CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The city [of Reggio Emilia] *in northern Italy has become a global model, and Mecca, for early childhood education.* (Savoye, 2001, p16)

Though highly debatable and simplistic, Savoye's generalization demonstrates nevertheless, the widespread acceptance that the Municipal Reggio Emilian centres (known there as schools) have been, and continue to be, influential in early childhood education. This has been the case in some European countries for more than thirty years (Kaminsky, 1999), in North America since the early 1990s (Katz, 1999) and more recently in Australasia (Fleer, 2003). Over the last twenty-five years, Reggio Emilia's centres and their early childhood educational project have attracted 'a mixed public', gaining the attention of educators, administrators, architects, designers, researchers and politicians on an international scale (Millikan, 2003a, p8). Since 1981, 10,000 people from 600 foreign delegations and 35 countries have attended its study tours and many more have seen its travelling exhibitions (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). The Reggio Emilian centres have been claimed to be "the most exceptional example of the highest quality early education that the world has ever seen" (Cadwell, 2002, p6). Certainly, prominent educational researchers and scholars have lauded them. Harvard's Professor of Education describes them as "the most impressive I have ever seen" (Gardner, 2004, p4), crediting them with dissolving the tensions that have dogged debates about the best education for young children.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) chose Reggio Emilia as the site to launch *Starting Strong II* (2006), the second report of its twenty country review of early childhood education and care. Though national and state policy was the major focus of the review, the OECD also gave some attention to curriculum and pedogogical issues. Acknowledging Reggio Emilia's "famed" schools and "the strong Reggio movement in Sweden" (2006, p139), the OECD report highlighted aspects of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice and this international organization gave it further prominence via its five published curriculum outlines (OECD, 2004).

Not surprisingly, teacher education has begun to incorporate Reggio Emilian influences—see for example, Higgins (1999) in Ontario, Canada; Stremmel, Fu & Hill (2002) in Virginia, United States of America (US); Ridgway & Surman, (2004) in Victoria, Australia—and it features in widely distributed course texts (Hendrick, 1997; 2004). Practitioner voices and/or perspectives have also been heard, often characterizing Reggio Emilian pedagogy as inspirational and transformative (Cadwell, 1997; Kocher, 1999; Bersani & Jarjoura, 2002). Local networks of interested practitioners have emerged and insights from such groups in Sweden, North America and Australia, have been disseminated (Dahlberg, 1999c; Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002; Millikan, 2003a). Yet despite this acknowledged and burgeoning influence in early childhood educational circles, there has been a paucity of research that examines its impact on practising teachers—including within Australia.

However, any project that attempts to address this gap in the research literature needs to take account of two relevant factors. Firstly, in Australia, interest in Reggio Emilian pedagogy has tended to be personally rather than systemically driven. Teachers have, generally, not been following an employer mandate, rather, they have themselves voluntarily taken up this interest. Secondly, there is the issue of translocation. Reggio Emilian educators argue that their practice has been, and continues to be, recreated in a particular socio-cultural, political and historical context. Hence, they also argue that their programs are not a formula for practice that can be directly transferred into differing contexts (New, 1994a).

Thus, the phenomenon of Reggio Emilian influence in early childhood practice outside Reggio Emilia, is not only under-researched, in Australia, it has also tended to be individually-based rather than centre- or school-based. Further, the absence of a fixed model to emulate and the paradox of 'influence without emulation' present a conundrum that highlights its complexity. Such circumstances suggest the need for a study that is broadly conceptualized, exploratory in nature and directed toward individual responses.

This study aimed to gain some purchase on the phenomenon in the Australian context by focusing on the process and effects triggered by local teachers' individual engagement with this Italian pedagogy. It asked:

> *How do local teachers create meaning from their experience of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice?*

More specifically, it sought the practitioner perspective on this question. Unlike a recent study involving primary school teachers (Ardzejewska & Coutts, 2004), this study does not seek to measure Australian early childhood teachers' understanding

of the philosophy, or to arbitrate on the success of its application. Rather, it seeks to understand the participants' interpretations of its impact, influence and local relevance. Thus it explores the above question more specifically through the following:

1. *How do local practitioners perceive and value their exposure to Reggio Emilian philosophy and practices?*
2. *How do they perceive and value its influence on their own thinking and practice?*
3. *How do they perceive and value its relevance to their own teaching context?*

A prerequisite to conducting this study was an understanding of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. The research participants' interpretations of its significance are also more readily heard if backgrounded with such an understanding. The following, chapter 2, provides therefore, an outline of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice. Drawing on both Reggio Emilian educators and well-known early childhood scholars as sources, this outline begins to map the context of this study. Chapter 2 also details local and international research as well as the scholarly and professional literature that prior to, and post-dating, this 1998 study, has explored the significance of Reggio Emilian pedagogy for other practitioners. It then adds to the contextualization of this study by outlining the variation captured in the sample of eight Australian teachers who agreed to become its participants.

Recruited from a pool of practitioners who had a self-declared interest in exploring Reggio Emilian pedagogy, these teachers were all changing their minds and their practice at no-one's behest but their own. The theoretical framework that guides this study is compatible with this situation. It is delineated in Chapter 3. Bounded by the concerns of teacher change, the chapter is grounded in the concept of teacher

agency and draws upon a range of theoretical literature and research that were birthed from it. This review explores themes in the literature relevant to the relationships among teachers' minds, actions and contexts.

Having located the study in its theoretical home, Chapter 3 is followed by the explanation in Chapter 4, of the methodological choices that were driven by the research questions, aims and scope of the project. This chapter details the data gathering strategies and the analytic procedures used to derive the common themes that constitute the study's findings. Chapter 4 also situates the study within its paradigm assumptions, its ethical boundaries and the politics of reception of qualitative research, while ending with this project's particular claims to rigour and soundness.

Chapters 5-7 outline the study's findings. These chapters delineate both the common themes derived from the analysis and the individual variation that undergirds them, while also highlighting exceptional cases. Chapter 5 examines the teachers' interpretations of the impact of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, their perceptions of its connection with their own, their perspectives on the issue of translocation and on an alternative process in which they were engaged. Chapter 6 presents the themes of Reggio Emilian influence on these teachers' philosophies and practices, again from their perspectives. While highlighting changes that revealed incorporation of Reggio Emilian influences, the chapter also reveals some of the interaction of these influences with the teachers' existing philosophical frameworks and practices. Chapter 7 then explores the teachers' reappraisal of their local contexts in the light of the changes that were detailed in the previous two chapters. This chapter takes a

broader view of context—beyond its conception as place—and explains the interplay of social considerations and the self, in the teachers' pedagogical recreations.

Finally, Chapter 8, in detailing the conclusion derived from these findings, presents the thesis of the study. Building on the discussions contained within the preceding three chapters, of the significance of patterns in the teachers' theorizing and reflections, this thesis is demarcated from them and clearly strikes out in a direction of its own. It offers an answer to the central question of the nature of teacher meaning making in response to Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Chapter 8 then also examines the implications of this study for both further research and for practice and it concludes with an assessment of the study's limitations.

Within the dual boundaries of these limitations and its research context, this study's subject, design and conclusion hold the keys to its significance. Firstly, given the international and burgeoning influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy and the resultant emergence of Regggio networks of teachers in Australia and elsewhere, this study's focus on the translocation of Reggio Emilian pedagogy addresses a perplexing gap in the research literature. Secondly, the OECD called for "expanded research agendas" in early childhood, beyond the "dominance of programme evaluation and developmental psychology" which would "include disciplines and methods currently under-researched" (OECD, 2006, p189). In allowing investigation of the perspectives of its teacher participants, as well as the complexity of pedagogical translocation as process, the study's design responds to the OECD's call to broaden the early childhood research effort. Finally, the significance of this study resides in the capacity of its conclusion to contribute to both the knowledge base and the theoretical understanding of teachers' pedagogical meaning making.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter outlines the contextual background to this study. It traces the dissemination in Australia of Reggio Emilian pedagogy and describes the group of teachers whose interest in exploring it led to their participation in this research. The chapter contextualizes their interest by describing the main features of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice. It concludes with a discussion of the local and international research, the scholarly and professional literature that has explored the significance of Reggio Emilian pedagogy for other practitioners. Subsequent chapters then outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of this local research.

Reggio Emilia in Australia

While the words *Reggio Emilia* now appear regularly in relevant training and labour market publications, Australian early childhood educators were first exposed to Reggio Emilian pedagogy little more than a decade ago at the Australian Early Childhood Association (now Early Childhood Australia) bi-annual conference held in Adelaide in 1992. Jan Millikan conducted the first of many subsequent professional development workshops, some four years after her own first encounter in the US in 1988 and first visit to Reggio Emilia in 1990. She was officially appointed, by Reggio Children in 1995, to be responsible for Reggio Emilia Liaison for Australia and New Zealand and in 1996, set up the Reggio Emilia Information Exchange (REIE), based in Melbourne (Millikan, 2003b).

Since this beginning, Australian educators have had increasing opportunities to explore this foreign pedagogy. Since 1992, they have been able to take part in organized study tours to Reggio Emilia (Millikan, 2003a). The Travelling Exhibition *The Hundred Languages of Children* exhibited in Melbourne in 1994 and again with Perth in 2001. Related conferences such as *The challenge of Reggio Emilia—Realising the potentials of children* have been held in Melbourne in 1994 and the *Unpacking* series of conferences have been held annually at Macquarie University in Sydney (1996-present). Literature and visual resources from Reggio Emilia and elsewhere are now widely available in English. Networks of interested educators, known as *RE-Search* groups, have emerged in major Australian cities and some regional areas. The *Reggio Emilia Information Exchange* (REIE) produces its own quarterly newsletter/journal *The Challenge* for subscribers across the country and has organized many of the events outlined above as well as a National Discussion Day. Interested Australian educators also have access to on-line resources including literature and discussion groups originating from Reggio Emilia and other international world wide web sites.

