggio Emilia Approach?	20
The Reggio Emilia Approach and Theory	21
The Principles and Philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach	22
Literature Review	27
Lack of Knowledge about the Approach	27
Cultural Differences	28
Diversity	30
Lack of Time	30
Funding	31
Working with Families	32
Negotiating Curricular Standards	33
Lack of Professional Support	34
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN	36
Methodology	36
Research Site	38
Participant Selection and Recruitment	40
Characteristics of Participants	42
Data Collection	42
Data Analysis	49
Ethical Considerations	51

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS	55
Ideologies of Developmental Psychology in Early Childhood Education	55
The Role of the Early Childhood Educator	56
Academic Skills and School Readiness	59
Views about Children	61
Interpretation of Findings through the Transmission Model to Education	63
Challenges of Reggio-Inspired Practice	64
The Image of the Early Childhood Educator	65
Lack of Knowledge about the Approach	67
Behavioural Challenges	68
“There are no rules to Reggio!”	70
Time constraints	71
Ministry Guidelines	72
Overcoming challenges	73
Collaboration	73
Personal Motivation	74
 CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION	 78
Summary of the Study	78
Discussion of Findings	78
Implications of the Study	90
Strengths of the Study	93
Limitations of the Study	93
Directions for Future Research	94
 CONCLUSION	 99
 References	 101
 Appendix A: Brock University Research Ethics Board Approval	 114
Appendix B: Letter of Invitation	116
Appendix C: Interview Questions	118
Appendix D: Letter of Information	119
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form	122

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While early in my career as an educator and carer of young children, I have felt a tension between the roles and responsibilities that accompany my job title and my own philosophical values and beliefs of what it means to be a child and what it means to teach and care for children. This disconnect between what I am required to do as an early childhood educator and what I feel and believe, has been an ongoing struggle for me as a professional practitioner, since entering the field in 2002. More recently in my career, I have learned about the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning and have embraced the principles and philosophies of this pedagogy as a vehicle to transform and reconceptualise the field of early childhood education (ECE). Acknowledging the lack of research on this approach to teaching and learning within a Canadian context, my vocational journey as an educator thus far has consequently driven my interest as a researcher to study the experiences of educators like myself, who have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, yet struggle with the conflicting ideologies that surround the field of early childhood education.

Accordingly, the aim of this present research study was to critically examine the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children by employing an institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987) involving educators from a large child care organization in Hamilton, Ontario. Following on with analyses from scholars such as Burman (2008b), Cannella (1997), and Moss and Petrie (2002), I suggest that the field of early childhood education is dominated by ideologies embedded with child development theories and their parent discipline, developmental psychology which have constructed an image of the child as a universalized, naturally progressing being who is innocent, in need of protection, and distinct from adults. According to Mitchell (2003), ideologies are a set

of biased ideas or beliefs that are assumed to be complete or static over time, while Burr (1995: p. 57) suggests these affect “*not only what we think, but what we think about, what we feel, how we behave and the pattern of all our social relationships*”. Moreover, ideologies order, organize and sanction the social relations of those in a position of power in order to maintain their position of authority and domination (Smith, 1987).

Within early childhood education, and in everyday life, the beliefs associated with the child development paradigm have become so deeply embedded that they have been taken-for-granted as “truth”, and as addressed in my research, confine and control the experiences of young people and thus, are in conflict with the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach. Through this present study, it is my aim to develop an understanding of how Reggio-inspired educators negotiate between the conflicting paradigms and ideologies that surround their practice. This issue is one of significance as early childhood educators persistently face the dilemma of needing to balance traditional child development practices with post-modern approaches in their professional work (Dockett, 2002). Furthermore, early childhood educators who approach their practice through a critical or more contemporary lens struggle with their desire to engage in social change, their concerns with the appropriateness of children’s educational experiences within a particular culture, and their commitment as professionals to facilitating the social construction of meaning (Jipson & Johnson, 2001). Moreover, it is suggested that the field of early childhood is not well researched and that there is a need to explore the links between the images of children in the public domain, the work of professionals in early childhood and furthermore, how ethics are embedded and produced through those images and practices (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). To add to these justifications, UNICEF’s most recent Innocenti Report card revealed that despite Canada’s affluence as an industrialized

nation, Canada pitifully ranked last in a comparison of child care services among 25 OECD countries (UNICEF, 2008). This finding thus signifies an immense need for further research on early childhood education programs within a Canadian context. Through this present research study, it was my aim to illuminate the ways in which early childhood education programs in Canada are organized in a particular way that privilege developmental-psychological discourses and ideologies, and the challenges educators might face in their practice as a consequence.

Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this present study was to critically examine the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children. Accordingly, the following research questions guided the study, which were exploratory in nature and were formulated in consideration of the literature reviewed:

- a) How are the ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm present within early childhood education and Reggio Emilia -inspired practice?
- b) What are the challenges early childhood educators face in adopting a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children?

Situating the Problem

In order to divulge the ideological domination of the developmental-psychological paradigm within the field of early childhood education, the following section will illustrate the ways in which the assumptions of this lens are problematic. First will be a discussion of the ways in which child development is embedded in the field of early childhood education, followed by an analysis of the constructions and cultural messages that are produced by this approach as discussed in reconceptualist literature.

Reconceptualising Child Development in Early Childhood Education

Numerous scholars involved in the movement to reconceptualise the field of early childhood education have articulated the influence of child development and its parent discipline, developmental psychology on teaching practices and curricular models worldwide (Bloch, 1992; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dockett, 2002; Soto, 2000; Walsh, 2005; Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). This influence is premised on the taken-for-granted assumptions of the child development paradigm. Although the ideological domination of developmental-psychological theory within ECE has been commonplace for decades, in recent years, there has been extensive criticism concerning the implications of a traditional developmental psychology focus on the experiences of children within the ECE classroom, as well as part of everyday culture. While the critiques concerning the field of ECE and its overreliance on child development and psychology are vast, the consensus among scholars is that the developmental-psychological lens is but one possible perspective and that there is an immense need for consideration of alternative approaches and conceptualizations; both within early education and more generally, towards understanding children and childhood (Alderson, 2008; Bloch, 1992; Burman, 2008a; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Kessler & Swadner, 1992; Soto, 2000; Mitchell, 2003; Moss, 2001; Moss and Petrie, 2003; Woodhead, 1999; Woodhead, 2006).

Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education

In 1986, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a document entitled “*Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age Eight*” (DAP; Bredekamp & Copple, 1987). This document and its revised version that was published in 1997 became known in the early childhood education community as the “green bible”, and was enthusiastically

accepted by educators throughout North America. The influence of this document resulted in an increased emphasis on psychological theory within early educational practices, based on the assumption that teaching practices, methods and curricula can be determined by knowledge of children's development (Walsh, 2005). The DAP document reinforced traditional child-centred values and applied Piagetian theory to early education; emphasizing respect for the universal stages of development, children's natural play, exploration and activity-based learning, and the role of the skilled practitioner as a guide and supporter (Woodhead, 2006). While the intent of DAP was to provide the 'best for children', it has been suggested that this document which is inscribed with the assumptions and values of the developmental-psychological paradigm is categorical, rigid and insensitive to social, cultural, linguistic and familial diversity and consequently, perpetuates a white, middle-class view of the world grounded in the social, historical and cultural traditions upon which it is based, and positions early education as the vehicle in which they can be universally achieved (Canella, 1997; Jipson, 1998; Jipson & Johnson, 2001; Mallory & New, 1994; Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). However, although the DAP continues to be criticized for its singular, Euro-American approach to child development and teaching, the document has nonetheless, become a dogma within the early education community and has highly influenced the structure of early education programs and accordingly, the role of the early childhood educator. Furthermore, as early childhood education has long been organized and justified on the principles of the DAP, it has been difficult to think about and understand young children from outside of this taken-for-granted knowledge (Prout and James, 1997; Woodhead, 2006). As argued by Bettye Caldwell (1984), early childhood education "*represents the applied side of the basic science of child development*" (as cited by Canella, 1997).

Although developmental research has undoubtedly informed and enlightened work with children (for example, *McCain and Mustard's Early Years Study, 1999*, which generated interest and increased public demands for investment in early childhood services), it has also projected a standardized story about childhood, insufficiently representing the experiences and capacities of young people and failing to recognize the multiple realities of children's everyday lives as well as their active participation and contributions to their social worlds (Alderson, 2008; Jipson, 1998; Mallory & New, 1994; Mayall, 1994; Woodhead, 1999). As described by Dockett (2002) "*traditional child development theory fails to address issues of context, be it cultural, social, political or economic*" (p.2). To follow will be a discussion of how a traditional developmental psychology focus may be problematic, both generally when considering children and childhood, and more specifically within the field of early childhood education.

Deconstructing Developmental Psychology

From both outside and within the discipline of psychology, scholars have critiqued and deconstructed the developmental theories and practices that are rooted in Western cultural traditions and values, and thus privilege particular ways of knowing and being, and limit possibilities for young people (Canella, 1997; Jipson, 1998; 2001; Walkerdine, 1993; Woodhead, 2006). As argued by Walkerdine (1984) "*developmental psychology is premised on a set of claims to truth which are historically [and culturally] specific and which are not the only or necessary way to understand children*" (p. 154). In order to disrupt the taken-for-granted truths that are embedded in the child development paradigm, it is necessary to look at the constructions and cultural messages that are produced through this perspective. The following themes are common criticisms that have been extensively addressed within critical reconceptualist literature.

Childhood as a social construction. The belief that childhood is a unique and distinct period of humanity appears to have largely emerged through enlightenment/modernist discourse (Burman, 2008a; Canella, 1997; 2001). The discourses of the enlightenment period and throughout the periods of modernity suggest that human nature is natural and constant, understood and controllable through universal principles, and discoverable through reason and the use of scientific tools (Canella, 1997). In contrast to the enlightenment narratives and modernist notions that all younger human beings represent a unique human condition called “childhood”, constructivist and critical philosophical perspectives suggest that the concept of childhood does not represent a universal human truth, but rather is a category created through language that may actually restrict and control the lives of young people, as well as those who are a part of their lives (Canella, 1997; Jipson, 2001). Postmodern scholars further suggest there is no such thing as “the universal child” or indeed a universal “childhood”; rather there are many children and many childhoods that have been constructed by our own historical, cultural and social interpretations and understandings of what children are and should be (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Jipson, 2001). As explained by Carlina Rinaldi (2005) “*Childhood does not exist, we create it as a society, as a public subject. It is a social, political and historical construction*” (p.13).

Many contemporary early childhood scholars suggest that the traditional developmental psychology perspective has fostered images of the child as a universal, naturally progressing being who is innocent, in need of protection and is distinctly different from adults (Burman, 2008a; Cannella, 2001; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). These commonly held views about children are explained by Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence (1999) who state that:

the child as knowledge and culture reproducer, a tabula rasa or empty vessel needing to be filled with knowledge and to be 'made ready' to learn and for school; as nature, following biologically determined and universal stages of development; as an innocent, enjoying a golden age of life, uncorrupted by the world; or as a supply factor in determining the labour force. What these ideas or constructions have in common is that they produce a 'poor child', passive, individualized and incapable ... (p. 7).

These constructions have been produced within dominant discourses, and have become so deeply embedded within everyday life that they have been taken-for-granted as truth and embodied by parents, practitioners, researchers and politicians (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Here, I use the term discourse following Foucault (1972) who describes discourse as "*practices which form the objects of which they speak*" (p. 49). In this Foucauldian view, discourse refers to "*a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories and statements that ... together produce a particular version of events*" and moreover, provide the framework for a person's daily lived experiences and serve the purpose of social control (Burr, 1995, p.32). Discourses of childhood are central to the ways we structure our own and others' sense of place and position, as childhood is a repository of social representations that functions only because of its relationship with other age and status categories, such as adulthood (Burman, 2008a).

Childhood as natural and universal. Childhood is constructed as a distinct period during the life span that is natural and scientifically definable. We have accepted the concept of the universal child without considering the historical, social, cultural and political context of the assumptions from which it has emerged (Canella, 2001). The constructions generated by psychologists tend to a mechanistic, atomized and essentialized perspective on individual

children that are comprised of social, emotional, language, cognitive, physical and moral domains and accordingly, younger human beings are reduced to functions or stages within these particular areas of development. Developmental psychology privileges theories as that of Jean Piaget, who has suggested that young children pass through universal stages of development, determined according to their chronological age. The trajectory of development is seen as progressive and uniform, with cross cultural perspectives appearing as optional extras that are treated as informing the development rather than entering into its structure in a fundamental way (Burman, 2008a; Canella, 1997; Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). While the developmental approach has constructed childhood as a universal experience, constructivist perspectives have maintained that childhood is distinct from biological immaturity and is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but instead, is a structural and cultural component of many societies (Prout and James, 1997). Moreover, theories of child development have been suggested to be flawed and to oppress the experiences of children (Mayall, 1993, p.3). According to Alderson (2008), this signifies a need to question these age-stage theories and to develop new theories which recognize the capacity and potential of children and young people.

Child as innocent and needy. Popular dialogue with and about children is dominated by the construction of younger human beings as both innocent and needy. Both the discourse of innocence and the construction of the child as needy produces a being who is weak, lacking and dependent, deficient and without agency, thus denying the ability of children to act and determine action for themselves (Canella, 1997; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). Accordingly, this image of the child generates a desire among adults to shelter children and reflects a model of children and childhood as passive, to be serviced, protected and provided for, rather than to be engaged as active participants (Moss and Petrie, 2002). As suggested by Woodrow & Brennan

(2001), the image of the child as innocent works to reinforce power differentials between adult and child and to reassert the power and control of the adult. Furthermore, the construction of the child as innocent is represented in a multitude of ways including pictures of children as helpless and vulnerable, images of premature babies in the hands of adults, and in promotional material for third world countries (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001).

Child as other. The concept of the child as other perpetuates the notion of the child as the opposite from the adult. Children are frequently described as innocent, weak, needy, lacking in skill or knowledge, immature, fearful, savage, vulnerable, undefined and open ended, as opposed to adults who are considered to be intelligent, strong, competent, mature, civilized and in control (Canella, 1997). Distinctly separate worlds have been popularized for adults and children in which adulthood has been understood as a state of completion, maturity and full human status while children are positioned as deficient (Canella, 1997; Moss & Petrie, 2002). Not only is the child constructed in opposition to the adult, the child is also viewed to be inferior.

Cultural Messages

The assumptions of child development produce particular cultural messages that may lead to social inequity, injustice and hostility for young members of society (Canella, 1997). First, the construction of child development constitutes multiple forms of privilege and subjugation. While certain groups, individuals or forms of knowledge are privileged, others are subjugated and placed at the margins of society, positioning them as lacking in credibility or validity, unimportant or nonexistent. This is observable through the lived experiences of children in which the knowledge they possess is frequently ignored or denied in contrast with adults (Canella, 1997). Furthermore, a normalized vision privileges those who fit the vision and subjugates those who do not fit that vision as deficient, wrong or abnormal. Consequently,

resistance, diversity, fluid character, unpredictability, complexity and obscurity are denied (Canella, 1997). As explicated by Woodhead (2006), the notion of 'normal' fails to adequately acknowledge diversities in young children's lives, the variations in how childhood is understood and experiences and how it is applied to individual groups of children considering their age, gender, maturity and social status.

Second, child development legitimizes social regulation and has been suggested to be a covert method for social control (Canella, 1997). As Canella (1997) proposes:

Childhood can be interpreted as a positive construction that has disempowered younger human beings by creating them as incompetent and dependent on adults for care, knowledge and even bodily control. The discourses of childhood have fostered regulation of a particular group of human beings by another group (described by adults) and generated multiple sites of power for these adults (p.44).

Bloch and Popkewitz (2000) add to the explanation of this phenomenon using Foucault's concept of governance, in which persons are shaped, guided, managed or regulated in light of certain principles or goals. As suggested by Walkerdine (1984), psychological surveillance is justified for the protection of the innocent child. Through ongoing surveillance, children are judged as competent or not quite ready, normal and natural, or abnormal and pathological (Walkerdine, 1993). Further, in later works Walkerdine (1993) adds that developmentalism has justified the scientific scrutiny of children, in which every movement of a child is calibrated to ensure normal and natural development. Likewise, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) suggest that the preschool has become the *'producer for pre-determined outcomes'* and that scientific knowledge has been positioned as the means of achieving those outcomes, through representation, classification and normalisation of children, teachers and their work.

As stated by Erica Burman (2008b),

Whether milestones, gender types, reading ages, cognitive strategies, stages or skills (and the toys and the consumer products they inspire), they [children] become enshrined within an apparatus of collective measurement and evaluation that constructs its own world of abstract autonomous babies; of norms, deviation from which is typically only acknowledged in the form of deficit or 'problem' (p.167).

Child development masks norms as natural facts or truths that are believed to be applied to all. Those who do not fit the norms are classified, guided and corrected toward avenues that would lead to the fulfillment of developmental expectations. Consequently, these claims to truth that are grounded in developmental psychology legitimize the role of experts like psychologists, social workers, physicians and educators who define childhood and maintain control over children, parents and other educators (Cannella, 1997; 2001). In addition, child development functions as a tool of cultural imperialism. Cultures that do not agree with or respond to the Western, Euro-American developmental expectations are categorized as backward and needing to learn from those who are more advanced. Child development produces an experience for younger human beings where they are no longer agents in their own world, but who are beings who must be limited and regulated (Canella, 1997)

A third cultural message that is produced through the assumptions of child development is the perspective of superiority and inferiority (Canella, 1997). Child development has created a human hierarchy where particular individuals or groups are marked as superior while others are marked as inferior. Child development places children at the lowest level of the hierarchy, which consequently justifies continued surveillance of them, judging them, rather than recognizing

them as human beings (Canella, 1997). Ironically, children are simultaneously constructed as redemptive vehicles who are expected to solve the problems of the adult world, particularly in terms of social order and economic success. For example, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) suggest that the majority of governmental initiatives that are put in place as children's services are implemented in an effort to ensure the "*future development, educational attainment and employability of the child*", in hopes of a more prosperous economic future.

Finally, child development produces a view of human life that is always deficient (Canella, 1997). Human beings are always progressing from one stage to the other and are viewed as always in process and never complete. In this sense, the child, in comparison to the adult, is viewed as especially incomplete and deficient.

Don't say Goodbye to Development

However, following on with scholars such as Burman (2008a; 2008b), Woodhead (1999; 2006), Moss (2001), and Moss and Petrie (2002), it is not my intention to argue that we should dispense with developmental frameworks altogether from our thinking, but rather to develop an awareness of the ways in which particular claims that are grounded in the developmental-psychological paradigm privilege some, while marginalize others. Nor is it my intention to reject developmental psychology entirely, but rather to offer a critique of the field and offer an alternate perspective towards understanding children, childhood and the field of early childhood education. Like Dahlberg and Moss (2005), my interest is not to banish developmental thinking but rather to "challenge the imagination" and to evoke the thought of an alternate possibility.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCHER'S STANDPOINT

As described by Smith (2005), standpoint theory creates a point of entry into discovering the social. To Smith (1987) and her “institutional ethnography” approach to research, each individual experiences the social world from a particular standpoint or social position, which is located within the larger social structure. When adapting institutional ethnographic procedures, the aim is to embody the standpoint of the informants (DeVault & McCoy, 2006) as clearly as possible, and it is important for researchers to disclose their own standpoint in order for the reader to recognize not only their approach to the investigation, but also some of their own understanding of the social world. Moreover, constructivist grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz (2005) suggests that “*all analyses come from particular standpoints*” and “*what we know shapes, but does not necessarily determine, what we ‘find’*”, thus suggesting a need for researchers to examine and make explicit their own assumptions. Charmaz (2005) also reminds us that in any investigation, the researcher shares in constructing what is defined as data, as what the researcher sees and hears is affected by many factors including their previous frames of interpretation, their personal biographies and their interests, as well as researcher-participant relationships, field experiences and methods. As the researcher in this study, my standpoint is influenced by my personal identity, professional experiences and the theoretical lens through which I view and integrate these.

My Personal Identity. While at first glance my experiences as a female young person, first-generation Canadian and a visible minority may not appear to have a direct relation to my research, on the contrary, I feel my personal identity and history has an immense influence on my understanding of the world, particularly my experiences of marginalization, inequality and oppression. According to Smith (1987), the voices of women and women of color have been

excluded and silenced from the production of ideology, knowledge and culture and thus their experiences, interests and ways of knowing the world have failed to be represented in the institutional order of society. While I am hesitant to claim that I have been victimized as a female, first generation Vietnamese-Canadian young person, I can attest that my experiences and position in society have given me the opportunity to recognize how particular types of being and knowing are privileged over others.

As a child, I repeatedly witnessed my family experience the judgements of others and what I felt was unreasonable treatment as a result of their status as newcomers to Canada. As a child of a single, immigrant mother to three children, I also witnessed my mother and family struggle while under constant scrutiny and criticism. As a student who navigated through the education system, I experienced discrimination and felt that I was at a disadvantage to others because of my ethnicity and family background. It was at a very early age when I came to the realization that I would need to work harder and do more, not only academically and professionally but also socially, in order to earn fair treatment and acceptance from others within and outside of the school system and workplace. This realization turned me to post-secondary education as a vehicle to cross the barriers that I have experienced as a result of my social location, although I have continued to recognize that even after completing a college diploma, Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree and studying at the graduate level, I am still at a disadvantage as the first and only in my family to attend university. Recently, I have become an expectant mother and while this gift has been the most joyous time of my life thus far, as someone who is a young woman as well as a student, I have become even more aware of what culture and society dictates as 'right' and 'wrong' and the way in which others' attitudes and beliefs can shape another person's daily lived experience. I share these aspects about who I am

to illustrate how my experiences in life have shaped my values, my firm stance toward a belief in rights, justice and equity and my standpoint as a researcher.

My Professional Experiences. My professional experiences as an early childhood educator have driven my motivation for wanting to research the institution of early childhood education in Canada. Further, my experimentation with the Reggio Emilia approach in my own professional practice has guided the focus of this study. As an early childhood educator who has been inspired to adopt the Reggio Emilia approach, I have often felt that my practice is constrained by larger forces that are beyond my control and have noticed similar feelings of concern among my colleagues. Further, while working as an early childhood educator, I have witnessed practices that I felt infringed the rights of children and were in conflict with my own beliefs and values. In response to the tensions that I have experienced as a professional, I have begun to look toward the Reggio Emilia approach as a tool to reconceptualising the field of early childhood education.

Theoretical Framework. As a researcher, my theoretical standpoint aligns with the basic tenets of the Sociology of Childhood. Current literature on early childhood education suggests that early childhood policy and practice tend to ignore the Sociology of Childhood and social constructionist perspectives (Moss, 2001; Moss and Petrie, 2002) thus signifying a need for current research on ECE from this alternate lens. Further, the assumptions of the Sociology of Childhood theoretical approach align with Reggio Emilia's "*image of the child*" and my own view of children as competent, powerful beings who actively contribute to the construction of their own social worlds. Moreover, the Sociology of Childhood lens is also an appropriate theoretical stance to assume for this particular topic of study because of the perspective's resistance against the assumptions of traditional developmental psychology.

The body of research termed as the 'new sociology of childhood' emerged during the twentieth century in response to the growing conception among scholars that traditional disciplines frequently condemned children to the margins and failed to recognize the place of young people within society and culture (Mayall, 2002; Moss and Petrie, 2002; Prout and James, 1997). In traditional sociology, children who were rarely given consideration were viewed through a socialization lens, which has been criticized by the new sociology of childhood for being biologically reductionist. As further illustrated by Matthews (2007), this theory of socialization has been challenged by the new sociology of childhood as it positions children as 'in process' to becoming full citizens and suggests that childhood is a stage in which young people acquire the knowledge and skills required for them to become competent, adult members of society. This conception of childhood is consistent with other theorists who have used a number of metaphors to explain this transitional period by describing children as 'lumps of clay' that need to be moulded by adult hands, 'future adults' or incomplete 'not-yets', and as 'tabula rasa' or blank slates. These dominant discourses have been challenged through the new sociology of childhood, which views children not as passive subjects of social structures and processes, but as competent and contributing social actors who are capable of making sense of and affecting their social lives, the lives around them and the societies in which they live (Matthews, 2007; Prout and James, 1997). It is this contemporary conception of childhood which has led to the view that children are worthy of study in their own right and accordingly, has influenced the movement for children's active participation in the realm of research.

Another component of traditional sociology which has been criticized by the new sociology of childhood is the notion of childhood as a period that is homogeneous in nature (Mayall, 2002; Prout and James, 1997). Advocates of the new sociology of childhood find the

socialization framework and the theories of development that ground developmental psychology inadequate as these perspectives fail to recognize the individual experiences of children.

Childhood, which is distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but rather, appears to be a structural and cultural component of many societies which varies through time and across societies (Matthews, 2007; Prout and James, 1997). The socially constructed nature of childhood has been explained by Froner who argued "*There is not one childhood, but many formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems*" and that "*Different positions in society produce different experiences*" (as cited by James and Prout, 1997). Through the new sociology of childhood, attention has been drawn to the danger of collectivizing children into one definition of childhood and the need to recognize the various experiences of children and childhood which are influenced by gender, race, class, nationality and disability (Matthews, 2007; Prout and James, 1997).

The new sociology of childhood is also distinct from traditional sociology as this theoretical lens recognizes the significance of children's relationships and the power imbalances that are embedded within these relationships (Matthews, 2007). Advocates of the new sociology of childhood have proposed that childhood should be thought of as 'development through dependency' rather than as a period of socialization, which frames children as passive and inferior to their adult counterparts and fails to recognize the ways in which children are oppressed by adults. As suggested by Matthews (2007), children are a marginalized social category and are positioned as deficient to adult society as a consequence of their age and 'lack of adulthood'.

Adopting the Sociology of Childhood as the theoretical framework for this piece of research was most appropriate as the principles of this approach parallel the Reggio Emilian

belief that children having agency and power in their own right. Further, as the intention of the research was to challenge some of the traditional practices and beliefs that surround the field of early childhood education, the Sociology of Childhood was appropriate to use as a lens as it also challenges traditional disciplines and the way in which they marginalize children and fail to recognize their rights.

A vast number of early childhood educators have begun to resist the dominating influence of child development by adopting more progressive approaches in their practice that challenge dominating discourses and assume child competencies rather than deficits, and the Reggio Emilia approach is one such contemporary model. While the adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach in Canadian early education classrooms is growing, there has been little empirical study of how this influences the experiences of educators, which is the focus of this present study. This present study aims to contribute to this contemporary field of research by examining the conflicting ideologies that surround the practice of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach and will illuminate the ways in which these educators negotiate between these tensions.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

What is the Reggio Emilia Approach?

In 1991, a Newsweek article entitled “The Ten Best Schools in the World, and What We Can Learn from Them” gave commendation and praise to the nursery school programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy; recognizing this system of child care and early education as the best early childhood education programs in the world (New, 2003). Under the leadership of the late, Loris Malaguzzi, this public system of child care and early education evolved through the hard work of parents, teachers and citizens following World War II as part of the town’s efforts to reform education and restore the sense of community that was lost during the war (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Wurm, 2005; Cadwell, 1997). As described by Carlina Rinaldi (2005), the executive consultant of Reggio Children, and a former pedagoga of the Reggio Emilia schools, the Reggio Emilia approach is distinct from other approaches to teaching and learning as it is based on an innovative set of philosophical and pedagogical assumptions and methods which provides new ways of thinking about the nature of the child as a learner, and the roles of the teachers, school, physical environment and the curriculum. While other regions in Italy have also established high-quality municipal early childhood systems, Reggio Emilia has become the most distinguished for its atelier (studio) and atelierista (studio teacher), its inclusive and equitable point system, the pedagogical team, the involvement and participation of elected officials in the development of the early childhood system and its teaching practices which reveal a commitment to research, experimentation, communication and documentation (Edwards et al., 1998). Today, the Reggio Emilia approach has attracted the attention of educators, administrators, researchers and policy makers throughout the world.

In North America, the Reggio movement is rooted in the work of dedicated individuals who visited Reggio Emilia and returned with powerful images and narratives about this community of education (NAREA, 2008). Interestingly, although the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy have insisted that their approach is not a curriculum that has been designed for emulation, the influence of these schools has been so powerful that it has caused a shift in ECE theory and practice worldwide, as educators have strived to achieve an equivalent level of quality education (Fraser, 2006). As suggested by Dahlberg and Moss (2006), "*Reggio Emilia is an experience which embraces a belief in the world and offers hope for a renewed culture of childhood and for reclaiming the school as a public space of central importance in democratic societies*". (p.3)

The Reggio Emilia Approach and Theory

While many and diverse theories are discussed within the discipline of education, they are rarely embodied in pedagogical practices in typical North American classrooms, where there is a continuing separation between theory and practice. In contrast, educators in Reggio Emilia believe that theory and practice "*... are inseparable – one without the other is inconceivable*" and thus, they "*... should be in dialogue, two languages expressing our effort to understand the meaning of life*" (Rinaldi, 2006). Accordingly, Reggio educators have brought in theories and concepts from many fields including education, philosophy, architecture, science, literature and visual communication. However, while Reggio educators have been inspired from many theories and philosophies, such as Erik Erikson, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Barbara Biber, and Lev Vygotsky (Fraser, 2006) they are not bound by them but rather have integrated them in such a way that they have constructed their own perspectives (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006).

The Principles and Philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Individuals who have visited Reggio Emilia, Italy have suggested that it is impossible to describe the Reggio Approach adequately through a few short sentences; nevertheless it is important to outline the fundamental principles which guide the practice of Reggio-inspired educators. To delineate these principles, I borrow and expand on the overview of the Reggio Emilia approach provided by Louise Boyd Cadwell (1997).

The child as protagonist. Reggio Emilia educators believe that the image that educators use to define a child creates the foundation upon which the school and practice will function (Wurm, 2005). Consequently, identifying one's view of the child is integral in understanding the role of the teachers and children in the classroom. The Reggio Emilia approach contends that each child is unique and is the powerful, competent protagonist of their own growth who has a desire to gain knowledge, has much capacity and amazement, and yearns to create certain ties with others to communicate (Edwards, 1998; Filippini, 1998). In this context, the child is considered to be a natural researcher who is inquisitive, curious, willing to experiment and discovers answers (Kim & Darling, 2009). This image of the child is drawn from education, psychological and sociological sources, as well as the everyday experiences of children at the Reggio Emilia schools (Wurm, 2005). Further, educators in Reggio Emilia reject the image of the 'poor child' who has deficits, who is at-risk and who possess limited capacities (Moss, Dillon & Statham, 2000; Dahlberg, 2006) but rather, assume the position that children are 'rich' individuals who are full of potential, are co-constructors of their world and are connected to adults and other children (Malaguzzi, 1993; Dalhberg, 2000). In Reggio Emilia, children are viewed as social actors and active participants in their society and culture with the right to speak from their own perspective, and to act with others on the basis of their own particular experience.

Moreover, children, teachers and parents are considered the three central protagonists in the educational process (Gandini, 1993).

The child as collaborator. Rather than focus on each child in isolation, the educators of Reggio Emilia believe that teaching and learning is based on relationships and thus, education needs to focus on each child in relation to other children, the family, the teachers and the community (Gandini, 1993). This belief is grounded in the social constructivist model that supports the idea that we form ourselves through our interaction with peers, adults, and the world (Lewin, 1995). Cooperation at all levels is the powerful mode of working that makes the achievement of complex goals possible for Reggio educators (Gandini, 1997). Accordingly, both large and small collaborative group work occurs regularly in a Reggio classroom as it is believed to be valuable and necessary to development. Further, an understanding of multiple perspectives is considered to promote group membership and uniqueness of self (OECD, 2004). This idea has been articulated by Filippini (1998) who states:

The child is not seen as an isolated being, but as always in relationships. The human, social, cultural, and historical context. The child's development is a process of individual and group construction. Nothing exists outside relationships. The child is the most important element of the school, but the child is not enough. We put at the centre the relationships between children, parents and teachers. That is the centre, for the child does not exist in isolation.

The child as communicator. In Reggio Emilia, children are viewed as having "one hundred languages" and thus are believed to have the right to use a multitude of diverse materials to discover and communicate what they know, understand, wonder about, question, feel and imagine. In Reggio Emilia, educators engage children in a great range of different forms of

expression (Lewin-Benham, 2008) which may include gesturing, drawing, writing, discussion, mime, dramatic play, movement, puppetry, painting, sculpture, shadow play, mirror play or construction. Further, New (2007) discusses that classroom teachers and artists work collaboratively to plan ways to promote each child's emerging ability to represent their ideas symbolically through various media.