While such access to resources has mushroomed in recent years, in early 1998, when interviews for this study were conducted, both resources and knowledge of Reggio Emilia's early childhood programs were much less pervasive within Australian early childhood education circles. The eight interviewees featured in this study were therefore, if not exactly 'pioneers', then at least venturing into territory that was familiar to very few of their peers. Thus, both in broad terms and for these individuals, it was territory that was largely unknown.

The Study Participants

Through a certain amount of serendipity, these eight Australian teachers had become aware of Reggio Emilian philosophical principles and practices but each had taken a deliberate decision to explore its implications. Their interest extended to volunteering participation in this research. Recruited from two *RE-Search* groups, they collectively covered a wide range of circumstances. For reasons elucidated in description of the research design (see Chapter 4: Methodology, p77) individual, personal/ background information was deliberately not collected from participants, (though as anticipated, it often emerged in the individual interview). Rather, this research focused on the group and thus, there follows here, a profile of relevant data concerning the range within it, of working contexts and professional status.

All the participants were female, experienced teachers of at least five years standing. None had post-graduate qualifications in education. However, the heterogeneity of the group stops here. Most but not all, were tertiary trained teachers, of three or four year status, though some with college and some with university pre-service education. One participant was qualified through the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector as a child care worker. Irrespective of pre-service educational status, all participants are regarded in the study and referred to, as teachers.

Many types of settings that exist in Australian early childhood education are represented in the working contexts of the group including preschool, long day care and primary education environments. Also, the teachers collectively worked across all the common early childhood groupings by age of children from approximately twelve months to eight years.

Some of the preschool teachers were based in non-government schools, one of which comprised all thirteen grades. Other institutional environments included a small, family-grouped centre licensed for twenty-five children across the age range of birth to five years, a pre-school belonging to a large early childhood organization and a single centre run by an independent Management Committee. None of the teachers worked in the government sector, at either state or local level, and none were owner-operators of their workplace. To this variation in institutional environments, can be added the differences generated via the recruitment strategy of crossing two states. Thus these eight teachers worked across the differing regulatory mechanisms for schools, pre-schools and day care centres in NSW and Victoria, so the sampling strategy produced wide variation in organizational systems and structures.

The sole teacher in a primary grade worked alone with her class of children. In the heirarchical sense, one teacher worked alongside assistant staff while all the others had responsibility for the assistants who worked with their group of children. Additionally, four had managerial responsibility as Directors of their pre-schools or centres. One of these Directors held the only middle management position within her organization, though there were varying degrees of middle management hierarchies above all the other teachers.

Attendance patterns of children varied according to government and organizational policy, from one day per week, one or two half-days per week through to five days, with varying degrees of stability. All eight teachers were the curriculum decision makers for their group/class. They had differing degrees of freedom in the scope of such decision making, depending on the interplay of the factors outlined above.

Though there were no novice teachers in this group, there was wide variation in ages, and in the professional and life experience of the participants. The length of time since their initial professional education varied enormously, as did their ages at entry into this educational opportunity and consequently, into teaching. Two teachers came to this study with uninterrupted teaching careers since graduation, others re-entered teaching after periods of absence, child-rearing and/or in other employment.

Across this diversity, at the time of recruitment, these teachers commonly held a sustained and self-defined interest in Reggio Emilian pedagogy and were involved in a *RE-Search* network group where the sharing of ideas and practices is central. In this, they were following the Reggio Emilian lead—as becomes apparent below, within the following outline of Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

The Philosophy and Pedagogy of Reggio Emilia

Reggio Children, the educational outreach organization for the early childhood centres of Reggio Emilia, refer to their

> *ongoing project of research and experimentation as involving a number of constants… all of which form an educational project whose objective is to reanimate and integrate all the expressive, communicative, and cognitive languages, to educate a 're-integrated' child who constructs his or her own powers of thought and choice* (1994, p.6).

It is difficult to relate, or more accurately, to 'translate', let alone define, Reggio Emilian philosophy and pedagogical practice. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) suggest in their use of the term "our Reggio", one's experience of Reggio Emilian educators communicating about their 'project' is a subjective one. Moreover, Reggio Emilian educators communicate through images as well as words. These visual, as well as verbal images constitute part of the power and effectiveness of that communication. It is possible to scan the literature produced about Reggio Emilian

philosophy and pedagogical practice to find and discuss the common themes in various descriptions and interpretations of it. However, a rendering of those themes must be a reductionist and impoverished description. Yet it may serve to orient the reader to ideas and practices that are discussed by the interviewees and referred to in the findings. A description of these characteristic principles and practices follows, beginning with the broader educational philosophy within which they are embedded.

The relationship of theory and practice

The past and current leaders of the Reggio Emilian centres' pedagogical / organizational structures, Malaguzzi (1993a) and Rinaldi (1995) respectively, have both referred to the relationship between theory and practice that underlies the work done there. Malaguzzi recognized the "long list of names" that have served as sources of inspiration while firmly rejecting "the belief that educational theories and practices can only derive from official models and established theories". The linear relationship of theory-to-practice is rejected in favour of connection and reciprocity. From the beginnings of their practice, they have "extracted theoretical principles that still support our work" (p51).

This is not an endeavour isolated by discipline boundaries. Malaguzzi (1993a) explains the interdisciplinary nature of the Reggio Emilian philosophy and its continuous practice.

> *But talk about education (including the education of young children) cannot be confined to its literature. Such talk, which is also political, must continuously address major social changes and transformations in the economy, sciences, arts, and human relationships and customs. All of these larger forces influence how human beings – even young children – 'read' and deal with the realities of life. They determine the emergence on both general and local levels of new methods of educational content and practice as well as new problems and soul-searching questions* (p54).

This broad contextualization of education is reflected in the Reggio Emilian "premise and objective" of what it means to be a teacher.

> *We also believe that it is essential for the teachers in our schools to be competent in other fields. The teacher ought to be a person belonging to our present-day culture, who at the same time is able to criticize, to question and to analyse this culture. The teacher ought to be intellectually curious, one who rebels against a consumerist approach to knowledge and is willing to build upon knowledge rather than consume it.* (Rinaldi, 1994, p58).

This teacher is a learner and moreover a researcher. (Rinaldi, 1994) proposes "research as a permanent learning strategy for both children and adults". Arguing against pre-specified and pre-packaged staff development models "that attempted to pour ideas into teachers, to shape them, so that they in turn could shape the children", Rinaldi asserts that these models "had little to do with research, reflection, observation, documentation, doubt, uncertainty or true education", and failed to adequately consider the most important aspect of education—the child (p55). Rinaldi, (2000) sees teachers as "authors of pedagogical paths and processes" a perception that could help overcome the "arrogant idea of separating theory from practice, and culture from technique" (p1). Referring to the earliest beginnings of their 'project', Malaguzzi (1993a) highlighted this interconnectedness of adults researching, learning from children and creating an interactive theory-practice relationship.

> *Things about children and for children can only be learned from children. We knew how this was true and at the same time not true. We needed that assertion and guiding principle; it gave us strength and turned out to be an essential part of our collective wisdom* (p44).

There are a number of 'guiding principles' in the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia recognized in the early childhood literature in English. Their existence poses a number of questions (some of which prompted this study) about the processes involved in using these principles as a source of inspiration for practice outside Italy. These questions and processes will be discussed below. Reggio Emilian educators'

own ideas about these questions and the pedagogical principles that prompt them, are highly relevant, though they need to be understood within the broader picture of the Reggio Emilian philosophy—of education, of the nature of their schools and of schooling.

The participatory nature of education as living

The early childhood years spent in the Municipal Reggio Emilian centres have been characterized by Malaguzzi (1993a), as "a continuous period of living together…five or six years of reciprocal trust and work" (p55). Child-centredness is seen to be essential but insufficient. The school is a living organism, a system of relationships and interaction among children, parents and teachers, where all three components are the centre of interest (Rinaldi, 1995; Malaguzzi, 1993a)

> *We see the traditional isolation of teachers and school staff, and their isolation from the families and the social environment as a backward existential imprisonment…the traditional educational theory of separation gives way to the theory of participation* (Reggio Children, 1994, p13).

Participation goes beyond a way of teaching into a way of being. This way of being, of living together, incorporates all the protagonist subjects involved in the education of children, that is, the children, families and teachers (Reggio Children, 2000). These three groups form a 'we' whose life is created "through participation", not merely by taking part in something but "by being part of it, its essence, part of a common identity…" (Rinaldi, 1998, p8).

The centrality, connectedness and interactivity in these relationships are seen to be an "operative epistemology" that constantly involves multiple points of view and reciprocal participation. It is

> *consolidated through multi-layered forms, exchanges, and dialogues that produce the formulation and sharing of educational ideas…..*

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It is a process that is and should be complicated (Reggio Children, 1994, p13).

It is also a process that is more than supported by, but rather, seen to be organically interwoven with the structures of the physical environment, working environment and forms of organization.

…we have tried to create the school as a system in which everything is connected…I cannot interact with just one part of the system and leave the rest aside, because that would injure the system. (Filippini, 1993)

This organic systems approach (Dahlberg, 1999a) manifests in the characteristic practices among educators, parents, children and indeed the city, citizenry and culture of Reggio Emilia.

The educational institution is in fact a system of communications and interaction among the three protagonists, integrated into the larger social system (Rinaldi, 1993, p104).

This system of relationships has in and of itself a virtually autonomous capacity to educate. It is not just some kind of giant security blanket… (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p63).

The organizational system can be understood as the roots that hold up, nourish and are inseparable from the tree of Reggio Emilian pedagogical principles. Like the schools themselves which are "particular places", these principles are <u>of</u> Reggio Emilia "not just anywhere" (Gandini, 1994). For the purposes of this study, four principles will be detailed—the image of the child; the relation of learning and teaching; the one hundred languages of children; and the place of the environment. In discussing these guiding principles, the practices of documentation; project work and the use of the atelier, will also be outlined.