The environment as third teacher. In the classrooms of the Reggio Emilia schools, the design and use of space encourages encounters, communication and relationships (Cadwell, 1997). There is both order and beauty in the design and organization of the space of each school building as well as the equipment and materials within it. Attention is paid to the aesthetic and artistic design of the classroom and objects are placed deliberately to promote a visual and meaningful context (Tarr, 2001). Every corner of every space of the schools has an identity and a purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate and is valued and cared for by children and adults alike. Each space itself is an educational project that was designed by teachers and architects to support the educational vision of the schools (Wurm, 2005). Tarr (2001) suggests that the classroom environment is a reflection of home, while the school is a reflection of the community.

The teacher as partner, nurturer and guide. Teachers play an important role in the educational process in the Reggio Emilia schools. In the classroom, the teacher's role is to facilitate children's exploration of themes, work on short and long term projects, and guide experiences of joint open ended discover and problem solving (Cadwell, 1997). In order to plan and proceed with their work, educators listen and observe children closely. Teachers ask questions, discover children's ideas, hypotheses and theories and provide occasions for each child to discover and learn. Teachers do not "fish for right answers or impart information"

(Cadwell, 1997), but rather, carefully ask questions to provoke children's thinking and a meaningful discussion.

The teacher as researcher. Teachers work in pairs and maintain strong, collegial relationships with all other teachers and staff in order to engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work of children (Cadwell, 1997). Teachers listen and observe, hypothesize and collaborate with children on projects that may take unpredictable directions (Lewin-Benham, 2008). These exchanges provide ongoing training and theoretical enrichment. Teachers perceive their role as researchers who prepare documentation of their work with children, whom they also consider researchers. The team is further supported by a pedagoga who services a group of schools (Cadwell, 1997).

Documentation as communication. Documentation is the process of gathering evidence and artefacts of what happens in the classroom (Rinaldi, 1994) in which teachers observe, record, share, analyze and debate their emerging understandings of children's thinking and learning (New, 2007). In Reggio Emilia, careful consideration and attention are given to the presentation of the thinking of the children and the adults who work with them. Teachers' commentary on the purposes of the study and the children's learning process, transcriptions of conversations and children's verbal language, photographs of their activities, audio and video tape recordings and representations of their thinking in many media such as composed in carefully designed panels or books to present the process of learning in the schools (Cadwell, 1997; New, 2007). Teachers may also use technology such as tape or video recordings, computerized slideshows or websites. In a Reggio Emilia classroom, documentation serves a number of important functions purposes. First, documentation makes parents aware of their children's experience within the school (Cadwell, 1997; Katz, 1998). As described by Kocher (2004), "documentation is a way of

making visible the otherwise invisible learning processes". Second, it allows teachers to better understand children, to evaluate their own work, and to exchange ideas with other educators. For teachers who consider themselves to also be researchers, documentation is essential because it provides the data upon which their research is founded (Wurm, 2005). Third, documentation also shows children that their work is valued. Finally, it creates an archive that traces the history of the school and the pleasure experienced by children and teachers in the process of learning that cannot be revealed through formal standardized tests and checklists (Katz, 1998). In Reggio Emilia classrooms, documentation has become an integral component of classroom life (New, 2007).

The parent as partner. Family is the basis of Italian culture and is fostered within the Reggio Emilia schools. Accordingly, parent participation is considered to be a fundamental and essential component of the Reggio programs and takes many forms including day-to-day interaction, working in the schools, discussions of educational goals, psychological issues, special events, and celebrations (Gandini, 1997; 2002). Parents play an active part in their children's learning experience and help ensure the welfare of not only their own children, but all of the pupils in the school. For example, parent representatives are involved with the Community Advisory Council and participate in meetings and work on committees to complete tasks and projects. In Reggio Emilia, the ideas and skills that the families bring to the school and the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers are believed to favour the development of a new way of educating. Familial participation is not viewed as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms (Cadwell, 1997). Teachers consider parents and families to be their full partners in fostering children's potential and parents respond to this by becoming deeply involved (Lewin-Benham, 2008).

The Reggio Emilia Approach: A Review of the Literature

A plethora of articles and books have been written and published that have documented the experiences of educators during their process of adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach in classrooms worldwide. While most of this literature has been written to recommend strategies for adopting the approach, or to inspire others to embrace the approach based on educators' narratives about their experiences and successes with Reggio, there appears to be a minimal amount of literature that has investigated the approach through a critical lens. It is my intention to build upon and contribute to the literature on the Reggio Emilia approach by exploring its adoption through a critical perspective. In order to do so, it is important to review the previous literature on the Reggio Emilia approach that has been conducted both in and outside of North America. This review will specifically summarize the literature that has discussed the challenges educators experience in adopting the Reggio Emilia approach.

Lack of Knowledge about the Approach

Previous literature has suggested that educators experience difficulty in adopting the Reggio Emilia approach in their practice because they do not have enough knowledge about the approach. For example, in Wong's (2003) study of early childhood educators who were newly adopting the approach in Hong Kong, educators who were impressed with the approach and motivated to incorporate Reggio into their teaching of the kindergarten curriculum reported that their dissatisfaction with the approach was due to the fact that they were not familiar with the theory behind the approach. Further, teachers who reported stress in adopting the approach also divulged that they felt incapable and lacked competent pedagogical knowledge and skills (Wong, 2003). The educators in this case study gave up on their efforts to continue adopting the approach due to their frustrations and lack of confidence. In Hirsch and Associates (2002)

research, teachers reported that a major challenge to adoption is that the Reggio Emilia approach is “too theoretical” and that staff “*didn’t seem to have a clue about moving towards this approach*”. The educators in this study also reported that to be better practitioners, more training and staff development about the approach to support their efforts is essential. Similar attitudes towards adoption have also been previously suggested by Cadwell and Fyfe (1997) who in their discussion of implementing the Reggio approach explain feelings of a lack of skill in communicating with children as a significant barrier for Reggio-inspired educators. These authors suggest that in order to learn and grow, teachers need to be open to and willing to risk failure. These authors also emphasize that support and modelling among colleagues is what is needed for educators to acquire these skills.

Cultural Differences

A number of writers have attributed the challenges to adopting the Reggio Emilia approach to the differences which distinguish American culture from European culture. For example, Ardzejewska and Coutts (2004) found that transporting a curriculum to a different context is likely to bring about hurdles for teachers, particularly because of a lack of understanding about the philosophy. Likewise, in Firlik’s (1996) examination of the Reggio approach in the United States, it is suggested that the difficulties in adopting Reggio in American early childhood classrooms are grounded in patterns of thinking, attitudes within the macro society and cultural conventions that exist in North America and are divergent from European societies. This author suggests that while practitioners and administrators can learn about different ways of thinking and adapt particular practices from the schools of Reggio Emilia, American professionals must also accept and appreciate their own collective habits of mind, societal attitudes and cultural dispositions that work appropriately in American educational

settings (Firlik, 1996). These ideas are dissimilar with New's (1993) earlier work in which she outlines the distinctions between the structure and practices of Reggio Emilia and American schools. In contrast to Firlik's (1996) ideas, New (1993) suggests that the characteristics that distinguish Reggio schools from American schools, including the role of the teacher, administrative policies and organization features, community support and parental involvement and the implementation of long-term projects as a vehicle for learning, should be embodied by American educators in order to achieve a teaching and learning atmosphere of community and collaboration. In more recent literature on the approach, Wurm (2005) suggests that in Reggio Emilia, Italy, everything is thought to be interconnected, which is distinct from the American mentality that has a tendency to compartmentalize and look at things individually. This writer also suggests that American teachers are frequently challenged by and frustrated with American-Italian differences including fluidity versus control, emergent versus prepared curriculum, knowing the answers versus questions, and structured versus relaxed and open-ended time (Wurm, 2005). The differences between Italian and American culture have also been highlighted by Krechevsky and Stork (2000) who suggest that the underlying assumptions of American education are outdated as they construct learning as the result of the individual, rather than group; teachers as consumers, rather than generators; assessment as outcome-driven rather than process-focused; and teaching and learning as only cognitive rather than aesthetic, ethical or affective acts. These authors further suggest looking towards the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia to challenge these educational assumptions in order to create a curriculum of the future (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000).

Diversity

In the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy, the population of children and families is culturally and linguistically homogeneous, especially in comparison to most communities in North America. For educators who are adopting the Reggio Emilia approach outside of Italy, some educators have reported that teaching in multicultural programs adds another element of challenge. For example, in the study conducted by Hirsch and Associates (2002) in a child care program in the United States that educates and cares for a diverse population, educators reported that building a bridge between the different cultures was a challenge for them when implementing the Reggio approach. However, other researchers have suggested that implementing the Reggio Emilia approach with linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse children and families is possible (Abramson, Robinson & Ankenman, 1995; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Wien, 2004). Educators have also reported success in using the Reggio Emilia approach in classrooms with children who have special needs and diverse learning styles, some even suggesting that education systems worldwide need to learn from Reggio Emilia (Loreman, 2007) and that the Reggio Emilia approach should be used as a vehicle to improve the practices of inclusive early childhood programs (Vakil, Freeman & Swim, 2003).

Lack of Time

Child care program supervisors view time as one of the major challenges facing them in working with the Reggio Emilia approach (Kinney & Wharton, 2008). Specifically, these individuals find it is difficult to find a sufficient amount of time to talk, listen, reflect, record and be together. Consequently, Kinney and Wharton (2008) suggest that staff teams need to be more creative and resourceful in allocating their time. To the same accord, Cadwell and Fyfe (1997) suggest that finding an opportunity to plan this type of approach takes time, energy,

commitment, organization and skill. Early childhood educators also report similar frustrations with the lack of time available to them as educators. For example, in Wong's (2003) qualitative study of educators adopting the approach in Hong Kong, educators reported dissatisfaction in the lack of time they had to go further with children's initiatives and interests and allow projects to develop. These educators reported that the scheduled curriculum needed to be a priority when planning their classroom time. These findings were similar to the results of a mixed methods study of Reggio educators in Australia, which reported that finding time was the biggest barrier to adopting the Reggio approach (Ardzejewska & Coutts, 2004). In a program evaluation of a Reggio-inspired program in San Francisco conducted by Hirsch and Associates (2002), educators also reported frustrations with a lack of time. Educators shared that they felt there was not enough time to work with the art teacher and that a lot of time outside of working hours was spent putting together documentation. Staff also felt they were not provided with enough planning time and needed to have more time to discuss and share ideas with their colleagues. Staff also felt that they struggled with integrating the Reggio approach with children's schedules including nap and meal times. Recollecting on her visit to Reggio Emilia, Wurm (2005) suggests that in Italy, there is "no struggle against the clock or an attempt to fit too many things into a small block of time" which is a common practice in American schools where time is hectic, pressured and structured. This writer suggests that Americans may find the Reggio approach to time, which is fluid, relaxed and open-ended, novel, uncomfortable and frustrating.

Funding

Finding available funds to support the work of educators has also been reported as a practical barrier to implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in schools in Australia (Ardzejewska & Coutts, 2004), the United States (Bersani & Jarjoura, 2002) and within a

Canadian context (Fraser, 2006). According to Fraser (2006), documentation which is an important element of the Reggio Emilia approach requires certain materials and resources that can be expensive. In Hirsch and Associates (2002) study, teachers reported that they lacked specific materials that are needed for them to do their work, such as a computer with word processor capabilities in the classroom. Stacey (2009) also suggests that teachers commonly complain about not having enough materials or money in order to do what they would like in their classrooms, although she further suggests that the teacher is the most important resource.

Working with Families

At the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, families are actively involved in their children's care and education. Parent participation is considered to be a fundamental and essential component of the early education programs and takes many forms (Gandini, 1997). For educators who practice outside of Italy, the ability to develop relationships with families has been identified as a barrier to implementing the approach. For example, Fraser (2006) explains that for families who work in stressful and demanding jobs, child care is viewed as a service that allows parents to work and that some families feel that being involved in their children's care would be additional work. Consequently, building the sense of community that is characteristic of the Reggio Emilia approach is a challenge that educators are faced with. In the Hirsch and Associates' (2002) study, researchers also identified parent participation as an obstacle, particularly engaging families and keeping them interested. However, in educational programs that traditionally promote parental involvement such as the Head Start classrooms in the United States, educators who are incorporating the Reggio Emilia approach have found parents to be interested and highly engaged in the education of their young children as well as supportive of

the curricular model that was being used in their child's classroom (McClow and Gillespie, 1998).

Negotiating Curricular Standards

Recent research has uncovered some of the dilemmas primary school teachers face in adopting the Reggio approach while having to adhere to the standardized school curriculum. In Wien's (2004) book, "Negotiating Standards in the Primary Classroom: The Teacher's Dilemma", the author describes the struggles, stresses and challenges that arise among eight teachers in Toronto, Ontario, Canada who feel tension between the necessity of fulfilling curricular expectations and embracing their own philosophies and beliefs about teaching young children. Among the eight teachers, Wien (2004) illustrates a portrait of one teacher who is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach but experiences challenges in adopting the approach into her practice as a Kindergarten teacher in the public school system. This teacher reports pressure to conform to a traditional teacher-directed curriculum while wanting to adopt the Reggio approach. She further explains her concerns about having to adhere to the standardized Kindergarten program (Wien, 2004). Among early childhood educators, struggles with having to negotiate curricular standards have also been documented. While early childhood educators may not have a standardized curriculum like teachers in the public school system, they still receive a tremendous amount of pressure to get the children in their care 'ready for school'. Early educators have the responsibility of teaching their children to read, write and do arithmetic and are further required to demonstrate each child's level of knowledge through various assessment tools and developmental checklists. These findings were also unearthed in McClow and Gillespie's (1998) study of parental reactions to Reggio in which parents expressed concerns about kindergarten readiness and whether or not the children were learning their letters or

numbers in a classroom that was Reggio-inspired. To Canadian author Fraser (2006), this is a very narrow view of school readiness. Early learning is multidimensional and should incorporate all domains, including physical, emotional, social and intellectual. To focus attention on only a few aspects of learning such as linguistic and logicomathematical upsets the balance of a child's global development and consequently weakens the foundation for learning in later life, by damaging their enthusiasm and motivation to learn and self-confidence as learners (Fraser, 2006). To supplement this argument, in a recently published book, Scheinfeld, Haigh and Scheinfeld (2008) demonstrate the way in which school readiness, in terms of focused learning, speaking, writing, thinking, reading, mathematics and socio-emotional development can be achieved through the Reggio Emilia approach. This is also presented in Stacey's (2009) recent book, in which the author documents a map project and the opportunity of the children involved to learn about spatial relationships, mathematics, representation, emerging literacy, social learning and language development. Along with school readiness standards, educators also find that state standards, state assessments and pressures for accountability create barriers in their ability to implement the Reggio Emilia approach in their practice (Horn-Wingerd, 2001).

Lack of Professional Support

In addition to the barriers previously mentioned, some educators report that the challenge to adopting the Reggio Emilia approach is due to a lack of professional support. For example, Kinney and Wharton (2008) discuss the need among Reggio-inspired educators for continuous support through professional development, and the challenge to supporting those involved who are at different levels of understanding. In an earlier study, educators reported that the challenges experienced in adopting the approach were due to a lack of adequate pedagogical support. Educators reported that their principals were not supportive of this new approach to

educating their students and were forced to follow the plans of the school administration. The lack of recognition and approval of supervisors, principals and colleagues aroused the work dissatisfaction they experienced. To reinforce experiences of satisfaction among teachers, collaboration between principals and teachers is essential. Further, this study suggests that enhanced levels of communication between management and front-line workers would improve misunderstandings and stress (Wong, 2003). The importance of professional collaboration was also acknowledged earlier by Firlik (1996) who suggests that cooperation between both teachers and administrators is essential in order to establish an effective and meaningful transition within preschool and elementary schools.