The image of the child

All people—and I mean scholars, researchers and teachers, who in any place have set themselves to study children seriously—have ended up by discovering not so much the limits and weaknesses of children but rather

> *their surprising strengths and capabilities linked with an inexhaustible*
> *need for expression and realization* (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p72).

This conviction is the starting place of Reggio Emilian philosophy (Neugebauer,

1994; Rody, 1995; Robertson, 1995). The image of the child is

> *this theory within you (that) pushes you to behave in certain ways; it*
> *orients you...it is very difficult to act contrary to this internal image.*
> (Malaguzzi, 1994, p52).

Reggio Emilian educators recognize that teachers act according to personal theories,

that there are many different images of children and of childhood and that the internal

image held, orients and directs interactions and relationships with children. Thus they

have chosen to hold an image based in the human "rights rather than simply needs"

of the child (Rinaldi, 1993, p102).

This image sees children not in deficits—"incomplete, weak, fragile"—but rather as

competent, with abilities, capacities and potentials: "strong, rich in resources and

powerful from birth" (Rinaldi, Spaggiari & Davoli, 1994, np). This child, who is open to

the world, driven by incredible curiosity, searches for the reasons for everything,

yearns for communication and relationship and hunts for meaning. Such children are

powerfully capable of constructing their own knowledge, construct themselves as well

as their world and in turn, are constructed by it. The child reinterprets reality, gives it

new meaning and so, builds the future (Rinaldi, 1993; Filippini, 1993; Malaguzzi,

1994). As Rinaldi points out, "this type of theory requires us to respect the subjectivity

of the learner" (Rinaldi, 1998, p10).

The relation of learning and teaching

Learning is seen as a constructive process, but more specifically as co-construction.

Rejecting notions of learning as transmission or reproduction, Reggio Emilian

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philosophy and pedagogical practice operates with children as "authors of their own

learning" (Malaguzzi, 1994). Malaguzzi further argues that

> *children do not wait to pose questions to themselves and form*
> *strategies of thought, or principles or feelings. Always and everywhere*
> *children take an active role in the construction and acquisition of*
> *learning and understanding* (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p60).

This philosophy holds an image of a "rich" not "poor" child protagonist and a view of

curiosity and learning that "from the very beginning refuse simple and isolated things

[but] love to find the dimensions and relations of complex situations". It maintains

> *"that it becomes unfair to lock children inside hierarchically constructed*
> *and linear stages or inexistent (sic) egocentrism..."* (Malaguzzi, 1987, p19)*.*

While recognizing that "the timing and styles of learning are individual and are difficult

to standardize with those of others", the philosophy emphasizes the importance of

relationship and collaboration in learning which is characterized as "social

constructivist".(Rinaldi, 1993, p104).

> *The emphasis of our educational approach is placed not so much upon*
> *the child in an abstract sense but on each child in relation to other*
> *children, teachers, parents, his or her own history and the societal and*
> *cultural surroundings. Relationships, communications and interactions*
> *sustain our educational approach in its complexity...It is our belief that*
> *all knowledge emerges in the process of self- and social construction*
> (Rinaldi, 1993, p105).

The dynamics of social interaction with peers, or more specifically, of collaboration—

exposure to other conflicting viewpoints, negotiation and reformulation of initial

premises—are perceived as "also substantially cognitive procedures"*,* essential to

growth and the educational process.

With these emphases on communication, relation, and collaboration among and with

children and adults—all possessors of rights—the learning and teaching relationship

is constructed and co-constructed in "non-traditional ways" (Malaguzzi, 1993a).

Reggio Emilian educators use the metaphor of a game of ping-pong. For the game of

children's growth through learning to continue, both "the skills of the adult and child, need appropriate adjustments". The two-way direction of interaction is emphasized, with Malaguzzi cautioning against devaluing the role of the adult, in deference to the image of the powerful, authorial child (p60). At the same time, he also cautions against overactivity on the part of the adult, as a risk factor that creates a passive role for children. Adults are to activate the meaning making competencies of children and then bring "together in a fruitful dialogue, their meanings and interpretations with those of children" (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p75).

This conceptualization of the relationship between teaching and learning as a co-construction, demands a view of teaching that focuses on learning. (Malaguzzi, 1994, p55). In Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice, researching and learning is the province of both children and adults (New, 1994a). Central to this focus is the "pedagogy of listening" where "scaffolding becomes truly reciprocal, between teacher and child, between teaching and learning" (Rinaldi, 1999, p7). Some of the central practices of this pedagogy, 'documentazione' and 'progettazione', are detailed below.

Reggio Emilian educators expect teachers to be learning about themselves as teachers, in concert with learning about children. They are "makers and actors not stagehands to a pageant of received wisdom" (Duckett, 2001, p95). They are active when listening, observing and reflecting about children's learning within a group of teachers and in dialogue with parents. Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) refer to such "reciprocal connections'' as occurring within a "mutual community of learners" (p45). This dynamic of group collaboration, among and between the three protagonists, is a hallmark of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice (Saltz, 1997; Abramson, Robinson & Ankenman, 1995; New, 1997).

The group, as the site of relationship, of "multiple listening, is a place of learning and a place of teaching". Individual children and adults require communication, dialogue and exchange to create, modify and enrich their theories and conceptual maps (Rinaldi, 1999, p7). For this reason, Malaguzzi portrays the teacher's role as that of "a creator of relationships". However, it is not confined to people but includes "relationships between things, between thoughts and with the environment" (Malaguzzi, 1994, p56). This role depends on the practices of teachers as learners and researchers and is connected with the principle of the one hundred languages of children.

The one hundred languages

The One Hundred Languages of Children is the name given to the travelling exhibition of Reggio Emilian educational experience. It is also the metaphor used to describe the multiplicity of tools that are available to human beings, for expression, communication and for the construction of meaning. Spoken language is but one. In the Catalogue to the exhibition, Malaguzzi points out the interconnectedness of these symbolic languages. When there is opportunity to develop them, they can become "generative forces" of each other, of action, of "logics and other creative potentialities" (Malaguzzi, 1987, p23). Millikan (2003c) cites Malaguzzi's explanation that development of the hundred languages depends on children's exposure to three things—resources and experiences; opportunities to express in different ways their thinking about such experience so that it is visible to themselves; and adults who take children seriously and "listen respectfully with eyes, ears, hearts and minds" (p14).

Thus, rather than being seen as a direct route to creativity that is separate from intellectual capacities, the symbolic languages are "put into connection", with each other and with the processes of theorizing and co-construction of meaning. As Rinaldi (1999) points out, the group context is necessary for the representation of theories and for their modification and enrichment. Difference is key.

> *We are talking about differences between individuals but also differences between languages…it is in the transition from one language to another as well as in their reciprocal interactions that concepts and conceptual maps are created and consolidated* (p7).

Just as creativity is seen to be not a separate faculty but connected as a "characteristic way of thinking, knowing and making choices" (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p70), so the principle of one hundred languages expresses the view of the interconnectedness of affective, imaginative and cognitive processes. This view is expressed in the symbolism of Malaguzzi's (1993b) oft-quoted poem, "Il cento c'e".

The place of the environment

Consistent with, and exemplifying the "pedagogy of participation", is the role accorded the environment within Reggio Emilian philosophy. Malaguzzi describes it as a "fully participating element in education". The catelogue of the travelling exhibition incorporates a section devoted to it, in order to highlight

> *the value we attach to this aspect…we consider the environment to be an essential constitutive element of any theoretical or political research in education…the environment should act as a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and life-style of the people who live in it* (Malaguzzi, 1987, p30).

The "conceptualization and realization of spaces, forms and functions" in each school, has involved "choices which we have favoured, while seeking coherence with the ideas and aims of our work". (Malaguzzi, 1987, p31).

These environments reflect Reggio Emilian attitudes to the importance and teaching potential of aesthetics (Fleet & Robertson, 1998). At the same time they reflect and support the place of communication and relationships within education. Space is designed and used to "favor relationships and interactions" among the three protagonists: children, staff and parents. Moreover, the walls "speak and document", through the temporary and permanent exhibitions mounted on them, the interactive learning processes that go on within them. The environment is seen as a motivating and animating force, as itself containing educational content and therefore a "third teacher" (Rinaldi, et al., 1994, np). At the same time, the particularity of each school is valued and reflected in its relationships with its surroundings and locale, its history and layers of experience and culture.

In these environments, time is not rationed or hurried (Gandini, 1994; Gandini, 1993). Rather it reflects respect for

> *the tools of doing and understanding, of the full, slow, extravagant, lucid, and ever-changing emergence of children's capacities.*
> (Malaguzzi, 1990, in Gandini, 1993, p148).

Specific spaces in the schools' environments also exemplify deliberate choices made in realizing the Reggio Emilian project. Children share classroom space with their age peers and with two teachers for a period of three years. The central piazza or meeting place is shared by the entire school and directly mirrors a use of public space in most Italian towns and cities. There is a permanent dedicated space for eating together (Gandini, 1993). The ingress is deliberately constructed and used as a welcoming space for children and parents. Its documentation attests traces of past and present lived experience and presents the identity of each school (Davoli, 1995).

The atelier, documentazione and progettazione

The studio or laboratory spaces in each school, known as the atelier and mini-atelier, have afforded several functions in the schools and were

> …never intended to be a sort of secluded, privileged space as if there and only there the languages of expressive art could be produced. It was instead a place where children's different languages could be explored by them and studied by us in a favourable and peaceful atmosphere. (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p68).

The atelier is staffed by an art-trained "atelierista", who works both with teachers and children. It is widely equipped for its variety of evolving purposes. It is a space that allows children to become masters of their symbolic languages using them as a construction of thoughts and feelings, particularly within 'project' work with peers. As "a cultural vehicle of staff development", the atelier, "assists the adults in understanding processes of how children learn". It is also a "workshop for documentation" and archive of this work, which is used:

> everyday to be able to 'read' and reflect critically, both individually and collectively, on the experience we are living and the project we are exploring (Vecchi, 1993, p122).

Like these particular spaces in the Reggio Emilian schools, there are also particular pedagogical practices that connect and exemplify the philosophical principles they emerged within. Two will be detailed here. They are inter-related processes known in Italian as 'documentazione' and 'progettazione', translated popularly but poorly as 'documentation' and 'project work'.

Documentation renders visible to parents, teachers and children, the children's capabilities and competencies as authors and co-constructors of their own learning. It most often, though not exclusively, portrays children's project work. Characterized by Spaggiari (1997) as "…a mental space and a cultural attitude more than a technical-professional skill'' (p13), documentation as a process, however, goes beyond its

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visible product, (the framed panels of examples of children's symbolic representations). It incorporates observation and interpretation by adults, which are seen as subjective, participatory processes. Documentation is a vital part of the Reggio Emilian 'pedagogy of listening', providing opportunities within the learning–teaching relationship.

For children, the re-reading and revisiting involved in documentation, allows the opportunity to carry out meta-cognition of their own processes and consequently to reflect and make adjustments. The learners are both protagonists of, and commentators on, their learning. Documentation is also seen to structure the learning process of the child and group of children. For teachers, it provides instruments for interpretation, discussion and professional development, helping them to develop understanding of how children learn and to situate their own hypotheses on teaching. Documentation affords the teacher the possibility of listening in order to learn how to teach (Rinaldi, 1998; 1999). As Rinaldi et al. (1994, np) have suggested

> *Observation, documentation and interpretation help teachers to follow children's suggestions of how to be a good teacher for them.*

The second practice to be detailed in this section is 'project work', a term which does not adequately translate the meaning given by Reggio Emilian educators to the process of progettazione. It is

> *not just planning and it is not just planning with an emergent curriculum. It involves the multiple action of children and adults separately and together. It is defined in dialogue between children and adults* (Rinaldi et al., 1994, np)

While it refers to an extended study of a topic by children—extended in both depth and time—using the symbolic languages to co-construct, theorize, revisit, and deepen understanding, the process is perceived to operate from, and depend on, its connections with the principles outlined above. It is inseparable from the system of

relations and organization, involving all three protagonist groups and exemplifies the attitudes to children, to research and learning inherent in the Reggio Emilian philosophy.

Projects are usually documented, for the processes of documentation (including observation and interpretation) allow teachers to hypothesize and to strategize where and how to adjust to, and challenge children, to keep the game, the adventure in learning, going. In this process, planning is thoughtfully carried out, informed by children's documented responses, and adult theorizing. It is "constructed and deconstructed from the realm of uncertainty by all the protagonists", but it is not tied to "excessively defined objectives" nor does it "base all on the first hypothesis". Progettazione is guided by "the compass not the train schedule" and is "to live the real process with the children" (Rinaldi et al., 1994, np).

The above depiction of Reggio Emilian principles and practices neither describes nor accounts for their influence which is undisputed in the literature (Dahlberg, 1999a; Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000) even by those who are concerned by it (Johnson, 1999). Indeed, this influence begs a number of questions about its nature and processes. However, Reggio Emilian educators are not silent on this issue of influence. Their views on this topic consistently accompany communication about their work. The Reggio Emilian perspective on others' reception of their work will be outlined below, before exploring the way in which these questions have been approached in the literature.

The situated nature of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice

Reggio Emilian educators stress the particularity of their experience. They point out

the importance of economic, social and political positions influencing the life of their

schools and they contend that considering these influences is important in any

context. They make it clear that they are not offering a "recipe", nor merely a point of

comparison but an opportunity to reflect on "the reasons why", on one's own

experience in its specific context (Rinaldi, 1995).

> *The Reggio experience is not offered as a model, but rather as a*
> *stimulus and point of reference for those who want to reflect on the*
> *educational reality in their own countries…We too have learned how*
> *seeing yourself through the eyes of others helps you to see with*
> *different eyes, to find new motivation for your work, to reinforce your*
> *willingness to evolve by dialoguing with the continuous changes that*
> *take place in the society, in children, in families …* (Gambetti, 1998, p4).

This stimulus and its subsequent influence around the world opened a potential, new

chapter in early childhood educational research. Teachers working outside Reggio

Emilia were grappling with the problem of responding to this provocation and this, in

turn, provided the stimulus for this investigation of responses in Australian contexts.

However, in 1997, at the time this study was conceived, there had been very little

investigation or analysis that addressed issues concerning the meaning and

processes of Reggio Emilian influence. There was a paucity of Australian writing on

Reggio Emilian pedagogy and even less published research based upon it. Some

cross-cultural studies existed (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 1994) and descriptions of

staff development programs (Fyfe, 1994). Additionally, some North American

scholars had grappled with issues inherent in transferring Reggio Emilian ideas and

practices into other pedagogical contexts (Katz, 1994; Firlik, 1995) but studies

foregrounding it (at least in English translation) were quite scarce. Hence, this study,

originated without the frame of a comparable, existing research base; was conceived

as exploratory and preliminary in nature; and was designed to be open-ended, pointing the way to further avenues of research.

While occupying a niche in unexplored research territory, this study was informed nevertheless, by some earlier relevant literature and its findings are illuminated by research that has emerged since it began. Both the earlier and the later work are therefore important contextual bookends to this study. This research and theorising of issues inherent in responding to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, is detailed below.

Reggio Emilia for the taking?

Many writers have warned of the impossibility of duplicating the Reggio experience and of the counterproductivity of trying. Yet these warnings are carried, not within a context dismissive of the value of the Reggio Emilian experience for other early childhood educators, but within one of wholehearted recommendation.

For example, Gardner (2004) warned against romanticization and the impossibility of transporting an educational system away from its local roots but also recommended "learning as much as we can from an educational system that works" (p6). Hawkins (1993) also saw the impossibility of simple transportation or importation, warning against emulation as fashion that ignores local traditions. Bruner (2000) took up a similar theme in arguing that the gift of Reggio Emilia is its "international message that you must take your local task seriously" (p16).

Moss (2001) argues the same point from a postmodern perspective, emphasising the importance of small scale, local experience as a "locus of dissensus" (p134). While reiterating the particular, contextualised nature of the Reggio Emilian experience,

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Moss (2001) also suggests that educators have a responsibility to insist on the alterity of Reggio Emilia. While he also reflects the near consensus in the literature, that duplication is neither possible nor desirable, he hints at the possibility of "a mass conversion to some Reggio approach or model" (p136). This possibility has been articulated by others.

Clyde (1994) has suggested that Australian early childhood personnel have been quick to accept some new ideas in toto, without reference to Australian contexts and she urges reflection on Reggio Emilian theories and concepts as a basis for integration into the local context. Johnson (1999) goes further. He argues that the process of dissemination of information about Reggio Emilia and responses to it, constitute a contemporary version of a cargo cult. Analysing the discourse on an internet site encompassing bulletin board discussion of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, Johnson puts the view that "large-scale adoption of the Reggio approach" is occurring with and without background information. Additionally, he also perceives incorporation of "smaller bits and pieces of Reggio". The effect of this is the denial of local identity and of local, collective and individual history. Johnson further argues that Reggio Emilia offers no "revisioning, rethinking, re-theorizing what we are/are not as a field of study" (p75). While Johnson has been critiqued as having missed the point (Wright, 1999; Rofrano, 2000), Millikan and Robertson (1996) have also argued against a "cult" mentality surrounding "the Reggio approach"—as it is termed in the US—and the danger of "seeing the 'what' of Reggio without attempting to understand the 'why'" (p1). Such views and the debate surrounding them, highlight questions inherent in taking Reggio Emilian pedagogy elsewhere.

The issues of interpretation and relocation

Issues in the relocation of Reggio Emilian principles and practices outside Italy, are central to this study. Yet, rather than seeking to answer a deterministic question, the study seeks to discover how teachers create pedagogical meaning within and around the change in contexts. Relevant issues have been the subject of some discussion in the literature and a small research base is building.

Interpreting Reggio Emilia's pedagogy is one such issue. Millikan (2003a) has reminded audiences not only of the difficulties of actually translating concepts into meaningful English but also of the subjectivity of entering Italian culture and "listening with my Australian cultural eyes"—with attendant potential for misunderstanding (p10).

Nevertheless, attempts have been made to 'translate', as it were, Reggio Emilian pedagogy for local consumption. Millikan (2003a) makes reference to claims on its pedagogy—as 'emergent curriculum' (a la Jones and Nimmo); as akin to Katz and Chard's 'Project approach'; as Forman's 'negotiated curriculum'; and as New's 'convergent curriculum'. She reminds readers that while Reggio Emilia's educators have expressed varying degrees of comfort with such descriptors, they are wary of labels that 'limit and try to contain the complexity of their work' (p18).

Apart from interpretation, there are other major difficulties in relocation. Firlik (1995) cautions that differences in American and European cultural conventions, thinking and attitudes make adapting and transporting methods with European roots "difficult at best" (p2). He has nevertheless, clearly advocated the adaptability of elements of the Reggio Emilian "model-approach-theory". His appears to be a methods approach.

Specifically, he suggests adapting the practices of projects, multiple modes of expression, teachers researching, and making better use of the environment. His analysis of contextual difference highlights American valuing of the utility of theory and therefore the measurement of its application; individualism over collectivism; doing over being; the hegemony of clocks and timetables; recognition of the dichotomies of work versus play; and competition versus affiliation (Firlik, 1995). Taken together, the implicit argument appears to be that differences in values limit the possibilities of relocation to mere adaptation of particular methods or practices. In comparison with Firlik, other writers are on the one hand, more cautious and on the other, more open to possibilities.

Millikan has questioned the possibility of dealing only with certain parts of the Reggio Emilian philosophy and she has asked whether these parts stand up without the whole (Millikan, 1997a). Katz (1997) takes the point further. She asks if the alternative to Reggio Emilian advice—that it is necessary to work on all fronts at once—is to do nothing. If the answer to this question is no, she asks further, if there needs to be a universal starting point.