While previous literature has documented the experiences of Reggio-inspired educators, including the challenges experienced when adopting the approach; there has yet to be research conducted on Reggio-inspired educators from a critical perspective. Further, while there has been some discussion of the barriers Reggio-inspired educators may experience, previous studies have not made a link to the broader social structures that may constrain or impede their practice. Moreover, the majority of these narratives have been documented within the United States and Australia and have rarely considered the unique experiences of Canadian educators. This proposed study will thus build upon previous literature by critically exploring the experiences of early childhood educators in a Canadian context.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of this present research study was to critically examine the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children within a Canadian context by exploring the presence of ideologies associated with child development theories and their parent discipline, developmental psychology. Through this qualitative piece of research, it was my purpose to develop an understanding of how Reggio-inspired educators negotiate between the conflicting paradigms and ideologies that surround their practice by specifically examining the role of the early childhood educator, their view of the child, and the challenges educators face in adopting the approach.

Methodology

This present research involved a qualitative, in-depth study employing Smith's (1987) research strategy of *institutional ethnography*, which focuses on how everyday experience is socially organized and re-orientates people in their every day and every night worlds. According to Smith (2005), institutional ethnographers strive to "*explicate the ruling relations that organize and coordinate the local experiences of informants*". The concept of ruling relations describes the forms of consciousness and organization that are externalized to particular people and places. In an institutional ethnography, the ultimate purpose of the research is to understand the political and economic contexts of an institution and to disclose how the experiences of those who are a part of the institution are articulated and coordinated by extended social relations that are invisible from within a particular setting (Smith, 2005). This goal is distinct from the purposes of anthropological or conventional ethnography which primarily aim to "*describe the history of the group, the geography of the location, kinship patterns, symbols, politics, economic systems,*

educational and socialization systems and the degree of contact between the target culture and mainstream culture” (Fetterman, 1998, p.12).

There are a number of significant reasons why institutional ethnography was an appropriate methodology to employ in this present study. First, in the same way that the Reggio Emilia approach is an alternative curricular model that challenges the traditional practices and dominant ideologies of early childhood education that are situated in the developmental-psychological paradigm, institutional ethnography offers an alternative to standard sociology that has claimed objectivity, and was developed to resist the standard authoritative methods which have failed to adequately represent the experiences of the women of whom they claimed to speak (Smith, 1987). Second, while I had some interest in collecting data to display the insiders’ knowledge, more importantly, it was my purpose to illuminate how the experiences of educators within a Reggio-inspired program are influenced by the ruling relations that dominate the field of early childhood education. Following Smith (1987) who challenges authoritative ways of knowing and uses women’s experiences to construct a platform to critique the dominant, taken-for-granted understandings of power, my aim was to illuminate and challenge the taken-for-granted knowledges associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm and its dominance in early childhood education, and consequently, the experiences of early childhood educators. This political intention for my research thus made institutional ethnography an appropriate method to employ as *“institutional ethnography’s focus on explicating ruling relations gives this scholarly research its potential for being a resource for activism and for transformation of the conditions of people’s lives”* (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 61). Further, I see many parallels between Smith’s (1987) discussion of men’s standpoint as authoritarian, oppressive and universal and the critiques of the developmental paradigm. It was thus, only

appropriate for me to employ methods which would allow me to employ a critical, qualitative approach such as institutional ethnography. In addition, as the research questions for this study were exploratory in nature, it was important to employ a qualitative technique that would allow for description and interpretation. Finally, as suggested by Smith (2005), in institutional ethnography, the researcher must be familiar with the experienced actualities of the informants who are participating in the study. Accordingly, I believe that the methods of institutional ethnography were highly appropriate in this present study as I have personally experimented with and applied the Reggio Emilia approach as an educator in my own practice and have developed an awareness of the struggles that educators like myself might face in adopting this approach. By intensively participating in and observing the program, listening and speaking to the informants, and critically analyzing the various legislations, policies and procedures that guide the work of the educators, it was my goal to uncover how educators negotiate between the conflicting paradigms that surround their practice in field of early childhood education.

Research Site

This research project was a qualitative study which employed Smith's (1987) research strategy of institutional ethnography, involving Reggio-inspired educators who work for a large child care organization in Hamilton, Ontario; a community where a large number of educators have begun to explore the Reggio Emilia approach in their own classrooms, and where the movement has become so influential that it has gained support from the municipal government and other public agencies (Artists at the Centre, 2009). In 2005, the Municipal Government of Hamilton initiated a number of strategies in an effort to fulfill their goal as "*Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child*". Consequently, Hamilton's children, youth and social services,

including the child care sector, received additional funding to enhance current and launch new programs to support Hamilton's children and families.

When considering Reggio-inspired practice, the community of Hamilton, Ontario is unique from other communities in Southern Ontario in that its local community college looks in-depth at the Reggio Emilia approach in the early childhood education diploma program. Further, in the nearby city of Burlington, pre-service teacher education students at Charles Stuart University have also been exposed to Reggio-inspired practice in their curricula. Early childhood educators in Hamilton have also developed and are involved in a number of networks to collaborate with other professionals about their work with the Reggio approach, including the Reggio network and Emergent approach network. In addition, through the *Artists at the Centre* (www.artistsatthecentre.com) initiative, educators and artists collaborate and work alongside one another to provide opportunities to make children's thinking visible through art and projects. Moreover, two of the largest child care organizations in Hamilton, among a number of other child care and family resource programs have proclaimed that they have deliberately reorganized their programming to reflect the work of Reggio Emilia. One of these organizations, which was involved in this present study, is a large not-for profit corporation that operates over twenty programs in partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board throughout the City of Hamilton and provides care for over 1,000 children from age 18 months to 12 years old on a daily basis. This unionized organization employs over 120 individuals including early childhood educators, educator assistants, cooks, school age program staff, supply staff and supervisory staff.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The experiences of early childhood educators were the focus of this study as “*early childhood educators are the creators of the curriculum*” and have an immense impact on the lives of the children and families with whom they work (Callaghan, 2002). Further, while the discourses and ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm may limit and control the lives of young people; this pervasive framework also has the potential to affect those who are part of their lives (Canella, 1997) such as their educators, thus signifying a need to explore their experiences.

In line with the intent of this study, participants were recruited using a combination of theoretical and purposive sampling. As described by Glaser and Strauss (2007) the intent of theoretical sampling is concept-driven and is used when the researcher wants “*to collect data from places, people and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts*”. As Berg (2004) explains, a purposive sample is one where the researcher has used “*their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population*” (pg. 36). While random sampling is considered to be the most ideal sampling method in terms of generalizing findings to a larger population, in this particular study, it is believed that a random sample would not have provided a group of people who were convenient for recruiting, available to participate and/or suited to the intent of the research (Patton, 1990).

My professional relationship as an early childhood educator with other educators and child care programs was advantageous in my ability to recruit a group of appropriate participants that fit the intent of this study. It was necessary for me to use this type of theoretical and purposive sampling as there is a limited population of educators in the community of Hamilton, Ontario who have adopted the Reggio approach in their practice. As participants were recruited

from the same organization that I am employed with, it was ensured that the participants and I did not work at the same program and were not individuals with whom I had a direct working relationship.

Seven early childhood educators were recruited from a large multiple-site child care organization located in Hamilton, Ontario. This child care organization was selected for their reputation within the community for their Reggio-inspired, high quality child care and school age programs. The researcher initially met with the program director of the organization to discuss the research study and to give an opportunity to ask any questions or address concerns. Upon approval by Brock University's Research Ethics Board (see Appendix A), the researcher received permission on behalf of the organization to recruit employees as participants for the study. Child care centre supervisors were then sent a letter of invitation via e-mail (see Appendix B) outlining the study and were asked to post the information where it would be visible to staff (i.e.: bulletin board in staff room). Individuals who were interested in participating were directed to contact the researcher via e-mail or telephone. Educators who participated in this study identified themselves as being 'Reggio-inspired' in their practice. While previous literature has described early childhood educators who are influenced by the system of early childhood education in Reggio Emilia as using an emergent, project or responsive approach, for the purpose of this present study these educators were termed as "Reggio-inspired" in order to emphasize the link between the practice of these educators in a Canadian context and the Reggio Emilia schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Educators who participated in this present study were not restricted based on their age, gender, credentials or years working in the field.

Characteristics of Participants

Each of the seven individuals who participated in this study were employed by the same child care organization and worked at different centres, with different age groups of children, ranging from preschool to school-aged. Of the seven participants, two were in supervisory/management roles, one as a child care centre supervisor, and the other as the program director of the organization. These two participants were also involved with mentoring new educators-in-training at the local community college and within the organization. All but one of the educators had at least a two-year, college level early childhood education diploma and two participants had earned Bachelor of Arts degrees. In addition to this credential, most of the participants were actively involved in professional development by attending workshops, network meetings and additional training. Participants' years of experience in the field of early childhood education ranged from just over 1 year to approximately 25 years. While the level of experiences, understanding and interest in the Reggio Emilia approach appeared to be quite various among the seven participants, each participant identified their level of expertise as 'average' or 'medium'.

Data Collection

In institutional ethnography, the researcher can employ a range of data collection techniques to explore the experiences of the participants. Typically, like other forms of ethnography, institutional ethnography may involve interviewing, observation and textual analysis of documents (Campbell, 1998). In line with the intent of this study, qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Prior to participation in the interviews and observations, each individual read a letter of introduction and signed an informed consent form. Textual analyses of various documents that guide the practice

of educators were also conducted to provide a deeper understanding of how the field of early childhood education is organized. Data collection with the participants occurred over a 5-week period during the early Fall of 2009, although the researcher began examining the texts for analysis during the month of July.

Interviews. Institutional ethnographers use interviews not to reveal subjective experiences among the participants, but rather to locate and trace the points of connection among the individuals that inhabit the institution. According to Walby (2007), the purpose of interviews in an institutional ethnography is not to necessarily learn about the informant, but to understand their location within the relations of ruling and to investigate organization and institutional processes (see also DeVault & McCoy, 2006). In institutional ethnography, the goal for the research is to elicit talk that will illuminate a particular circumstance. Further, the goal is not to make generalizations about the participants involved in the study, but rather to unearth the social processes about the institution or organization that have generalizing effects or produce similar experiences for the informants (DeVault & McCoy, 2006).

Individual interviews were semi-structured in nature and each interview ranged from 45-90 minutes in duration. Interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy, later transcription and analysis by the researcher. Each interview was conducted at a private location of mutual agreement between the researcher and the participant, which was at the participant's home or at their place of work in a private and quiet room. Following each interview, the words of the participants were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then reviewed and analyzed by the researcher.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to capture the participants' voices based on the types of questions described by Patton (1990). Patton (1990) suggests that six types

of questions should guide the interview process: the background or demographic question, the knowledge question, the opinions or values question, the experience or behaviour question and the feeling or sensory question. Interview questions with the early childhood educators focused on the educator's experience with the Reggio approach, including what they like about the approach and the challenges they face in adopting Reggio in a Canadian context. The conversation-style interview and emergent nature of the interview process allowed the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants and for data to unfold inductively. See Appendix C for the interview guide that was used with the educators.

Once the interview was complete, the participants were explained the purpose of the study and were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the project. Interview participants were then given a \$20 honorarium as compensation for taking part in the study.

Participant Observation. Participant observation is a research method that begins in the actual events from which description and stories are derived. It is a method of data collection that allows the researcher to explore the "social in motion" (Diamond, 2006). Participant-observation is suggested to be superior to other methods of data collection as it provides rich and a quality amount of data, as well as the opportunity for the researcher to gain familiarity with the practices of the observed group. In addition, Merriam (1998) suggests that when combined with document analysis and interviews, observations allow the researcher to generate a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon. Charmaz (2005) also contends that when intensive interviews are combined with multiple observations, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be gained. Furthermore, in the context of educational research, it is argued to be the best method to use in the classroom (McKernan, 1996). When participant-observations are employed in studies employing institutional ethnography, this research strategy has the potential to make a unique

contribution to understanding how ruling relations work. Moreover, observations of everyday life allow the researcher to capture the language used by participants which is important for analytic purposes (Campbell, 1998).

The location for the participant-observations in this present study occurred at two of the participants' places of work during program hours. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe such research sites as 'performance sites', where events are occurring and people are acting. Over a period of 5 weeks, I immersed myself into two different child care programs; one preschool program and a school-aged, before and after school program 15 times and took on the role of an active participant-observer. Anecdotal observations and thoughts that related to the guiding research questions were documented during and after each visit in a hand-written journal. The journal provided a forum for exploring ideas, themes and reflections on the research (Creswell, 1998). The data collected from the participant-observations were also used to supplement interview data through triangulation, in order to "give a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation" (Altrichter et al., 1996, p. 117).

Textual Analyses. In examining relations of ruling, institutional ethnographers examine texts, which disclose how power is embedded within social institutions and structures (Smith, 1987). According to Smith, (2006), in institutional ethnography, texts are defined as "words, images or sounds that are into a material form of some kind from which they can be read, seen, heard, watched and so on" ... and can include "common place objects of our contemporary world" such as "books, the bus tokens, the airline reservations, the radio, the CDs, the e-mail messages, the advertisements, the movies ...".

In institutional ethnography, the relations of ruling are believed to be mediated by texts which are the primary medium of power. As Smith (1987) suggests that "We are ruled by forms

of organization vested in and mediated by texts and documents, and constituted externally to particular individuals and their personal and familiar relationships...". Furthermore, Smith (2006) suggests that examining texts in ethnographic research is critical in "*exploring the translocal organization of the everyday*" (p.66).

DeVault and McCoy (2006) suggest that when examining a text, institutional ethnographers are most interested in understanding:

1. *How the text comes to the informant and where it goes after the informant is done with it.*
2. *What the informant will need to know in order to use the text (create it, respond to it, fill it out, and so on)*
3. *What the informant does with, for and on account of the text.*
4. *How the text intersects with and depends on other texts and textual processes as sources of information, generators of conceptual frames, authorizing text and so on.*
5. *The conceptual framework that organizes the text and its competent reading*
(Devault & McCoy, 2006, p.36-37).

In this proposed study, textual analyses of policies and documents which guide the practice of early childhood educators were conducted to give the researcher insight into how texts organize and dominate the structure of the programs, where they are used, and to supplement and enhance the data gathered through the interviews and observations. Textual analyses began in July 2009, prior to data collection and were on-going during the data collection period.

Textual analyses of publically available policies and documents which guide the practice of early childhood educators were conducted to give the researcher insight to how texts construct young people and consequently the role of the educator.

The documents analyzed in this present study are as follows:

a. *Day Nurseries Act*

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services holds the responsibility for monitoring and inspecting licensed child care programs to determine if they are meeting the requirements of the *Day Nurseries Act* (DNA). This act sets out the requirements that need to be met by child care operators in Ontario order to operate. The act ensures that day nurseries are properly licensed, regularly inspected, and conform to established rules and regulations, to help to protect the health, safety and well-being of the children who attend a child care program. Originally written in 1946, amendments and revisions to the Act have been made in 1966, 1971, 1974, 1978, 1984, 1990, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004 and 2006, and are currently under review for further amendments and revisions in light of recent announcements for a province wide full-day kindergarten program (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1997).

The DNA includes specific minimum standards that must be met in the following areas:

- a) program policies and procedures
- b) building and accommodation
- c) equipment and furnishing
- d) playgrounds
- e) record-keeping

- f) staff and group size
- g) nutrition
- h) program
- i) health and medical supervision
- j) support for children with special needs

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services monitors compliance to these standards in a variety of programs including nursery schools, full and extended day child care centres, before and after school programs and home child care (AECEO, 2010).

b. *Early Childhood Education Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R)*

Developed by Harms and Clifford in the early 1980s, the ECERS-R and its updated versions (1998) is one of the best known and most widely used evaluative resources to help early childhood programs examine their environment and learning program. Used worldwide, ECERS-R is a tool that examines a program's learning and play environment (e.g. space, furnishings, routines, activities, interaction, and schedule) and is designed to be used for programs serving children 2 1/2 - 5 years of age. It is suggested that high ratings in ECERS-R can be reliably connected with quality programming and high learning outcomes for the children in the program being rated (Harms and Clifford, 1998).

c. *Early Learning For Every Child Today (ELECT): A framework for Ontario early childhood settings.*

Developed by the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, *The Early Learning For Every Child Today (ELECT)* document was introduced to Ontario early childhood educators and Kindergarten teachers in early 2007. Designed to complement the Day

Nurseries Act, Ontario Early Years guidelines and the Kindergarten Program, the ELECT framework informs educators about how young children learn and develop and serves as a curricular guideline for early childhood education programs in Ontario, including child care centres, home child care, nursery schools, Ontario Early Years Centres, family resource and parenting programs, readiness centres, family literacy centres, child development programs and early intervention services (ELECT, 2007). Included in the document is a continuum of developmental skills and strategies that are hoped to support and be used by practitioners who work together in early childhood settings, in an effort to transform programs and services for children from birth until entry into grade one into one coherent system.

In this present study, textual analyses were used to supplement the data collected through interviews and participant observations. Textual analyses were viewed as necessary and valuable to augment the study, as documents mediate and regulate the practice of educators. Moreover as Sevenhuijsen suggests in Moss and Petrie (2002, p. 81) “policy texts are sites of power” and are used by practitioners to ensure that minimum standards for practice are met. However, policy texts and related program documents are rarely considered for their theoretical content and culturally-bound contexts and consequently should be examined critically (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2005).

Data Analysis

Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the grounded theory approach is a method of qualitative research that uses a systematic set of procedures to generate a novel theory to explain a specific research phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). However, since their publication in 1967, there has been much academic debate between “Glaserians” and

“Straussians” regarding what constitutes “true grounded theory” (Stern, 1994). While Glaser, who had a background in statistical analysis believed in theory emerging directly and rigorously from the data (Duchsche & Morgan, 2004; Stern, 1994), qualitative researcher Strauss and his colleague Juliet Corbin adopted a more detailed, systematic and prescriptive approach toward generating a theory (Bluff, 2005), which Glaser criticized as being “forced” and contrary to the tenets of this methodological and analytical approach. Today, contemporary grounded theorists such as Charmaz (2005) have offered an alternative view of grounded theory that has moved away from claims of objectivity and has looked at more subjective, constructivist approaches to inquiry.

Although the intention of this study was not to generate a new theory, following other recent qualitative work (e.g. Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Hsieh, 2010; Matheson & McCollum, 2008 and Olmstead, Blick and Mills, 2009), analytical procedures of the grounded theory approach were employed to generate themes from the study’s qualitative data and to provide a greater depth of understanding. More specifically, grounded theory coding procedures of open and axial coding were used as an analytical framework to clarify and elicit key themes from the data collected in this study. Open coding is the process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The researcher asks questions about the data and makes constant comparisons by looking for similarities and differences between each incident, event and other instances of the same and differentiating phenomena. The researcher then labels and groups similar events and incidents together to form categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the open coding process, interview transcripts and observational data were reviewed by the researcher in which similar

words and phrases were coded into initial themes or categories. Each document for textual analyses was also coded in the same way to elicit initial themes.

After this process of open coding, axial coding was then deployed where n the researcher identifies one open coding category to focus upon and goes back to all other data to create subthemes around this phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context, intervening conditions and consequences (Strauss, 1987). At this point in this study's analytical process, subthemes from the data were created and similar ideas taken from the key informant interviews, participant observations and other textual analyses were grouped together to form interconnected categories. Although there is great debate about how this process actually occurs, as described by Charmaz (2005), "*grounded theory is a comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories and category with category*". Quotes and notes in this study were then stored electronically according to theme by the researcher for further analyses and to assist in the writing process. It is important to reiterate that while grounded theory analytical procedures were used in this present study, grounded theory methodology which is traditionally aimed at generating theoretical codes or statements not employed.

Ethical Considerations

All research activities in this proposed study were in compliance with the guidelines set by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. Ethical clearance from the board was received on July 30, 2009 (FILE: 08-326 MITCHELL/NGUYEN). To ensure that all participants were properly informed, they were each provided with information prior to participation in the form of a Letter of Information (see Appendix D) and an Informed consent form (see Appendix E). These written disclosures regarding the nature of the research included the purposes of the study, the methods of data collection and data analysis, assurances of confidentiality and information

regarding the use of the participants' responses and comments as data for the study. These documents were signed by the participants and the researcher before beginning the study. The researcher and participants held copies of each document for future acknowledgement purposes. To protect confidentiality, all information that could identify individual study participants or the participating organization remained hidden from everyone but the evaluators. Pseudonyms were also used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. For further confidentiality of the data, all paper data, audiotapes and electronic data were stored in a secure location at Brock University that was only known to the researcher.

As in any research study, there a number of ethical concerns to be closely considered. First, there may be a reason to question any relationships I might have had previously with the individuals who participated in this study. Both Acker (2000) and Sherif (2001) suggest that this type of relationship between the researcher and informants is one of an indigenous or insider; in which our mutual experiences in other environments, i.e.: the workplace, as well as our overall view of Reggio or early childhood education could be similar. Consequently, it was important for me as the researcher in this study to take extra care to balance each participant's feedback with my own impressions. However, while some may consider the researcher's location to be hazardous; those who approach research from a grounded theory perspective believe that one's own experience is of integral value to informing the research question and that personal or professional experiences can motivate a potentially successful research endeavour (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover, this research project was viewed as a way to "give voice" to the participants who may not otherwise have the opportunity or venue to be heard. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss the adoption of grounded theory procedures within social science research as follows:

If we do it correctly, then we are not speaking for our participants but rather are enabling them to speak in voices that are clearly understood and representative ... however incomplete, [we] provide a common language (set of concepts) through which research participants, professionals and others can come together to discuss ideas and find solutions to problems. Yes, we are naïve if we think we can 'know it all'. But even a small amount of understanding can make a difference (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 56).

To further justify my position as the researcher in this study, institutional ethnography procedures treat the knowledge of the researcher not as biased, but consider one's experience to be data that hold the analysis accountable to actual lived experiences while revealing something about whose interests are being served (Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Moreover, Campbell and Gregor (2002), suggest that institutional ethnographers who study settings that they know well are more likely to be able to change and use their research as a tool for social justice.

A second ethical issue that was considered in this study was the possibility that participants might feel distress about sharing their feelings, both positive and negative, about their work and experiences as educators. It is possible that participants may have felt concerned about the consequences they might face if their responses were found undesirable by their employer. However, it was ensured that any concerns or stress felt by the participants were minimized by ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the data collection process and in the actual thesis document through the use of pseudonyms.

A third ethical concern relates to the possibility of stress or feelings of intrusion on behalf of the participants through and during the participant-observations. It was possible that the

participants would feel anxiety by having an “outsider” present in their classroom. This concern was addressed by gaining the participants’ informed consent and by being explicit with the participants about the research study. Participants were also reminded that that they were not being evaluated or judged by the researcher through the observations. The participants were also made aware of the researcher’s educational and professional background to help the participants gain a sense of commonality and rapport with the researcher.

Chapter Five: Research Findings

Upon reading the transcripts of the participants and through the analytical procedures of open and axial coding, a number of themes surfaced from the data collected which will be described in the following section by synthesizing the words of the seven participants, the researcher's interpretation of the observations and the analyses of the textual data. It is important to note that while over 60 pages of interview data were transcribed and 42 pages of observational data were recorded, in line with the intent and scope of the study, the data analyzed and reported in this section were specifically drawn in response to the main research questions which guided the study. In reporting the findings, researcher-selected pseudonyms have been used to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant.

Ideologies of Developmental Psychology in Early Childhood Education

In order to explore the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach in their practice, the first research question examined the ideological domination of the developmental-psychological paradigm within the educator's daily lived experience. As discussed in earlier chapters, while developmental psychology has made significant contributions to the understanding of children and childhood, a solely or central developmental-psychological lens is problematic because of the assumptions of this approach that construct children as in process, passive, incapable and in need of protection. In contrast to these views, the Reggio Emilia approach contends that each child is unique and is the powerful, competent protagonist of his or her own growth who has a desire to gain knowledge, has much capacity and amazement, and yearns to create certain ties with others to communicate (Edwards, 1998; Filippini, 1998). Through the interviews, observations and textual analyses that were

conducted in this study, the inscription of the developmental-psychological paradigm on the practice of the educators was revealed.

The Role of the Early Childhood Educator

While interview participants were never directly asked about what ideological beliefs they felt were inscribed on their practice, a number of participants articulated the influence of the child development paradigm on their role as early childhood educators when asked to describe their work and their interest in the Reggio Emilia approach.

Based on the responses that were provided by the participants, it became apparent that these individuals aligned themselves with the Reggio Emilia approach because of its alternative way of thinking and practice that are distinct from more traditional approaches to educating young children. For example, when discussing her experiences with different teaching curricula, Courtney described her preference for the Reggio Emilia approach and explained the differences between the approach and more traditional approaches to teaching and caring for young children. Her response also revealed two different constructions of the child; one perspective which is characteristic of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the other more congruent with the developmental-psychological paradigm.

In other programs, they were all theme-based. You already come up with the ideas and you don't really explore them with the children. You tell them – we're doing this, this, this and this. And that's not right, really. Why do you get to choose? They are the ones who spend their time in the program. Your opinion isn't any more important than theirs. So I like Reggio because you use their ideas and listen to what they are saying, which really isn't all that difficult and I think it also makes your job more meaningful.

Like Courtney, Kate also shared that her inclination towards the Reggio Emilia approach was because of the difference of this approach from traditional teaching practices. As she explains:

The whole idea of listening to children is one that I think is central to the philosophy. And one of its main principles is that if you want to know what children are wanting and thinking, is that you need to stop and listen to children ... and that is something that we haven't done well traditionally in our ECE programs. Once you listen to children you need to develop skills that allow children to express what they want to say in terms that can be understood by others.

Kate also addressed her observations as a supervisor of a child care program concerning her experience with educators who are hesitant to adopt the Reggio Emilia approach in their practice, which also revealed some pedagogical and philosophical differences between the Reggio approach and other approaches to teaching and learning.

Some people get caught up in the view that they are the controllers of children, and it's their role to take them through routines and certain tasks. So this whole view of being in charge of a group and getting them through a schedule, and controlling behaviour and making sure children aren't getting hurt has led to ECEs putting themselves, or adopting the view of controllers or police or dominators. It's really hard to let go of that view of ourselves; someone who is in control and in charge.

In another interview, Norma recalled the time when she and her coworkers were first transitioning toward adopting a Reggio Emilia approach. One way they had changed their

practice as educators was to consider the rules they had in place for the children throughout their program. Norma explained the response that some educators gave her was resistant in fear that they would lose control of their classroom and the children in their care.

It will be mayhem!, they would say. Some teachers said, you eliminate the rules and you'll have chaos. It will be crazy! The rules are in place to keep the kids in order and safe.

Norma continued to explain the reaction she got from other educators while her team was reconsidering the program rules.

I felt like people were looking at me like oh, you just wait until you get into the real world. You don't really understand until you've been in the field for a while. Then you'll get why we have all these rules in place. Then you'll get why we do time out. Then you'll get why only two people can play in the house centre. Then you'll get why we say eat your lunch before you get dessert. They thought that because I was a new grad and new to the field that I was naive and that basically, my ideas and beliefs were out in left field.

As Norma discussed in the interview, in contrast to the forewarnings she received, upon their examination of the classroom and playground rules, she and her teaching partners discovered that many of the rules were in place unnecessarily and that the issue of safety was being used by the program staff over excessively as an excuse that was actually hindering the experiences of the children, as well as their practice as educators. As she explains:

We had the other effect. We removed the rules and there were way more interactions with the kids. The staff were no longer policing everybody. We

weren't enforcing rules. We no longer had to do that, so we could relax and fulfill our role as teachers even more than we could before.

These responses from the educators reveal the way in which the ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm are inscribed on the dominant perception of the role of the educator; as a controller and protector of the child.

As Norma further explained in her interview:

An ECE is really in a position of power. If you allow yourself to view yourself that way. You are the keeper of the time, keeper of the rules. I decide when things happen and who gets to do what. I'm the decision maker, I impose them, enforce them and change them as well.

As Norma recognizes in her interview response, adults by virtue of age have the potential to possess a great amount of authority and control over young people, and this power differential is also possible within the early childhood education classroom.

Academic Skills and School Readiness

As explained by Dahlberg and Moss (2006), the assumptions of the developmental psychological paradigm construct the preschool as the producer of pre-determined outcomes, particularly those outcomes that are related to academic skills and school readiness. In recent years, the focus on fostering academic skills within Ontario early childhood classrooms in preparation for school has gained even greater attention. More specifically, through the recent implementation of the "Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings" (ELECT) document that was presented to the early childhood community in 2007, educators have been given guidelines of how to organize their environment and interact

with children in order to better support children's learning and development. While the intention of the ELECT document is to be implemented as a framework for curriculum or pedagogy rather than as a specific curriculum, the introduction of the document in early learning settings has demonstrated the pervasive influence of the child development paradigm within early education.

Written to align with the province's Kindergarten document, the ELECT document provides a thorough table of information on children's development from birth to eight years, linking domains and skills, indicators of skills and how these skills can be developed through interaction. Broad categories of development including physical, social, emotional, communication/language and cognitive are included in the document. Within the document, justifications for using the ELECT document as a resource include the need to support children's early brain development (p. 8) and to identify learning and developmental difficulties at an early age in order to *"lead to interventions that reduce difficulties and set children on more optimal developmental pathways"* (p. 9). While the document includes statements about acknowledging *"children's individual and diverse developmental and natural disposition to learn"*, the document uses evidence from child development research and professionals to support the emphasis of the child development lens within early childhood education, demonstrating one way in which the developmental-psychological paradigm has permeated early learning classrooms. The emphasis on the child as a being of development is particularly visible in pages 20 through to 23 which serve to inform the reader about children's development and acquisition of skills. This finding is an issue of concern as Blaise and Andrew (2005) contend as *"developmental theory has ... set benchmark standards for what a child should be doing and capable of at any given age, [while ignoring] the complexities of [culture], gender and sexuality and the ways in which children might deviate from or subvert such suggested norms."* However,

it is also important to note that the document also makes a point to mention that “the rate of development is shaped by each child’s family, culture and daily experiences” (ELECT, 2007, p. 20), thus recognizing the diversity of one’s journey through the life course.

Through an analysis of the ECERS-R rating scale, which is a widely used measurement tool to assess what a high quality early learning program should look like, it is apparent that academic achievement has become a priority within the field of early childhood education, as it is viewed as an integral indicator of quality. More specifically, an examination of the ECERS-R document revealed the inclusion of academic skills such as language and reasoning, math and numbers, nature and science as indicators of a quality program. Furthermore, the companion scale to the ECERS-R, the ECERS-E provides an even greater emphasis on academic skills and includes additional items which centre on literacy, mathematics, science and Environment and diversity, suggesting that focus on these skills is central to a high quality early learning program.

Views about Children

The emphasis on the early education program as a vehicle for fostering academic skills was also embedded in some of the educators’ views of what their role is as the educator in the classroom as well as their views of the child, as revealed through the interviews.

For example, when asked to describe her role as the early childhood educator in a preschool program, Amanda explained:

My role as the ECE is to get the kids ready for school. To give them the best start they can so that next year when they go to Kindergarten, they will be prepared. So a lot of our programming involves literacy and numeracy skills, but play-based. There’s been tons of research out there that proves children who go to daycare do

a lot better in school. I've even had teachers say they can tell on the first day of school which students have been in my program and which ones haven't.

Tiffany, who works with older children in a school age before and after school program shared similar a sentiment about her role as the educator:

My role is to ... pretty much prepare them for the rest of their lives. So whether it's spelling words, counting or problem-solving, everyday thinking skills. You're there to support the children in the areas they need support in. Say for instance, in school they are getting some aspects of language and all that kind of stuff but if there are areas that they are weak in, I try to focus on those things and make them better so that they are all at the same level. Technically, I'm not teaching them anything. But I try to give them help so they can understand it.

This same educator described her view of the child, which corresponded to the view of her role as the educator.

I think the child, they are there to learn. Whether or not they want to, they learn every day. They're learning something.

Likewise, Susana described her role as the educator, and her view of the child, using a metaphor in very traditional terms.

My view of the child is like an empty notebook that needs to be filled up. They need and want to learn and the teacher writes on those pages, which is pretty powerful if you think about it. You've got a lot of responsibility.

This passive role of the child described by Susana positions the educator as in power, while the child is poor and weak. This construction of the child is also visible within the Day Nurseries Act (DNA), a policy document used province-wide to regulate the operation of child

care programs. While the DNA is important as it sets out specific criteria to ensure that minimum standards are met in child care programs, the language of the Day Nurseries Act suggests that the child care program is a site to protect children and families who are at-risk.