Gambetti suggests that the complexity of the issue requires new vocabulary, a point confirmed at least in the variance of terminology quoted in the foregoing discussion.

> *You could say 'apply' or 'adapt' or 'translate' or 'reproduce' but no term is satisfactory* (Gambetti & Gandini, 1995).

Yet this caution has not produced a narrow conception (in the vein of Firlik) of how to proceed. Advice goes beyond recommending judicious emulation of specific practices to suggest that teachers need to link the world of practice change to the world of thought, theory and values. Katz' questioning (1999) of the apparent lack of

critique regarding the cultural appropriateness of importing a Reggio approach, is relevant in this regard.

New (1994a) suggests that values can be clarified in the search for common ground amid cultural variation. For New, the pertinent questions relate to separating those aspects of Reggio Emilia that are impossible to transport and those with potential to challenge local goals and ideals. She sees the motivation and value of Reggio Emilia, among other things, as its challenge to ideas about children and their relationship with society.

Dahlberg (1999a) takes the notion of 'Reggio Emilia as challenge' somewhat further. Drawing from post-structuralist theory, she posits that Reggio Emilia transgresses dominant discourses in early childhood pedagogy by challenging the prevalent tradition and avoiding master discourses. Questions are not answered from a universalized and decontextualized perspective. When considering the historical relationship of Swedish and Reggio Emilian experience and thus the issue of changing contexts, Dahlberg concludes that this has helped Swedish educators problematize their own tradition and practices, starting from Swedish traditions and culture. With an outsider's perspective, Millikan (1997b) contrasted practical responses in Sweden—as slow-moving—and in the USA—as a speedy "adaptation". She noted the "very reflective and thoughtful response" observed in Denmark and Sweden that included a "consideration and debating of their current philosophies and practice" (p5). The metaphor of Reggio Emilia as prism is often used to describe this kind of process.

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As detailed below, such a prism brings into focus contextual similarities and differences. It ranges across considerations of social values, educational priorities, philosophical principles and their resultant impact on the roles of various parties in the pedagogical process.

A challenge to reflect on difference

Some writers, in taking up the challenge of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, have used this prism as a lens to view their own cultural contexts in order to reflect upon difference.

<u>Individualism</u>

As noted earlier, Firlik (1995), has pointed to the American values of productivity and its measurement, of a belief in dichotomies and in individualism. Nimmo (1994) has also discussed the American value of individualism and analyzed the way it constrains perceptions of children and practices. He sees the Reggio Emilia pedagogy as challenging assumptions about children's capacities as social actors and beings. These assumptions are manifest in the lens of individualism and consequent practices. Nimmo questions practices related to individual ownership of ideas and highlights contrasts—between symbolic representation as expression, rather than communication; intellectual conflict as internal, rather than social; and difference as requiring individual protection, rather than being viewed as a community resource. He also questions notions of identity, contrasting American conceptions of self located in the individual and the present, with Reggio Emilian views of the self, as constructed in relationships and over time (Nimmo, 1994).

Images of children

A decade later, Hendrick (2004), also examined contrasts and reached similar

conclusions about a "much more protective and possibly restricted vantage". She

cited Saltz' view—that this leads to the "infantilizing (of) our youngsters" (p40). Others

have examined notions held about children within their own cultural contexts, using

as prism the Reggio Emilian principle of "the image of the child". Dahlberg's (1999b;

1999c) report of the Stockholm project in Sweden, attested to local images of the

young child as 'nature' and of older children as 'knowledge reproducers'.

In Australia Tan (1995) argued that

> the socio-historical construction of our image of children in Australia has
> had a heavy emphasis on health and welfare before education…I suggest
> it is still a welfare oriented image (p15).

Hertzberg (1995) similarly suggested that the prevalent view of the

> needy, weak individual…emanates from the political, cultural and social
> bases of the values and images of the mother, maternity, family, the
> child and care and education for 0-6 year olds (p7).

Robertson's (1995) Australian study of six early childhood practitioners highlighted

assumptions of individualism, of children as autonomous learners isolated from

family. Like Millikan, Mauger, Thompson, and Hobba (1996), Robertson (1996) has

also analyzed the impact of the conception of individualism in her own work,

contrasting these assumptions with Reggio Emilian views on collaboration and

learning as social construction.

Millikan (2003a) referred to the 'cute' child, as a conception of children that has wide

currency in Australian cultural contexts and describes it as an impediment to the

appreciation of children's capability. She saw this in combination with the pervasive

influence of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in early education circles,

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confining educators' image of children to ages and stages and resulting in teaching aimed at needs rather than strengths. In similar vein, New (1994a) argued that Reggio Emilian pedagogy, with its emphases on the significance of social relations, of schools as communities and of teachers as learners and researchers, prompts a reconsideration of the definition of schools and of the roles of teachers and parents. Others have subsequently taken up related themes in their considerations of difference.

Local educational priorities and imperatives

Abramson (2001) relates that some US educators believe they face differences such as ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, mandates for assessment and standards, early literacy, nutrition education and outdoor play environments, without the common cultural values and social support in Reggio Emilia. New (2003) attributed to "skeptics of Reggio Emilia's relevance to US classrooms" similar views, such as a lack of cultural support for collegial relationships in a fragmented and hurried society; a focus on competition and testing and a view of teachers as tools, while acknowledging the challenges of family diversity and teacher workload (p37). In Australian schools, Fleet (1996) also acknowledged the power of tradition and systemic organisation as constraining forces. The nexus between mandated timetabling and fragmented curriculum, as well as ratios and work practices were inhibitive differences that challenged rather than stifled efforts to work on, and for, change in schools (p13).

In the United Kingdom (UK), Abbott (2001) referred to the top-down pressures on children starting formal school at an early age, who are expected to meet externally imposed targets and follow a curriculum designed to prepare them for the next stage

in the system. She believed this owes more to an industrial model than to one of a cooperative community. Similarly, Moss (2001) referred to the prescriptive guidelines on content or methods, quality assurance, accreditation schemes, inspection systems, Baseline Assessments or other outcome indicators, that characterize UK and other education systems. He asserted that Reggio "breaks all the managerialist rules that shape Britain's approach to the development of early childhood services" (p126).

In Australia, Millikan (2003a) recommended that if its educators accepted belonging to a community as an important educational concept, then they needed to define and determine the meaning of 'community' and the nature of the relationships within and without their organizations that "impact on their particular way of being" (p20). In similar vein Gőthson highlights the influence of Reggio Emilia among Swedish educators via the "process of understanding that democracy has to be redefined all the time" with respect for differences, contradiction and conflicts—which presents a "very big challenge for us because we do not have a confrontational tradition in our culture" (Kaminsky, 1999, p2). Millikan (2003a) has also suggested that subsequent to her extensive experience as a student of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, she now sees collaboration as one of the most important aspects of Reggio Emilian principles to be explored locally.

This focus on collaboration and community encompasses a role for parents. Yet New (1999) considers the home-school relationship an understudied aspect of Italian early childhood programs. Bersani and Jarjoura's experiences (2002) notwithstanding, this appears to be the case outside Italy as well, at least in the literature devoted to examining Reggio Emilian influence. There was an isolated study by McClow and

Gillespie (1998) who researched parental reactions in Head Start classrooms. Their findings—that parents wanted more information, communication and involvement with the Reggio influenced programs—tend to confirm the suggestion that collaboration with parents is an underdeveloped and indeed under-researched area of Reggio Emilian influence outside Italy.

Inspiration to reflect on commonalities

As well as providing a challenge to reflect on difference, interpreting across contexts is also perceived to involve reflecting on commonalities. Gandini (1997) believes that exposure to Reggio Emilia provokes both reflection on experience and a search for connections. There have been some reports of conclusions reached as a result. For example, Gőthson took a broad view in reporting that Swedish educators found connections in democratic traditions and common societal values around responsibility for children (Kaminsky, 1999). Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) believed there were some mutually understood theoretical traditions, rendering the philosophies of Reggio Emilia familiar to North American educators. They saw the teachers' role in Reggio as an extension rather than a rupture of the roles of teachers as commonly practised in North America—though it should be noted this view was not shared by Hendrick who contrasted the North American teacher role of leader and developer of curriculum with that of the Reggio Emilian collaborator (2004, p44). Doig and Larkins (1997) were more locally focused in perceiving similarities—to Victorian teachers' experience of constant reflection on practice and theory and the honing and renewal of skills; to their school's collegial and administrative support and to small group work in a co-operative, nurturing environment.

For Gambetti (1998), such connecting is a process of seeing differently through others' eyes, while involved in a search for common values. The process renews motivation. New (1994a) characterizes this process as inspirational. She sees the inspiration deriving from the recognition that early childhood goals held in common across cultures, are realized in Reggio Emilian practice. Bruner (2000) echoes both these notions in suggesting that Reggio Emilia is inspirational in its example of the relationship between locality and universality.

Clearly, irrespective of the nature of the inspiration, local teachers' attempts to bridge the differing contexts, generates some kind of process. The relevant literature warns against taking the process to mean the mere duplication of practices. As seen above, it suggests practitioners need to interpret and analyze the contrasting contexts. Yet more is involved. The literature also suggests the need for a local engagement with Reggio Emilian pedagogical principles and the construction of a locally significant response. The nature and scope of this process are detailed in turn, below.

Responding to Reggio Emilian pedagogy

New (1994b) warns of the danger in regarding Reggio Emilia as a formula, 'quick fix' or model. She argues Reggio Emilia should be seen as a provocateur, offering an opportunity for a co-operative learning process at home. Nimmo (1994) suggests engaging with Reggio Emilia by building on the known. Moss and others have tied the provocation of Reggio Emilia not only to the analysis of the local context but to the construction of new understandings requiring choices about philosophical positions and values (Moss, 2000; Gambetti & Radke, 1994; Nimmo, 1994). New (1994a) held that a necessary forerunner to local response involves developing an understanding of the relationship between work, values and the context of early

childhood education in Reggio Emilia and elsewhere. Fu, Stremmel and Hill (2002), in an account of their own response to the challenge of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, appeared to share this view in describing their "process of transformation" as one of "action research", carried out by a community of learners engaged in philosophical and inquiring conversations (p7/8). In similar vein, and also from a practitioner perspective, Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) cited Gardner (1998) in stating that learning from Reggio Emilia must involve a local "re-invention" (p6) while Cadwell (2002) reminds readers that ideas, not only need to take root locally, but must sustain themselves in a particular place.