The construction of child care as a site to protect children and families is presented throughout the DNA. More specifically, sections with the DNA are dedicated to ensuring the health and medical supervision of children, positioning the operator and employee as accountable for monitoring the well-being of the children in their care. The emphasis on ensuring health and safety suggests that children and families are in need of protection.

Within the ELECT document, particular constructions of the child as “becoming” and “at-risk” are also evident. For example, the document describes the importance of play in the early years for optimal development and later academic success, suggesting that children are on a pathway towards the adults they will come. Moreover, the document includes statements about children as “vulnerable” to societal barriers such as “poverty, employment demands, transient living conditions, parental health problems, minority ethno-cultural, racial or linguistic status and limited time and resources”, (p. 9) constructing children and childhood as at-risk and in need of support and protection.

Interpretation of Findings through the Transmission Model to Education

An alternative interpretation of selected findings from this study is drawn upon here to reflect both the multiplicity of analytical pathways and more traditional approaches to early childhood educational theory known as the ‘transmission model to education’ (Nola & Irzik, 2005; Richardson, 1997). This approach, which has been frequently critiqued by constructivists, positions educational instruction as a process in which the teacher transmits a fixed, prescribed body of knowledge to the learner (Nola & Irzik, 2005). This more traditional model of education

is challenged by constructivists who view the approach as "didacticist, and therefore teacher-oriented, [since it] emphasizes content too much, encourages passive rote learning and memorization, and provides the student with no genuine understanding (p. 175)". Further, constructivists reject this approach since it fails to provide the necessary interaction between previous and newly acquired knowledge, and in providing opportunities to internalize knowledge at a deeper level of understanding (Richardson, 1997). This latter view is also consistent with Friere's (1993) critique of traditional education:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.

While the intention of this study was to examine the presence of ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm in Reggio-inspired practice, one could also argue that the more traditional transmission model of education was also present within the practice of these educators through the role of the educator, the emphasis on academic skills and readiness and the views about children.

Challenges of Reggio-Inspired Practice

The second research question of this study examined the challenges that Reggio-inspired educators face in their practice. Accordingly, a number of the interview questions asked participants about the challenges they experience, both as early childhood educators and more specifically to adopting the approach in their practice.

The Image of the Early Childhood Educator

One issue that educators discussed as a challenge during their interviews was their image as professional educators, particularly while working alongside teachers in the public school setting. A number of educators shared that they felt that teachers who teach at the grade level viewed them as being inferior and that they desired to prove themselves as capable and professional.

As Amanda shared:

They (teachers) see the kids as wild, and they think you don't know how to do your job. It's not even that bad, I like my job. I just wish teachers would respect what I do and see that.

Likewise, Joanna shared one of her frustrations about working in a child care program within a school setting.

I absolutely hate how the teachers in the school will treat our kids differently as soon as the bell rings. Suddenly a bell rings and it's like *your* kids did this and that. What makes them mine and not yours? It's funny how until 3:05 they are students that belong to the school and after that it's like we are invading the school. The kids don't deserve that. And then it also makes it seem like there is something wrong with our program and that we are incompetent when actually the children love it, the parents love it and we work really hard.

It is important to note that Joanna's response was reinforced in the observations that were later conducted. During one of my visits to the after school program where Joanna works, the principal of the school came into the room and asked the staff if she could talk to the group. Joanna and her teaching partner asked the children to give their attention to the principal, who began talking to the children about not being loud or disruptive when heading down to the hall to go to the bathroom. She then told the children that she did not want to have to talk to Joanna and her teaching partner about their behaviour and explained that attending the after school program was a 'privilege' and that if the children were not following the rules they would have to find somewhere else to go after school. On another occasion, a teacher who I later learned was the gym teacher, approached Joanna and reminded her that the children were not to use the equipment and materials in the gym as they were school property. While both the principal and the teacher's concerns are indeed valid and logical in light of the school's rules and expectations, it is interesting how both individual's complaints positioned the afterschool program as being outside of the school's purpose and responsibility and that the children, despite being students of the school during the day, were considered to be visitors who were borrowing school space rather than having a right to use it.

In addition to the challenges educators face within the school setting, educators also described that gaining recognition and satisfaction from the parents they work with was also a challenge, more specifically because of their lack of understanding about the Reggio Emilia approach.

As Tiffany described:

I don't think parents understand fully what the emergent approach is all about. I think they're having a really hard time adjusting to the fact that we don't do

worksheets, daily weather circles or hooked on phonics or whatever it is that other schools do. We've had some children pull out because we don't have those things.

This feeling of concern on behalf of parents was observable on one of the occasions where I visited the preschool program. Upon picking up their child from the program, a parent approached Courtney with the complaint that her child did not know how to write her name or count to 100 yet, when her older child was able to do these things "when she was his age". The parent wanted to know that her child was 'getting something out of the program' and felt that after being in the preschool program for a period of time, should have acquired these skills. This parent also discussed with Courtney that when her child attends Kindergarten, the teacher will not have as much time to help her child because of the larger class size and that she did not want her child to struggle in school, and ideally, would like her to be ahead of the other children.

Lack of Knowledge about the Approach

Challenges that educators experienced in adopting the Reggio Emilia approach also seemed to be linked to their own lack of knowledge about the approach. As Amanda shared during her interview:

When I first started working here I heard that part of the organization did Reggio and the other part did emergent. So I was really confused at first. When you went to different sites, I felt like what are you supposed to do? You have different expectations and different messages and it's not all that clear about what you need to do.

Amanda also explained:

Documentation is my biggest challenge. Because I didn't know how to do documentation. When I first got the impression, I honestly thought that there was

one way to do it. And one way only. I just couldn't wrap my head around it because like I said, at the beginning I didn't know how to do documentation, I didn't know where to start.

Susana, who was the only participant without a diploma in early childhood education shared that she experienced a lot of difficulty in adopting the approach. When asked about what her biggest challenge was in putting the Reggio approach into practice she shared:

Just a lack of education because I don't have an ECE background. I'm not that familiar with the Reggio approach or how it's supposed to work so it's obviously not easy to practice something that you're not familiar with. I have a lack of knowledge which is my biggest barrier. But it's a learning process.

Behavioural Challenges

Educators also reported that having children in their group with behavioural challenges made it difficult to incorporate aspects of the Reggio approach into their practice.

As Tiffany shared in her interview:

I was always focusing on the children's behaviours because I had so many behavioural issues in the classroom that it was so hard to pinpoint their interests and work off something. I was overworked. I felt like there was too much for me to do. So I didn't really know how to begin.

Susana explained her feelings of difficulty:

Some of the centres I've worked at under the organization are highly inclusive, which is great but I think it's difficult to focus on different things. Like we can support the children who have special needs which I truly believe in but that takes up a lot of time and energy working with the resource teacher, support facilitator,

doing classwide planning, and everything else. So adopting a new curriculum is just impossible at this point.

This sentiment was also shared by Courtney who explained:

Sometimes I feel like it's impossible for me to do everything I need to do with all the behavioural problems that we have. So I'm spending most of my shift chasing kids around making sure they are not being aggressive and playing nicely. On top of that some of our group is really young and they don't have a lot of words. So it's hard to find out what they're interested in when they can't talk or tell you.

In contrast with the feelings expressed by Tiffany, Susan and Courtney, Kate looked to the Reggio Emilia approach as a way to help her better address the behavioural challenges that existed among the children in her group. When asked how she first became inspired to adopt the approach, Kate shared her story:

At the time I was working for a program with preschoolers, in the central east end of the city. It was a highly therapeutic program, there were children with special needs and children with behavioural issues. I spent a great deal of my time trying to address behavioural issues. I think I was also at the point in my career where I was getting a little tired and burnt out with the early childhood education scene, and I was searching for something that would inspire me to do things in a different way.

Kate continued to explain that she became inspired to adopt the approach after having the opportunity to attend a presentation on the Reggio Emilia approach which included a video of the Diana School in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

I was struck in the presentation by how relaxed the teachers appeared in the role, and that was something that I wanted for myself, as opposed to always reacting and policing children. I wanted to be more relaxed and be more of a teacher than someone who was supervising all the time. I think that was the beginning of the inspiration. And then when you start to examine your practice and see a positive impact even when you see a small change you are further inspired to learn more and do better with that.

“There are no rules to Reggio!”

Educators who worked in supervisory positions also shared the challenges they experienced in their role. Norma described the pressure she felt from her staff to give more guidance and support to staff who are adopting the Reggio approach.

Staff want you to just tell you how to do it. The directions, recipe. Like a cake. As if you do A B and C and then you are now a Reggio Emilia teacher! As the supervisor of a team, the staff were looking for me to give them answers. All the time they were looking to me for guidance. I think teachers became frustrated with me. They were feeling like I was purposely not telling them, that I probably did somewhere have a secret book with all the rules, but that I wasn't going to share it. If only they knew, there are no rules to Reggio! It's a philosophy, not a step-to-step program. So there was a great deal of frustration with those folks and so for me working in my role was a challenge.

As a supervisor, Kate also experienced challenges in supporting her staff in their adoption of Reggio.

I know for a fact that there is a huge misunderstanding about the approach. I have seen programs that make great changes to the environment and add some really nice aesthetic elements to the environment and change their language to the extent, like, oh we need to respect one another, we need to listen, etc. But then once they've made these preliminary changes they stop there and say now we do Reggio and we are a Reggio program and it's so much more than that. And it's kind of discouraging to see that that's what people believe is a Reggio program and that's what they are willing to accept.

Time constraints

A number of the educators identified that a lack of time was a challenge to their adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach. When asked about the challenges she experiences, Courtney shared in her interview:

Sometimes there aren't enough hours in the day. Because you do have a routine to follow – well a schedule. Most of that can't be helped. Because children are dismissed from school at a certain time, they have to be brought to school at a certain time. Then we have other children that go to school and they have to leave a certain time. So sometimes you only have so much time to do things. But within those couple of hours you do have some flexibility. So if we don't want to go outside because we're doing something than we don't. We don't have to go outside for two hours. But I would say timing is the biggest challenge.

Tiffany shared the same frustration during her interview:

I appreciate one hour a week of programming time but just coming up with your programming chart, thinking about all of that, it takes up an hour. So to do all these other things like documentation and research, which are so important, there isn't enough time. So that's what I find really difficult. Some programs, I don't have a sleep room. Some other programs do, if they have younger children. So staff can do things while the children are sleeping. So at least they have that time to look forward to. I don't have that. So that's the difficult part.

Susana also identified time as a barrier to her adoption of the approach.

There is a lot of paperwork to get done and administrative time, groceries and different responsibilities that come with my job and to be honest I don't feel that taking on extra work when I am already needing more time makes sense right now.

Ministry Guidelines

While educators were not directly asked about the textual documents that surround their practice, a number of educators mentioned some constraints on their practice that were related to ministry guidelines.

Courtney shared:

Sometimes, for instance today, I had to combine my group early because I had to go do dishes because we are short a staff. Little things like that. You have to cut your program short, and therefore you're not completing a project with the children, that you know they really enjoy because you have to cut your program

short. (The ministry requires that) you have to have so many staff per kid so if there's too many kids this happens.

As the program director, Norma also shared feelings of being overwhelmed by Ministry expectations:

Some days I am feeling so overwhelmed by serious occurrences, outbreaks etc. That my brain is dealing with ministry things. The challenge is that my personal role now is often now very reactive. I tell myself I will take care of one task but then other stuff comes up, over and over again. I can't even respond to one e-mail and then four more come up and the phone is always ringing for me.

Overcoming Challenges

During the interviews, the educators disclosed a number of ways they were able to overcome the challenges of adopting the Reggio Emilia approach.

Collaboration

A number of educators identified the importance of having supportive teaching partners in adopting the Reggio Emilia approach.

As Amanda stated:

It's important to have the support of your team. If you are unsure of something they are there to back you up no matter what.

Courtney also shared this same opinion:

It is really important to have a relationship with your co-worker because sometimes when you want to program plan for your group you want someone to bounce ideas off of and it's hard to come up with all the ideas by yourself.

Sometimes you're stuck on, how can I take this further? For example, The

children are building bridges. So we've talked about what bridges look like, what are the different parts of a bridge. What does a bridge need to stay standing up etc. I've already asked this question and that question and they've given me these answers and I've come up with the questions from their answers but I don't know where else to go from here because you get stuck. So, if I don't have anyone else to bounce off of, that makes it challenging to come up with all the ideas on my own.

Networking with other educators and professionals also seemed to help the educators grow in their practice:

As Courtney explained:

I've joined the Reggio study group. It's a network; it's almost every month or every other month. From September-June. So it's probably about 10 times a year that we meet. So just coming together with other colleagues that are practicing the philosophy and bringing in examples of other documentation so I could see how other people put together their work. That helps me a lot.

Courtney, who is involved in the Artists at the Centre project described her experience in the program and how it has aided in her adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach.

We have an artist in our classroom. Having an artist is a huge advantage. She sees things in a different perspective. I'm not a very artistic person. So she provides us with materials that I've never thought of besides crayons and scissors. There's a lot of other materials. And she comes up with other ideas, that maybe I haven't thought of. So she's great to bounce off of. So I love having the artist there!

Personal Motivation

Both participants who worked in supervisory roles had similar views about what is required to make the adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach more successful.

When asked this question in the interview Norma responded:

It takes dedication to professional growth and passion to get involved and want to make change. And that is hard hard work. And if you're not going to get paid any more money, why bother? And if no one's going to hold you accountable, who cares? And if the kids seem happy at the end of the day and you still have your job? Why make more work? So it comes down to the person's individual motivation. It comes down to that.

Kate also agreed that an individual's motivation to learn was an important factor in success:

I think there has been no shortage of opportunity for educators to learn more. But people just want a recipe to follow. If you want me to do something just tell me how to do it and I'll do it. They want a blue print or recipe and direction and they think that they've done what needs to be done and they are not taking it any further. What we really need to be doing is encouraging people who are interested in studying, a more academic approach of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. People need to read things, and reflect on their own practice. To really take time to go in depth. We don't do that well in our society. We want something that is quick and easy.

This idea was reinforced through my interview with Susana, who among those who shared their story, appeared to have the least amount of knowledge with the approach. When asked what inspired her to adopt the approach in her practices she explained:

I wouldn't say inspired is the correct word. I would say it was enforced into the [organization] and it's just the way the [the organization] does their programming and so as an employee, I have to do it to.

Documentation as a Tool to Demonstrate Professionalism

Some educators suggested that their work with the Reggio Emilia approach has helped them with the challenge of demonstrating their role as professional educators, particularly through the documentation component.

As Amanda explained:

I think the big thing is that a lot of people see ECEs as babysitters and we're not, so I really feel part of my job is to display some sort of piece of documentation so that parents kind of know, Oh this is what they are learning, this is what they've been doing.

Joanna shared that her documentation was used for similar purposes:

Besides the fact that I put the documentation up to make the children's thinking visible, and to show them that their work is valuable, I also do it for the school staff and parents. It's important for me to prove to the principal, teachers and parents that the children's time in the program is meaningful and that they are being productive, learning, engaged. Not just hanging out but that they are getting

something out of being in the program. If you have documentation, with photos and text it proves that there has been something meaningful done.

Overall, these findings reveal the presence of ideologies grounded in the developmental-psychological paradigm within the field of early childhood education and highlight the challenges these professionals face as a consequence of this pervasive lens that is deeply embedded throughout their work as educators. Despite these challenges, the educators presented themselves as dedicated and motivated professionals who are able to overcome the obstacles they face. Although the educators encounter some conflict between the dominant ideologies that surround their practice and their own beliefs about children and teaching, the educators appeared to be satisfied with their work and are able to negotiate through these conflicts.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Summary of Study

The aim of this present research study was to critically examine the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach to educating young children. To explore their experiences, an institutional ethnography was employed involving seven educators from a large child care organization in Hamilton, Ontario. The present study also examined challenges faced by educators who have adopted a Reggio-inspired approach in their work.

In line with the intent of this study, qualitative data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observations and textual analyses to explore the presence of developmental-psychological ideologies within early childhood education and Reggio-inspired practice. It is noteworthy that multiple analytical pathways can guide the interpretation of findings and that these may include not only the newer sociological frameworks for understanding adult-child interactions, but more specifically, traditional approaches to early childhood educational theory such as the "transmission model to education" (Nola & Irzik, 2005; Richardson, 1997).

Discussion of Findings

Consistent with earlier scholars (e.g., (Canella, 1997; Jipson, 1998; 2001; Walkerdine, 1993; Woodhead, 2006) involved in the movement to reconceptualise early education, the findings of this study reveal that the field of early childhood education is dominated by ideologies rooted within the development-psychological paradigm. The inscription of ideologies associated with the developmental-psychological paradigm were observed throughout the stories and lived experiences of the early childhood educators.

The Role of the Educator

Through interviews, observations and textual analyses, the inscription of ideologies consistent with the developmental-psychological paradigm were visible on the dominant construction of the role of the early childhood educator. More specifically, a number of constructions of the educator were evident when the interview participants discussed their role in the classroom in relation to the children.

As eloquently stated by Norma,

An ECE is really in a position of power. If you allow yourself to view yourself that way. You are the keeper of the time, keeper of the rules. I decide when things happen and who gets to do what. I'm the decision maker, I impose them, enforce them and change them as well.

As Norma explained in our interview together, educators have the potential to hold an immense amount of power and authority as the adults in the classroom and if they believe in particular constructions of the child, have the ability to exploit that power. This finding is consistent with the discussion made by Woodrow and Brennan (2001), who have suggested that the child is constructed as innocent in order for "*adults to maintain their position of power, to be all-knowing and to consider and make the 'right' decisions on behalf of children*". Furthermore, these authors suggest that the construction of the child as innocent legitimizes the protection of children on behalf of adults. Canella (1997) also previously proposed how particular constructions of children justify adult power in her critique:

Childhood can be interpreted as a positivist construction that has disempowered younger human beings by creating them as incompetent and dependent on adults for care, knowledge and even bodily control. The discourses of childhood have

fostered regulation of a particular group of human beings by another group (described by adults) and generated multiple sites of power for these adults (p.44).

This finding also conflicts with the principle of the Reggio Emilia approach which views the teacher in the classroom as a collaborator and co-learner with the children, rather than as having a position of control over them.

In this present study, while participants Norma and Kate have both developed a firm stance against this construction of the adult teacher as controller, both also recognized the dominant perception among educators to be in control and “police” the children in their care. As Woodrow and Brennan (2001) suggest, this belief is in response to the construction of the child as monster or threat “*who needs to be tamed and ordered in to higher order activities through education*”. These writers suggest that when the image of child as monster or threat dominates, practices within the school tend to be framed by rules and expectations of socially acceptable behaviours. This is consistent with the story shared by Norma in this study, who discussed her team’s reconsideration of the rules as part of their transition to the Reggio approach, and the resistance and criticism they received from other educators. As demonstrated through Norma’s story, teachers’ roles within the early childhood education classroom are constructed around maintaining social order as they protect themselves and other children from the “monster” children, which accordingly prohibits the development of relationships and trust (Woodrow and Brennan, 2001). In contrast, the Reggio Emilia approach embraces relationships as integral and seeks to support children's reciprocal relationships with other children, family, teachers, society, and the environment. Like the child, the teacher is not seen as central but as one component in the learning process and a co-constructor of knowledge within the educational community.

The idea of early childhood educator's aligning themselves with practices rooted in child development theories is also consistent with another construction of the early childhood educator suggested by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999). These authors have described a dominant view of the early childhood educator as an entrepreneur, who must successfully market and sell his or her product. In order to ensure an efficient production of the product, the educator must manage the institution to ensure high productivity and conformity to standards, (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), standards that are typically grounded in the developmental-psychological paradigm. Moreover, to Moss and Petrie (2002), a reconceptualisation of the image of those who work with children is necessary, from the "*technician to reflective practitioner, researcher, co-constructor of knowledge, culture and identity*" (p.137), images that are consistent with the philosophy and principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The Discourse of Quality

One ideology that was prominent through the data collected was the discourse of quality care. As suggested by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), "quality has become the great cliché of our age" (p. 9) and has become an issue of priority in early childhood education. As demonstrated in the findings section, various documents, such as ECERS-R and ELECT are implemented in the early childhood classroom to ensure that specific standards are met and as a result, their use is legitimized in the name of providing high quality care and education. Standardized measures such as these tools have been greatly supported by professionals, as well as the general public, particularly because they are inexpensive to obtain and implement, are so widely used that they have become familiar, and are easy to comprehend.

While the intention of these and similar tools have been developed and utilized in the best interest of children and their families, there are a number of potential problems that have been

suggested by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999). First, these writers suggest that the term 'quality' is a socially constructed concept based on the assumptions of the early childhood institution as producer of pre-determined outcomes, and the child as an empty vessel who requires guidance on their journey through development and preparation for school. Further, these authors suggest that the process of defining quality is "*an inherently exclusive, didactic process, undertaken by a particular group whose power and claims to legitimacy enable them to determine what is understood as true or false*" (p.94). Quality is then presented as a universal truth that is free from value and cultural variation, believed to be applicable anywhere within the field. Goodwin and Goodwin (1997) have also previously suggested that there are concerns about standardized measures like the ECERS-R and ELECT tools, including potential bias in the measuring instruments that might not consider ethnic, cultural, language, gender age and socio-economic status. Another issue that Goodwin and Goodwin (1997) describe as problematic is the misuse of test results from these standardized tools to make high-stakes decisions about individual children. As reiterated by Dahlberg and Moss (2005), standardized tools like the ECERS-R have transformed the assessment of the subjective, value-based concept of quality into a process that is believed to be objective.

Professionalism in Early Childhood Education

One reason why educators may adopt practices consistent with the developmental-psychological paradigm is to "compete" with teachers within the school setting and to prove their status as capable professionals. While early childhood educators may enjoy their work, they may find themselves adopting scientific methodologies in an effort to appear to be more deserving of professional status. Distinct from the idea of a "job", a profession involves possessing a specialized body of knowledge, a juried entry into the field and a sense of social service, which

accordingly, brings high social status and privileges (Heyning, 2001). Although early childhood educators consider themselves to be professionals, they often find it difficult to convince others of this status. As suggested by Heyning (2001), to further their efforts toward professionalization, early childhood educators may affiliate themselves with scientific ideas about children, child study research techniques, and university based research programs.

These ideas suggested by Heyning (2001) regarding professionalism in early childhood education were visible in this present study. As Amanda, one of the participants in this study shared:

They (teachers) see the kids as wild, and they think you don't know how to do your job. It's not even that bad, I like my job. I just wish teachers would respect what I do and see that.

Another participant, Joanna expressed a similar frustration and the need to prove herself as a professional not only within the school setting but to parents:

It's important for me to prove to the principal, teachers and parents that the children's time in the program is meaningful and that they are being productive, learning, engaged. Not just hanging out but that they are getting something out of being in the program.

As demonstrated through these statements, the inclination of these educators to engage in practices that are embedded with child development theories is motivated by desires to prove themselves as professionals. This notion is consistent with arguments previously made by Bloch (1992) who has suggested that within the field of early childhood education, "scientific" is synonymous with "professional". Bloch (1992) traces this connection to the first quarter of the twentieth century, when the disciplines of early education and child development attempted to

emulate psychology because of its more “scientific” theoretical and methodological base and accordingly, the implications for research and pedagogy. As discussed by Bloch (1992) those who aspired to be recognized as professionals within these disciplines used science as a means to establish a base for greater knowledge and to resist the view that child development and early education were “female fields”. For example, G. Stanley Hall turned to child study as a scientific method and claimed that the natural development of children should be examined solely through objective methods that could then guide pedagogy. Later, Hall’s methods were criticized for being too “unscientific” for various reasons, and researchers looked to experimental psychology to gain a more scientific status for psychology. The dominant belief was thus the more objective, reliable and controlled the investigation, the more ideal.

Bailey and Meltzoff’s (2001) suggestion of institutionalized ageism within the field of education may also explain the need for early childhood educators to prove themselves as professionals. These authors suggest that an age-based hierarchy within the education system has positioned those who work with younger students as having fewer abilities and deserving of less respect. As described by these authors, a common belief has prevailed in which teaching is viewed as only legitimate if labelled with a grade level number, and the larger the number, the more legitimate. This notion was visible in the present study among the educators who felt that they were treated as inferior to the teachers in the school. Further, Bailey and Meltzoff (2001) suggest that this system of stratification is also related to gender, in which women have traditionally taught the lower grades while men have dominated secondary schools and thus the educating young students is deemed as inferior.

Challenges

While educators experienced a number of challenges that are consistent with previous literature on the Reggio Emilia approach, the findings of this study extends our understanding of Reggio-inspired educators' practice by acknowledging how particular ideologies have played a role in creating and sustaining these challenges.

Academic Skills and School Readiness

Consistent with previous literature, Reggio-inspired educators reported that one of the challenges they experienced in their practice was with demands on behalf of parents to get their children 'ready for school' and to incorporate an academic focus in their teaching practices. A number of educators who participated in this study also embodied this sentiment, as described by Amanda:

My role as the ECE is to get the kids ready for school. To give them the best start they can so that next year when they go to Kindergarten, they will be prepared. So a lot of our programming involves literacy and numeracy skills, but play-based. There's been tons of research out there that proves children who go to daycare do a lot better in school. I've even had teachers say they can tell on the first day of school which students have been in my program and which ones haven't.

This statement as shared by Amanda reveals a belief of early childhood education programs as a vehicle to foster school readiness and academic skills. In turn, this construction of the early childhood institution is consistent with the idea that:

Each stage of childhood, therefore, is preparation, or readying, for the next and more important, with early childhood the first rung of the ladder and a period of preparation for school and the learning that starts there" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).

Likewise, Woodrow and Brennan (2001), suggest that the dominant view of childhood is constructed as a time of preparation and life, suggesting that childhood is not “real life” but is a preparatory stage for life to come during adulthood.

While the intentions of the educators to get the children in their care “ready for school” were in the best interests of the children in their care, this view of the child, which is deeply rooted in the developmental-psychological paradigm, produces a construction of the child as “poor” and in need of preparation before they can be expected to learn, rather than a “rich” child who is capable of learning from birth, and whose learning during early childhood is one part of a continuous process of lifelong learning, no more nor less valid and important than other parts (Dahlberg, Moss & Petrie, 2006). Amanda’s reference to “research” in her response also demonstrates the influence of scientific and modernist assumptions on the practice of early childhood educators.

These findings are also consistent with one of the three constructions of the early childhood educator that have been suggested by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999). These authors suggest that the early childhood educator is a technician, whose task is to ensure the efficient production of the institution’s outcomes; in particular, the transmission of predetermined knowledge to the child and the support of each child’s development to ensure that milestones are achieved at the correct and “normal” age. This view of the educator was articulated by the educators who participated in this present study and was also visible in the textual documents that were analyzed, including the ELECT document which outlines a continuum of age specific skills to be supported by educators and achieved by children within early learning classrooms.

Another reason why school readiness may be a focus in early childhood education programs is because of desires to gain political or financial support. As described by Fuller, Holloway & Bozzi (1997) conceptions of development are often used to mobilize support for preschool initiatives.

Children's Space vs. Children's Services

As outlined in the findings section, one challenge that educators faced in adopting the Reggio Emilia approach was others' perception of their work. For example, the principal at one school identified the afterschool program as a "privilege" for the children. While the principal's concerns about the children's behaviour were indeed valid in her role as the school administrator, they are also reflective of an ideology which frames early childhood education as a service for children and families. In contrast, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) have framed institutions like child care as a space for children, and have suggested that the early childhood institution be considered as a right to citizenship, a means of inclusion in civil society and a pedagogical opportunity. To Moss and Petrie (2005), the term children's service is bound in particular understandings of public provisions for children, a very instrumental and atomising notion in which provisions are technologies for acting upon children, or parts of children, to produce specific, predetermined and adult-defined outcomes. In contrast, the concept of children's space positions the environment as having many possibilities, cultural, social, economic, political, ethical, aesthetic, and physical, which may or may not be predetermined, or which may be initiated by adults or children, presuming unknown resources, possibilities and potentials. These environments, are understood as public spaces where children live their childhoods. In the context of these descriptions of space vs. service, it is viable to suggest that the principal of this school possesses a view of the institution as a service to the child which suggests a particular

understanding of children and their place in society. In contrary, viewing the program as a children's space would be consistent with the following explanation described by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999),

“the children are not attending an early childhood institution because they are classified as in some way disabled or otherwise in need, or because their families are classified as unable to meet their needs, but because the early childhood institution is a place for all children, a recognized part of early childhood” (p. 85).

In this context, children are viewed to be a valuable part of society and accordingly the early childhood institution provides a space where they may develop relationships with other children and adults in order to make full sense of their capabilities for learning and to live a good childhood. This alternative construction of the early childhood institution is consistent with the principles and philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach, which has constructed the environment as the third teacher. In the words of Malaguzzi (1996),

... We consider the environment to be an essential constituent element of any theoretical or political research in education. We hold to be equally valuable the rationality of the environment, its capacity for harmonious coexistence, and its highly important forms and functions. Moreover, we place enormous value on the role of the environment as a motivating and animating force in creating spaces for relations, options and emotional and cognitive situations that produce a sense of well-being and security. (p. 40).

Consistent with the Reggio Emilian image of the child as “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults and other children” (Malaguzzi, 1993),

the environment of the Reggio Emilia classroom has been constructed as a space to support this child.

Lack of Knowledge about the Approach

One challenge that educators reported in their practice was having a lack of knowledge about the Reggio approach. A number of educators felt that they did not have enough knowledge or experience to carry out different elements of the approach. Some educators even suggested that working from a Reggio-inspired framework was more difficult and “more work” than more traditional approaches to educating young children. Previous research has also suggested that educators may experience difficulty shifting their work with children from the traditional to the postmodern. More specifically, Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) suggest that for educators, this challenge is related to the dominance of developmental psychology in teacher education programs and the lack of exposure among teachers-in-training to alternative theoretical perspectives. Prior to entering the field, student-teachers are engrained in the belief that psychology should be the central source of wisdom for professional practice (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Moreover, these authors also suggest that there is little information available to students and teachers once entering the field of how to access postmodern ideas and apply them to their work in daily classroom practice. Among the educators who were interviewed in this present study, these reasons may also be relevant as each educator reported that they were not made aware of the Reggio Emilia approach during their studies in early childhood education but rather, encountered the philosophy and its principles while working in the field.

“There are no rules to Reggio!”

In our interview together, Norma touched on the challenges she faced in her role as supervisor of a team who was exploring the Reggio Emilia approach.

Staff want you to just tell you how to do it. The directions, recipe. Like a cake. As if you do A B and C and then you are now a Reggio Emilia teacher! As the supervisor of a team, the staff were looking for me to give them answers. All the time they were looking to me for guidance. I think teachers became frustrated with me. They were feeling like I was purposely not telling them, that I probably did somewhere have a secret book with all the rules, but that I wasn't going to share it. If only they knew, there are no rules to Reggio! It's a philosophy, not a step-to-step program. So there was a great deal of frustration with those folks and so for me working in my role was a challenge.

This experience of Norma's is an interesting finding as the educators of Reggio Emilia, Italy have frequently emphasized that their approach to education is not to be emulated. As articulated by Carlina Rinaldi, "*We do not offer a recipe, nor a method, our work is not to be copied because values can only be lived not copied.*" (as cited by Moss and Petrie, p.9). However, the desire of the educators to "get the answers" that Norma describes reveals the alignment of the educators' practice with standardized methods and strategies to teaching, that conflict with the Reggio Emilia approach, but are characteristic of more traditional approaches to working with young children.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study confirm the ideological domination of the developmental-psychological paradigm in early childhood education and the need to adopt alternative approaches to understanding children and childhood. In order to disrupt the dominant images of children and offer other possibilities there are a number of promising next steps from here for both theory and practice.

One suggestion for a theoretical implication of this study is following Burman's (2008a) suggestion to "move beyond the baby and the bathwater". In her critique of developmental psychology and dualistic thinking, Burman (2005) makes the case for engaging in cultural and disciplinary tourism, for crossing borders between the North and South and for experimenting with ideas about psychology and education from outside of America. Accordingly, Burman (2008a) develops an argument for what she terms as "decentering the developmental story" when talking about young people. Accordingly, this author contends that we should consider the child not as a developmental subject, but rather as a product of a diverse childhood.