While clearly rejecting duplication, Hawkins (1993) went beyond the localised response in arguing for a process of educational debate and exchange with Reggio Emilia that considers and uses institutional, cultural and social differences. Fu et al. (2002) share these latter considerations in maintaining that their transformation process drew not only upon the experience of Reggio Emilia but also embraced other diverse philosophical, theoretical and practitioner voices that are "responsive to the social, cultural and historical contexts of the US" (p7/8).

Thus, it appears that when teachers engage with Reggio Emilian pedagogy, a fine line is to be trod between responding to its challenges and maintaining responsiveness to local contexts. As already noted, interpretation and relocation of Reggio principles opens possibilities for meaningful change through reflection on connections of commonality and difference between the local and the Reggio Emilian contexts. Significantly it is suggested that these contexts should be seen in broad terms, beyond the narrow confines of the practical, to embrace the cultural, social and philosophical. Yet at the same time, the terms cited above—re-invention,

reconstruction and transformation—suggest that grappling with the issues of engagement, takes on new and complex meaning when it is informed by practice. The voices of practitioners who have taken on this task, are thus relevant and important in adding descriptions of its scope to this discussion of the nature of the process.

Derived from practice and personal reflections and outlined below, this literature includes scholarly sources as well as *The Challenge* newsletter. Those few articles that were authored by study participants were excluded, to allow a clear comparison between the study's findings and this related literature. The early literature pre-dating this study and its later growth are detailed below thematically.

Practitioner responses

Practitioners detailed the impact of learning about Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

Inspiration

Its inspirational quality was evident. Shepherd (1996) described the "almost spiritual" moment "that made me look, really look, at what I do" (p10). It "opened my mind" and "released the chains", inspiring "hunger for more" (Baker, 1995, p17/18), "passion as boundless enthusiasm" (Finn,1997, p7) and precipitating "the impact it would have on my life" (Bourke, 1996, p16).

Questioning and Reappraisal

Questioning and reappraisal of current practice was the norm (Piccolo, 1997; Gambetti & Radke, 1994). Gunn (1995) captured the essence of many of the teacher-writers' reports in describing "the intricacies of the process that has unfolded

at our centre" (p6). A focus on 'the image of the child'—a focus shared by Gambetti and Radke (1994) and by others in Australia, as detailed earlier—led to reconceptualised practices regarding the environment, children's management of curriculum decisions and staff roles in observing and reflecting.

Advice

Some advice was also given. Cadwell (1997) spoke of the need to see the process in the long-term and Gambetti and Radke (1994) recommended embracing uncertainty as a positive. Drawing on their own experience, Fyfe's (1994) teacher-colleagues suggested others should explore 'the hundred languages' in some depth to develop a language to converse about them and alter planning procedures to allow for possibilities and interpretation in project work.

Projects

Children's involvement in ongoing projects featured in early Australian and other reports. Unknown (1994) has been followed by many later examples of such practice in many countries. As with LeeKeenan and Nimmo (1993) in the US, Reggio Emilian influences are clear in this project work—the use of symbolic media as integral to learning; multiple transitions in connection building between children's experiences; and collaboration. These latter authors also questioned the inter-relation of culture and children's achievements within progettazione.

Many of these same themes, as well as others, were taken up in the reports of practice change that appeared after this current study was conducted. In both time frames, collaboration featured as did authenticity in teaching and learning. The professional development implied in earlier reports was made explicit later, while

documentation emerged as a significant preoccupation of more recent practice-based writing. These themes are detailed below.

Authenticity in teaching and learning

Authenticity was often designated with the term 'really'. Steele and Lester (2004) spoke of "really handing over ownership of the program and learning to children" and "really revisiting past learning" (p19), while a decade earlier, Fyfe's (1994) colleagues experienced difficulties in authentically attending to, and conversing with, children. Fyfe also linked authenticity to time as did Kocher (1999), a Canadian teacher who was "learning to slow down", "really listen" and "think more deeply" (p21).

Authenticity in teaching brought role change. Unknown's (2003) group of teachers experienced difficulty in striking a balance between leading, following and working alongside children. Kaplan (2003) characterized it as relinquishing "my control" and beginning to understand the relevance and power of discussion among children (p10). Bourke (2002) reported change from school teachers who "saw themselves as 'learning coaches' rather than transmitters of knowledge and curriculum" (p14), while Szydlik (1998) stopped the questioning of children as testing, controlling and steering. She perceived a new culture of authenticity, originality, caring and lively conversation among the children, as well as a more authentic and engaged self.

Professional and personal development

She was also not the only teacher who perceived the effects of practice changes on her own development. Like Kocher (1999, p21) who was becoming a "more reflective practitioner", Graham and Cumming (2003) credited "the learning and reflection" as enabling "a personal and professional transformation" (p8), though Kriegler (2002)

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found this "completely new concept of what it meant to be an educator in an early learning environment" disquieting,

> *…I was launched completely out of my comfort zone and have become resigned to the idea that I will never return to it!* (p8)

Documentation

Earlier reports of experimentation with project work were complemented in later explorations of documentation which usually accompanied it. In the practice literature, documentation is credited with a powerful role in professional development and according to Unknown (2003), reveals professional learning within a group of teachers. From a single school in Victoria, Sayers, Bell, Maloney, and Ridgeway (2003) noted not only its power as the catalyst of change for educators, but also for parents and children, influencing the image of children and classroom practices. Cadwell (2002) in North America, reported from a group of teachers, that documentation had ceased to be an add–on and had become central to their processes—"the engine that drives the work" (p97).

However, as Hobba (2004) noted, "widespread exhaustion, frustration and burnout" can accrue to those struggling with projects and documentation, particularly if working with the whole group of children. Wright (1999) had sounded a similar cautionary note against taking "the kind of early childhood programs we have now and add[ing] the *content* of documentation to them". Rather he saw documentation as the opportunity to "retrain ourselves to undo the ways of seeing that we have developed" (p7).

Collaboration

Earlier reports detailed a sense of isolation and a desire for opportunities to collaborate with colleagues (Fischle, 1997; Baker, 1997). The importance of working relationships with staff and parents was reiterated by Fyfe (1994) and Cadwell (1997) though they regarded collaboration in their own contexts as not without its difficulties.

Wien's Canadian centre staff had worked over a five year period with Reggio principles of 'transparency, relationality and reciprocity' and had transformed their environment, as well as exploring working with documentation. Wien (1998) emphasised its "unique, particularized practice adapted to its locale" which derived not from copying ideas from Reggio Emilia but from ideas "processed collaboratively by staff in conjunction with real problems and challenges" (p12). The Director of this centre noted the absence in the literature of what she took to be assumed knowledge in Reggio Emilia, that is, the need for a team to "know each other deeply" in order "to teach well together" (p17). She emphasized also the need for time to build trust and collaboration among adults.

This concern with the complexity of collaboration was echoed by others. Bersani and Jarjoura (2002) expressed similar conclusions. The building of interdependent relationships including with families, that were not based solely in teachers' agendas, required "much time, reflection and hard work" as well as organizational supports (p70). These teachers also discovered the power of collaboration in promoting growth in their organization but reported its attendant challenges in a context that valued congeniality over critique. Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) echoed similar views in suggesting that teacher education needed to shift emphasis from learning how to manage settings to creating a community of people working together. This was

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precisely how Gibson (2001) perceived the evolution of change in her Australian centre—with all involved on a journey, together, as a community. In addition to ongoing dialogue within the centre community, she also referred to "local, national and global networking with other centres and colleagues" (p3).

Reports from Networked Groups

Networking appears to be an antidote to the isolation of teachers that was noted earlier and integral in the change process for some. Two reports, significantly larger in scale than the single centre group and individual practitioner responses noted above, have emanated from professional networks of teachers responding locally, to Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

Dahlberg (1999c) worked with a group of Swedish teachers meeting in a monthly network over three years. She also raised trust among adults in the group, as vital to their work of reconstructing their image of children and their roles as teachers, using documentation of their own pedagogical activities. These Swedish experiences appeared similar to those reported from North America and Australia and also included changes to the environment, to really hearing children and asking better questions, as well as using documentation as a key to family participation. Akin to those practitioners and theorists noted above, Dahlberg also perceived documentation as a learning process for teachers, with potentials for 'self-reflectivity', dialogue and reconstruction of pedagogy. However, she enlarged on the notion of community, in seeing potential for documentation in "opening up preschools as public spaces". She connects this work to notions of citizenship and to children's, parents', and teachers' participation in "public discourse and in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance" (p5).

Another concern of Dahlberg's was the dominance of Piagetian theory. She suggested that it distanced teachers from children, helped to objectify them and contributed to teachers' inability to really follow children's thinking, theories and dreams (1999c). In Australia, both Wright (1999) and Millikan (2003a) shared such concerns over the prevalence of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and its limiting influence on children's potential.

Millikan's recent book (2003a) reported on a wide range of aspects of the Australian experience, based on responses to questions sent across the country to the local networks of educators inspired by Reggio Emilian pedagogy and involved in *RE-Search* groups. These local responses echoed the elements of the processes engaged in by educators, in other parts of the world.

Local contexts presented challenges. Imposed curricula, mandated outcomes and expectations of early literacy were impediments for Australian teachers working from Reggio Emilian inspiration. Isolation was keenly felt. Elements of the differing organization and regulation of schools and centres resulted in problems related to fragmentation—of children from communities; of blocks of time and availability of materials due to scheduling; of relationships due to attendance patterns; and of curriculum due to government mandates. Working with parents was also seen as predicated on local difficulties in terms of both space for parents and parental time constraints. Like the other writers referred to earlier, Millikan also spoke to the power of documentation in rendering children's thinking visible and in offering potential for building relationships with the communities of schools and centres. She welcomed its power for teacher development and teaching but noted that requirements for record-keeping overwhelmed its use for these pedagogical aims.

At the same time, a locally valued difference emerged regarding outdoor space. Together with the use of verandahs giving access to the outside for most of the year, outdoor time and space were perceived as reflecting an Australian way of life.

In addition to these issues of context, Millikan's reporting of Reggio Emilian influences held much in common with other Australian and international practice-based literature. These influences included project work; observing children in the context of the group; really listening with eyes, ears and emotions; not hurrying children, rather, providing time to make learning satisfying; furthering questions instead of providing answers; release from having to know everything; and projecting and learning with children rather than rigidly planning in advance (p98).

Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) encapsulated much of the foregoing literature, in advising others embarking on a process of change in response to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, that each teacher and group has to identify the values and ideas that most resonate with meaning in light of their own philosophy, experiences and context. In so doing, they also captured the focus of this study and obliquely identified the research gap it set out to fill.

For while much of the literature is either written outside Australia and/or post-dates this study, at the time it was conducted, there had been but a few reports of teachers' responses, perceptions and reflections—Australian or otherwise—about instigating and grappling with Reggio-inspired change. Thus this study was conceived to add to a potentially rich, but under-mined seam of practical knowledge. Though the earlier literature reflected theorizations about what teachers should do, it was poorly served by theorizations from practitioner accounts of, much less research into, their views of

how they actually <u>did</u> respond. In the intervening period, not much has changed.

Though certainly much expanded, the later literature outlined above reveals piecemeal and largely individualized insights about potential, practice changes and problems. Even the 'stocktaking' reports of Dahlberg (1999c) and Millikan (2003a) from local teacher networks are exclusive of formal research. To date no published study has been undertaken that examined, across a diverse range of teachers, the nature of the process Fraser and Gestwicki (2002) reduced to such elegant terms. In focusing on an Australian group of teachers engaged in a process of active response to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, this study sought to delineate and theorize this gap in the educational knowledge base.

Summary

The foregoing discussion has illustrated both the principles and practices of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. It has also illustrated that they have been experienced as inspirational and provocative. Responding to the provocation raises a number of issues related to the interpretation and relocation of Reggio Emilian philosophy with the local reconstruction of practice. However these issues are manifest, there is broad agreement in the literature (with exceptions noted) that the provocation of Reggio Emilia, constitutes a challenge to locally reflect on ideas, practices and contexts with a view to change and improvement. The notion of reflection is consistent with the philosophy of Reggio Emilia and is consistent with related notions of teacher as theorist and researcher, which are also shared in Reggio Emilian philosophy. These notions are theoretically imbued and have been the subject of extensive research. This scholarly and research tradition and the place of the present study within it, is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research centres on a group of teachers who were prompted by their experience of Reggio Emilian pedagogy into 'changing their minds' and changing their practice. In a self-initiated drive for improvement, they were thus engaged in their own exercise of professional development that involved both mind and action. Certain theoretical propositions—for example, teacher reflection, teacher theorizing, teacher research, teacher inquiry—and related research around teacher change, go to the heart of the relationship between teachers' minds and their practice. The way in which they inform and frame this current research project is outlined below.

At the outset, it needs to be stated that this project assumes a certain stance toward teachers and pedagogy. For teachers to 'change their minds' about pedagogical principles and practice, implies that they are active agents in relation to theory and practice. The concept of *teacher agency* is therefore fundamental and logically, is more consistent with a change framework that is *bottom-up* rather than *top-down.*

Teacher Agency

Paris (1993) defines agency in the context of research in curriculum studies. The concept of teacher agency defies a notion of curriculum as received, as an invariant teacher-proof package to be delivered. It is a concept that sees teachers not as passive recipients of others' decision making but as "creators and critics", initiators and adaptors, who are active in engaging intellectually in their work (p16). This

concept of agency views curriculum change as a continuous, discursive, multi-stranded and individual construction, rather than a unitary, mass reaction.

Thus, Paris (1993) perceived the findings of her research as inconsistent with models of change that were based on imposed and system-wide curriculum. Since these models and their measures of teachers' effectiveness ignored the view of teachers as agents in curriculum work, she perceived them to be inadequate in situations where teachers initiate change or where teachers see their work on change, as a continuous process rather than an event.

Such situations characterize not only the nature of this study, but also, one end of a polarisation in the literature on teacher development. At this end, the centrality of the concept of teacher agency is highlighted against the other end, where "the linear perspectives and deficit models", as characterized by Fleet and Patterson (2001, abstract), hold sway. Tafel and Fischer (2001) argue that deficit models of "in-service" need to give way to conceptions of teachers as "leaders, researchers and authors of their own professional development" (p221). Thus Down, Hogan and Swan (1998) perceive teacher development to occur

> *not through managerial directives or externally imposed standards but in ways that recognize the autonomy of teachers as learners* (p5)*.*

In similar vein, Clark (1992) argues that professional development should not be a process done to teachers but rather, one where teachers take responsibility and control. Such "self-directed professional development" is based in an approach to lifelong learning and a construction of teachers as

> *more active than passive, more ready to learn than resistant, more wise and knowledgeable than deficient and more diverse and unique than they are homogenous* (p76-77)*.*

This "bottom-up" perspective (Williams, 1996)

> *locates teachers as active constructors of knowledge and deliberate
> architects of their practice* (p156).

This is a view shared by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999). In their outline of the
different intellectual traditions and educational projects (mainly in the US) that gave
rise to a decade of the "teacher research movement", teacher agency was a central
concept. Notions of

> *the teacher as technician, consumer, receiver, transmitter and
> implementor of other people's knowledge*

were commonly critiqued in favour of their polar opposite—a construction of "teacher
as knower and as agent" (p16).

Williams (1996) argued that recent literature on teacher education and teacher
professionalism explores the role of teachers in the creation of theory about teaching.
This view contrasts with the 'top-down' perspective that is based in traditional
research, where teachers have no role but to absorb the theory created by
educational researchers and apply it. She refers to the emerging idea of

> *reflective practitioners and teachers-as-researchers, that is of teachers as
> constructors of theories* (p156)*.*

This reference inadvertently highlights the somewhat confused nature of these
constructs—that is, of teacher as reflective practitioner, researcher or theorist—and
their interchangeability in the literature. Nevertheless, like the concept of teacher
agency and the 'bottom-up' perspective on both teacher development and
educational theory making that it implies, these constructs are highly relevant to a
study that focuses on teachers 'changing their minds' in a self-initiated response to a
professional development opportunity.

Even within the literature on the single construct of reflection, there is agreement that there is confusion (Rodgers, 2002; Dalzell, 1997; McCutcheon, 1992). Bullough (1989) regarded 'reflectivity' as a "slippery concept" (p15). Hatton and Smith (1995), in their review of the literature, view the terms 'reflection' and 'critical reflection' as loosely used and ill-defined and Leino (1997) sees the capturing of the meaning of reflection as "problematic" given a widespread lack of agreement about it (p146). These differences are also evident in the literature on action research. Kemmis (1999) for example, believes these differences are no longer internal debate but rather, the manifestation of "opposing traditions" of thought around the purposes of professional development (p154).

However, confusion and difference should not be taken to mean that these four conceptions of changes to teaching—reflection, theorizing, researching or creating meaning—are totally disparate constructs. Their relationship is akin to metonymy—similar or related ideas lead to interchangeability yet differences also exist among each term and among meanings ascribed across the terms. Following Sparks-Langer and Colton's (1991) lead in their review of 'reflective thinking', it is possible to distinguish differences in approach.

It is argued, therefore, that differences in approach not only account for the above metonymic relationship but are also derived from the relative influence and emphases drawn from broader theoretical frameworks, such as critical social theory, feminism and post-structuralism. Such frameworks have been applied within these constructs by various writers.

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Thus, Connelly and Clandinin (1996) acknowledge the role of critical social theory in particular types of reflection and Kemmis (1999) regards "critical social science" as "the crucial contestation" around the theoretical concept that is action research (p154). McLean (1999) acknowledges constructivist, practical and critical perspectives on teachers and teaching, the latter including post-structuralist and feminist theory. As Burns and Walker (2005) argue that 'voice' is central to feminist theory and methodology, then the foregrounding of teachers' 'voice' aligns feminist theory with a 'bottom-up' perspective on education research.

The review that follows, therefore, will not focus on highlighting distinctions between constructs of teaching, such as teacher as 'researcher', as 'theorist', as 'reflective practitioner' and as 'creator of professional meaning'. Rather, it will focus on distinguishing underlying themes explored by writers using any one of these constructs, to characterize the processes and products of the relationship between teachers' minds and their practice. In so doing it will position this study theoretically, in a conception of this relationship that highlights its breadth and complexity.

Teacher thinking: implicit and explicit

Much of the early work in the US that focused on teachers' minds was aimed at constructing a portrayal of the cognitive psychology of teaching. It was focused on the mental constructs and processes underlying teacher behaviour (Clark & Peterson, 1986). McCutcheon (1992) points out that the literature contains a variety of terms to describe the beliefs teachers hold about their practice as well as the processes of developing them. She refers to "constructs", "perspectives" and "images" and to their interrelationships as "clusters" or "ordered sets" (p195). This focus was one step removed from the process-product research literature on

teaching effectiveness that correlated teacher behaviour with student achievement measures. Process-product research efforts have been critiqued for failing to live up to their promised effects and for inadequately theorizing classroom life, the meaning of teaching or learning to teach (Kleinsasser, 1992; Richardson, 1990). In like vein, but writing from the specific perspective of curriculum change, Parker and McDaniel, (1992) perceived similar problems with this research base and its related conceptualization of "teachers as technicians" (p97).