Consistent with Burman's (2008a) argument that there is a need to recognize the ways in which developmental theory has produced particular discourses about young people, other authors have also suggested that we consider children and childhood from alternative perspectives, for example what Woodhead (2006) has called a "human rights perspective". As discussed by Woodhead (2006), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) legislates that all children are to be respected as persons in their own right. While recognizing the various debates and challenges surrounding the topic of children's rights including respect for diversity, Woodhead (2006) suggests that the human rights approach is a promising lens through which children and childhood can be viewed as it recognizes and gives respect for children's agency, capabilities and capacities. A rights based perspective is also appropriate for educators inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, as this approach recognizes children as having inherent rights and views them as "strong, powerful, [and] competent" citizens (Malaguzzi, 1993). Accordingly, the findings of this study also imply a need to consider alternative constructions of children and to move away from the discourse of children as "dependent, needy, weak and poor" and to look at children and young people through a lens

which frames children instead as ``citizens, members of a social group, agents of their own lives and as co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture (Moss and Petrie, 2002).

Additionally, this present study also has a number of practical implications. First, this study suggests a need to incorporate alternative methods of assessment and evaluation that move away from universal and standardized methods that are rooted in developmental-psychological traditions. For example, while using standardized scales and measures may have their benefits, it would also be useful to incorporate a more qualitative approach that would involve multiple perspectives in assessment and evaluation including the views of staff, children, parents and other stakeholders. For example, in addition to implementing the ELECT document to measure a program's quality, it would be beneficial to have the opportunity for stakeholders to share their ideas, opinions and feelings about a program through focus groups or qualitative surveys.

A further practical implication that arises from this study is following Moss and Petrie's (2002) suggestion that a reconceptualisation of not only the child, but the image of those who work with children is necessary. As suggested by Moss and Petrie (2002), it is necessary to transform the field of early childhood education and other work with children by revaluing those who work in these professions as highly trained, critical and reflective practitioners. For Moss and Petrie (2002) enhanced training and education of those who work in the field is crucial. As these authors suggest, "reform would mean offering opportunities for existing members of the workforce to (re-train) in the new role, taking account of previous training and experience" (p. 146). Consequently, it would be important for teacher education programs to expose future educators within their curricula to multiple perspectives and approaches, including those that deviate from traditional practices. Furthermore, in light of the challenges that the educators reported in their work and the ways in which they shared that they were able to overcome these

challenges, a further implication for practice is to also offer informal educational opportunities and to increase support to educators by providing opportunities to collaborate and network. The educators in this study recognized the benefit of mentoring relationships and collaborating with other professionals in their work with the Reggio Emilia approach. Consequently, it would be valuable to continue providing ways for educators to learn and network through initiatives like the Artists at the Centre project.

Strengths of the Present Study

There are a number of strengths to the present study. First, my experience as an early childhood educator, as well as my professional relationship with the participants was advantageous in recruiting and gaining access to a research sample, as well as with gaining a rapport with the informants during the data collection process. Second, the methodology employed in this study was a strength as it considered the exploration of the research questions through a holistic approach by incorporating interviews, observations and textual analyses. Another strength of the research was the qualitative and inductive nature of the research process, which allowed the stories of the participants to unfold and to be incorporated in the study.

Limitations of the Study

Considering that the sample size for this study was relatively small, the results of this study are not generalizable to a larger population or to another sample at a different point in time. However, it was not the intention of this study to make generalizations or truth statements about Reggio-inspired educators, but rather to illuminate their experiences and to consider what their stories tell us about larger social issues.

Another possible limitation of this study is a phenomenon referred to by Maxwell (2005) as participant reactivity. Because I had a professional relationship with the participants, their

behaviours and responses may have been influenced or affected. For example, participants may have tried overly hard to cooperate by offering responses they felt that I might be seeking or that they perceived as helpful to me. Alternatively, participants may have also felt guarded or less candid in their responses. Because the interview data were based on the self-reports of the participants, it is possible that their information was not entirely accurate. However, in line with the methodological approach employed in this study, it is also important to note that institutional ethnographers, such as Campbell (1998), suggest that observational and interview data are “*methodologically central to a trustworthy analysis*” (p. 55) and that a trustworthy analysis accounts for the experiences of the informants. Consequently, in order to make sense of the participants’ lived experiences, it was necessary to include their voices in the study.

A third limitation concerns the time span of the data collection. The period of 5 weeks for interviewing and observations was chosen as it was felt that this would provide a sufficient amount of insight into the lived experiences of the educators while also being feasible to allow the researcher the time to analyze and report the findings as a requirement of the graduate program. While it would definitely have been advantageous to have an extended ethnographic study that would allow the researcher to make observations of the child care program throughout the school calendar year; that option was not possible for this particular study.

Directions for Future Research

Six main suggestions surfaced from this study as directions for future research. First, in line with the intent and confines of this study, seven early childhood educators were recruited to participate in individual interviews. Future studies may wish to include a larger sample to gain an even deeper understanding of the lived experiences of early childhood educators. Likewise, as observations were conducted at only two sites, future studies may wish to include multiple sites,

to enhance the data collection. However, it is important to reiterate that this intent of this study was to learn about larger social issues and not to make generalizations or truth statements about Reggio-inspired educators, and as such the sample size was believed to be sufficient and feasible.

A second recommendation also concerns participant recruitment. Educators were recruited solely from one child care organization for reasons of convenience, accessibility and availability. However, the experiences of those who work for the organization involved in this study might be unique from other organizations as the organization is a not-for-profit, unionized environment. These factors may have influenced the experiences of the educators, as well as the outcome of the study. Consequently, future studies might want to expand their recruitment to other organizations that are structured differently.

Third, the length of the study, particularly the length of the participant-observations was relatively short (5 weeks) in order to adhere to time constraints and the requirements of the graduate program. Future studies may choose to gain a deeper understanding of the organization's social processes by conducting a longer ethnographic study.

Fourth, while the focus of this study was the experiences of the early childhood educators, it is certain that the field of early childhood education as well as the work of educators and the pedagogical approach they employ also affects the lives of children and families. Accordingly, a recommendation for future research would be to incorporate the voices of children and families into the study or to design a study which looks at how the experiences of children and families are affected by the ideologies of early childhood education, and the work of Reggio-inspired educators.

A fifth recommendation is for the incorporation of the Raising the Bar initiative that has been developed and implemented to address the concerns with quality in child care within the

community of Hamilton Ontario. Raising the Bar is a program that has been endorsed and financially supported by the City of Hamilton, Community Services Department that was designed to help families ensure that their children are receiving high quality early learning and child care services. The presence of a Raising the Bar certificate in a child care program is a sign that the program has made a commitment to maintaining provincial regulatory standards as well as local community standards. Participants of the Raising the Bar program voluntarily submit documents to an annual review to demonstrate that they have met community standards. Child care programs and educators participate in a review each Spring in an effort to receive Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum recognition.

Three categories of standards are outlined by the Affiliated Services for Children and Youth, the coordinating and administering body of Raising the Bar:

“1. Quality Assurance

- *Quality is monitored through frequent on-site observations.*
- *Parent and/or Caregiver feedback is collected each year.*
- *Action plans are developed to address areas of need and to plan for improvement.*
- *In addition to annual provincial licensing reviews and local public health inspections, Raising the Bar programs undergo site visits by Early Childhood Education Consultants.*

2. Best Practices

- *The program offers information for parents and promotes opportunities for community involvement.*
- *There are detailed policies, procedures and management practices to guide day-to-day operations.*

- *Specific strategies are in place to support optimal child health and development.*
Resources and information about child development are provided to parents.

3. Professional Education

*The team of Early Years professionals in **Raising the Bar** programs maintain credentials and commit to additional training each year.*

- *First aid and CPR are kept current.*
- *Cooks have Food Handlers' Certificate training.*
- *All directors and staff attend workshops and conferences to enhance their understanding of early childhood education and care.*
- ***Raising the Bar** programs support teacher training through mentorship and by providing practical training opportunities for cooperative education students.” (ASCY, 2009)*

Examining how this document has constructed the role of the educator, as well as the child and its effect on the work of Reggio-inspired educators, would be an interesting direction for future research.

Finally, a sixth recommendation is for future studies to consider the recent changes that are occurring on a provincial level within the field of early childhood education. More specifically, in 2009, the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) was established which serves as the organization responsible for regulating the profession of early childhood education. According to the CECE, members are professionals who must meet minimum practice requirements and standards of practice of the profession in order to register and use the title of “early childhood educator”. As the college is a new phenomenon, in future research, it might be interesting to explore how the college, and its accompanying legislation, the Early Childhood

Educators Act, 2007, have impacted the experiences of Reggio-inspired educators. Likewise, it would be interesting to explore how the future full-day Kindergarten programs that will be piloted in Ontario September 2010, will affect the work of these educators.

Conclusion

By employing an institutional ethnography approach which involved interviews, observations and textual analyses, the present study examined the experiences of Reggio-inspired early childhood educators, in order to gain an understanding of the conflicting ideologies that surround their practice, and the challenges educators face as a result of these tensions.

Seven educators from a large, Reggio-inspired child care organization in Hamilton, Ontario were recruited to participate in this study. The present study examined their stories and experiences, as well as the textual documents that surround their practice, to gain an understanding of how the developmental-psychological paradigm is inscribed within the field of early childhood education. The present study also examined the challenges that Reggio-inspired educators face in their daily lived experiences, and considered how these challenges are related to particular ideological beliefs. Results indicated that the developmental-psychological paradigm is visible throughout the practice and experiences of these educators, and those educators who philosophically aligned with the Reggio Emilia approach were likely to navigate through these challenges. Moreover, the findings of the study suggest a need for reconceptualisation within the field of early childhood education, and the incorporation of alternative approaches towards understanding children and childhood,

Overall, this study contributed to the field of early childhood education, as well as current literature and research in a number of ways. First, while there has been some literature on the Reggio movement in the United States (Cadwell, 1997; Firlik, 1996), there has been little focus on its influence in Canada where there has also been a growing number of educators who are exploring the approach in their practice (e.g. Wien, 2008). This study thus contributed to the literature by examining the experiences of educators within a Canadian context. Second, while

previous literature has looked at the barriers Reggio-inspired educators face in their practice, this study was unique in its link to broader social issues adding a critical perspective to the understanding of the approach. Third, this study used a methodological approach involving institutional ethnography and grounded theory analytical procedures that were congruent with the principles and philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach but have not yet been employed in previous studies.

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Appendix A – Brock University Research Ethics Board Approval

DATE: July 30, 2009

FROM: Ann-Marie DiBiase, Acting Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Dr. Richard C. Mitchell, Child & Youth Studies
Anna Nguyen

FILE: 08-326 MITCHELL/NGUYEN
Masters Thesis/Project

TITLE: Conflicting Ideologies in Early Childhood Education: *An Exploration of Reggio-Inspired Practice*

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: ACCEPTED AS CLARIFIED

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of **July 30, 2009 to June 30, 2010** subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the

ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

AMD/an

Research Ethics Office
Brock Research, MC D250A-1
Brock University
500 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1
Phone 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Fax 905-688-0748
Email: reb@brocku.ca

http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/Ethics_Safety/Humans/Index.php

Appendix B: LETTER OF INVITATION

LETTER OF INVITATION

Title of Study: Conflicting Ideologies in Early Childhood Education: *An Exploration of Reggio-Inspired Practice*

Principal Student Investigator: Anna Nguyen, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Masters of Arts Candidate

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Richard C. Mitchell, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Associate Professor

Committee: Dr. Shannon Moore, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Assistant Professor
Karyn Callaghan, Mohawk College, Professor of Early Childhood Education

Dear Early Childhood Educator,

My name is Anna Nguyen and I am a graduate student pursuing a Masters of Arts degree in Child and Youth Studies at Brock University. In partial fulfillment of my degree, I am conducting an original research project entitled "*Negotiating Ideologies in Early Childhood Education: An Exploration of the Reggio Emilia Approach*", and would like to extend an invitation for you to participate.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach in a Canadian context. I am most interested in learning about what you like about the approach, why you have chosen to adopt it, what are the challenges you experience and your opinions about what would make adoption more successful. As a participant, you would participate in a 45-90 minute, one-on-one interview, as well as allow me to conduct observations of you in your place of work over a period of 8 weeks during September-November 2009. As the researcher, I will not be evaluating you or your program but rather will be looking to better understand your experience as an early childhood educator. As a thank you, your place of work will be compensated with a \$50 gift certificate to purchase materials for your program.

The expected duration of this study will be from September-November 2009.

One benefit that participants who are involved in this project may receive is the opportunity to 'tell your story' and reflect on your experience as an early childhood educator. This study will also contribute to the field of early childhood education by adding to the literature on the Reggio Emilia approach which has rarely looked at Reggio through a critical lens or in a Canadian context.

There is a possibility that you may be apprehensive to participate in this research because of potential social risks. Social risks that may be experienced by participating in this research include a feeling of invasion, intrusion or loss of privacy because of the observations that will be conducted by the researcher. You may also be concerned about the possibility of the research disclosing poor practice which may harm your reputation with your employer or colleagues. However, we would like to remind you that you will only be asked to discuss events and issues that you are comfortable discussing, and that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline from any questions or component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact myself, the principal student investigator or my faculty supervisor by September 5, 2009 via email or phone.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Thank you,

Anna Nguyen, B.A. (Honours), R. E.C.E.

Master of Arts Candidate

905.905-515-6048

anna.nguyen.brock@gmail.com

Dr. Richard C. Mitchell

Associate Professor

905.688.5550 ext. 5085

rmitchell@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (FILE 08-326 MITCHELL/NGUYEN).

This study has been funded by Brock University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as an early childhood educator/in the field of early childhood education.
2. When did you first learn about the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What is your level of expertise about the Reggio Emilia approach?
4. How did you become inspired to adopt the Reggio Emilia approach in your own practice?
5. How would you put the principles and philosophy of the approach in your own words?
6. How are these principles and philosophy put into practice?
7. What aspects of the approach do you agree with?
8. What aspects of the approach do you disagree with?
9. What do you feel your role is in the Reggio-inspired classroom?
10. What is your view of 'the child' in the Reggio-inspired classroom?
11. What are your biggest challenges to adopting Reggio in your practice?
12. What demands of your job create challenges to adopting Reggio?
13. What aspects of Reggio are the most difficult for you to achieve?
14. What tools/resources/support have you been given in your adoption of Reggio?
15. What would make your adoption of Reggio in your program more successful?
16. What response have you received from colleagues, parents, families and the community?

Appendix D: Letter of Information

Project Title: Conflicting Ideologies in Early Childhood Education: An Exploration of Reggio-Inspired Practice

Principal Student Investigator: Anna Nguyen, B.A., E.C.E.
Master of Arts Candidate
Department of Child and Youth Studies
Brock University
un04hg@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Richard Mitchell
Assistant Professor
Department of Child and Youth Studies
Brock University
rmitchell@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the experiences of early childhood educators who have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach in a Canadian context.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview with the principal student investigator which will address your insights and experiences within the field of early childhood education and the adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach in a Canadian context. You will be interviewed one-on-one in a private location. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. Participation will take approximately 90 minutes.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

One benefit that participants who are involved in this project may experience is the opportunity to 'tell your story' and reflect on your experiences, and to share your expertise of the field of early childhood education. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the field of early

childhood education by adding to the literature on the Reggio Emilia approach which has rarely looked at Reggio through a critical lens or in a Canadian context.

There is the potential that you may be apprehensive to participate in this research because of potential social risks. Social risks that may be experienced by participating in this research on behalf of the participants include the possibility of the research disclosing information that may be harmful to your reputation with your employer or colleagues. We would like to remind you to only discuss events and issues that you are comfortable discussing, and that you may decline a response to any question (interview protocol) for any reason without penalty.

There are no other known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.

Data collected during this study will be stored in Anna Nguyen's office in a locked file cabinet. Data will be kept for two years after which time it will be destroyed by shredding paper documents, and erasing electronic and audio files. Access to this data will be restricted to Anna Nguyen and Richard Mitchell.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available in June 2010. I will mail you a synopsis of the results.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Student Investigator or Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (TBD). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records and return page 3 only when we meet for our interview.

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study entitled “Conflicting Ideologies in Early Childhood Education: An Exploration of Reggio-Inspired Practice”, as described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____