A shift in emphasis saw the development of a research base investigating teachers' implicit theories of teaching and learning. Clark and Peterson (1986) described them as a "personally held system of beliefs, values and principles" that functioned as both sense maker and guide of cognitive and other behaviour (p287). This fundamental shift moved the focus from psychological schemata to a more philosophical orientation to teachers' thinking. For Richardson (1990), exploration of teachers' beliefs and understandings from this perspective awaited the advent of an "alternative paradigm for understanding human behaviour" and a research methodology consistent with it (p11). Qualitative research and naturalistic studies of teaching became the alternative to the "positivist, technical paradigm" that process-product research exemplifies (p9).

Pajares (1992), in his review of research into the "messy construct" of teachers' beliefs, allowed that qualitative research could be helpful—despite the review being conducted from a clearly positivist epistemological stance wherein it was argued that beliefs be "carefully operationalized" (p308). It recommended that research should provide insight into the relationship between beliefs, on one hand and teachers' knowledge, their practice and student outcomes, on the other. However, it did find

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that beliefs and knowledge were "intertwined' and that connections among beliefs and indeed their context-specific nature should become a focus of research, suggesting that "the socialization of teachers can be little understood outside the context of their shifting conceptions" (p329).

Fang's (1996) review sought to focus on the then, small research base centring on the relationship between "teachers' beliefs and their effects on teaching and learning" (p50). Mainly drawing on research into reading, it argued that teachers hold implicit theories that are described variously in the literature as 'belief systems', 'theoretical beliefs', 'beliefs and values' or 'philosophical principles'. In an essentially hermeneutic approach, underlying meanings and deep assumptions are the focus (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999)—for example the "personal assumptions, beliefs or pre-suppositions" referred to by Hopkins (2002, p66) or the "coherent and interdependent belief system or orientation" of Standen (2003, abstract). In whatever guise, they are seen to influence reactions to teacher education, to practice and to change and act as filters through which judgements are made. In turn they are variously shaped by such factors as experience, teacher education, opportunity for reflection, context and self (Fang, 1996).

Fang's focus on implicit theory led to an examination of "competing theses" in the literature, which are derived from investigations of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, theories, philosophy (or other such related term) and practice. The nature of these competing theses is their positing of this relationship as either consistent or inconsistent. Researching one or other of these types of relationship continues—see for example Einarsdottir (2003). Fang (1996) was also arguing for future research that leads "to improved understanding of the complex and interrelated processes of

personal experiences, beliefs and practices" (p60), a point taken up by Beswick (2003), in arguing (in relation to mathematics teaching) that both these competing theses take insufficient account of the contextual nature of teachers' beliefs.

It is the argument of this thesis that the research route examined by Fang (1996) is unlikely to reach this laudable end. In other words, research *on*, rather than *by* or *with* teachers, that teases out their implicit theories in order to explore the consistency of theory with practice, is incompatible with a theory of teacher agency and a 'bottom up' perspective on curriculum change. Moreover, it is argued that both these perspectives are more compatible with a proposed aim of understanding the relationship between teachers' minds and practice, particularly in the contexts of practice change and professional development. This is essentially an argument for a research focus on the explicit, rather than implicit, theories of teachers and it is an argument that finds common ground in other literature on teacher 'reflection', on teacher 'theorizing' and 'teacher research' or 'inquiry'.

Teacher reflection: clarifying and fixing

As already noted, 'reflection' is not a precise construct and for some authors, holds much in common with similar constructs such as 'teacher theorizing' and 'teacher research'. Two of these similarities are pertinent to the relationship between teachers' minds and their practice and these themes, here called 'clarifying' and 'fixing', will be explored below. Other themes in the literature on 'reflection', 'theorizing', and so on, will be detailed subsequently.

Clarifying

The first theme refers to the clarifying role of uncovering the implicit, bringing it to consciousness, in order to service intentionality, as explicit 'theory', 'belief', or 'philosophy'. Reflection, theorizing or research, are characterized variously as the processes that perform this function.

Pape (1992) perceives theories as "models of reality" arising from teachers' beliefs about the relationships between and among assumptions that they hold. These assumptions are the fodder of reflection. Dewey, the acknowledged father of teacher reflection, described it as the consideration of belief and the grounds that support it (Moallem, 1997). This uncovering and clarifying function corresponds in Van Manen's classic typology of reflection, to the type known as 'practical reflection'. Van Manen's construct is perceived as involving analysis and clarification of the meanings and assumptions behind experience (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Leino, 1997).

Stone's (1992) philosophical analysis of the literature uses the term "meaning construct" and refers to "the web of beliefs in which they are embedded". She posits that effecting change in teaching practice is tied to "interrogating and reformulating teachers' meaning constructs" (p21). Taking the perspective of the action research movement, Kemmis (1999) suggests that it involves teachers subjecting their own theories to analysis and critique, while for Hopkins (2002) theorizing by teachers is linked to gaining increased clarity on their tacit knowledge. McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996) see that in the creation of new meanings, teachers' tacit knowledge is made explicit. For many educational researchers (for example Ponte, Ax, Beijaard & Wubbels, 2004) this is achieved when teachers re-frame their

experiences with the help of academic collaborators involved in "insider-outsider" teacher research (Lee & van den Berg, 2003, p93; Mitchell, 2003, p204).

From whichever perspective and in whatever guise, the process of clarifying or uncovering the implicit is seen as essentially rational (Fenstermacher, cited in Donnelly, 1999; Parker, 1997). The same can equally be said about the process of fixing—the second theme to be explored in this section. When teaching, teacher development, or curriculum change are viewed as problem solving (in other words: as fixing), then the emphasis remains on the rational. Only when these constructs are painted on a broader canvas (as detailed later), is there room for other emphases.

Fixing

Schőn is widely credited with formulating the problem-solving perspective that is applied to teaching (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1999; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Moallem, 1997; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Loughran, 2002). Clement & Vandenberghe (2000) see this problem-solving orientation as essential to professional development. In their view, mastery grows from craftsmanship via reflection to identify and solve problems. Different writers emphasize different sources of the problems that generate teacher reflection, theorizing or research.

For some, the definition of the problematic lies in conflict. Teachers act on a perceived conflict between belief and practice (Moallem, 1997; Pape, 1992). For Moallem, this perception can encompass conflict between ideas in a belief system but it must be explicit. Moallem also makes the helpful distinction between 'reflective reconstruction' following realization of conflict and 'rationalization' of events post-practice. Pape takes a constructivist approach and includes ideas as well as practice,

as a source of conflict with existing beliefs, while much of the research literature on teachers' implementation of top-down, mandated curriculum change attests to a combination of such sources of conflict. Teachers resist or construct a bottom-up hybrid in response to conflict which is generated by a clash of new with existing ideas and practices (see for example, Gallucci, 2003).

This focus on problem solving has been questioned. Donnelly (1999) has argued that while teaching involves problems "it is not clear that the central task can be understood as problem solving" (p943). Hatton & Smith (1995) acknowledge the view of reflection as a broader relationship between thought and action while Hopkins (2002) cautions against seeing action research as "a deficit model" of teacher professional development (p51). The focus may be on clarity of understanding (Louden, 1992) or the achievement of insights, rather than, or exclusively, on problem resolution. Improving may not necessarily entail fixing. This broader focus allows a conception of teaching, teacher development or 'bottom-up' curriculum change, as inquiry. It allows teachers to go beyond fixing explicit conflicts to questioning their construction.

Teacher inquiry: connecting and critiquing

In this framework, there is also a place for the consideration of values, both personal and social, and for the questioning of purposes. The influence of critical social theory is acknowledged (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). In Van Manen's oft quoted typology, the highest level of reflection—'critical reflection'—involves consideration of "personal action within wider socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p35). In a more recently developed rubric in teacher education, Ward and McCotter (2004) termed this "transformative" reflection,

requiring "personal involvement with fundamental pedagogical, ethical, moral, cultural, or historical concerns and how these impact students and others" (p250).

These emphases are not new. Richardson (1990) focused on moral and ethical aspects; Sparks-Langer & Colton (1991) on a conception of social justice; Burnaford (2001) on larger issues of democratic education and human rights; and Popkewitz (1995) saw power relations as a legitimate focus of research. Examples in the early childhood context range from anti–bias work in the US (Derman-Sparks, 1989) to recent Australian approaches such as MacNaughton (2000; 1996) on gender and race and Robinson (2002) on sexuality.

Thus the social outcomes of teaching are open to contemplation, along with means and ends (Zeichner & Tabachnick 1991; Raines & Shadlow, 1995) As Beyer (1992) notes, this requires a sense of context and an awareness of alternatives, that go beyond the classroom into the social and political realm. For Fischer and Weston (2001) this is teacher research that involves a vision of what schools could become and the harnessing of "our moral dedication to improving our profession and society" (p47). In short, as Bullough (1989) has pointed out, this requires an explicit ontology, or at least, as Smyth (1992) contends, in drawing on the work of Paolo Freire, a particular kind of reflective approach. Such an approach includes pragmatic effectiveness but takes the focus beyond it, to consider the social, cultural and political contexts, purposes and ends of teaching, learning and education.

The heretofore assumed emphasis on the individual mind in relationship to action, is supplanted in this framework, by a conception of reflection, theorizing or research by teachers, as social not solitary (Grundy, 1998) and grounded in political discourse

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(Skrtic & Ware, 1992; Beyer, 1992; Kemmis, 1999). Thus, the teacher inquires, not in isolation, but within a collaborative community (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991; Hogan & Down, 1998; Cherednichenko, Gay, Hooley, Kruger & Mulraney, 1998; Hobson, 2001b; Potter, 2001). Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger and Beckingham (2004) have discerned "a clear movement toward collaborative professional development" (p436). They advocate a combination of "self-regulated learning" focusing on "individuals within context" (p439) while utilising a "communities of practice (COP) framework" (p437). Collaborative project partnerships between practitioners in school communities and university-based researchers, which utilize such COP frameworks, have been more recently evident in Australia (Sachs & Groundwater Smith, 1999)— for example, the Project for the Enhancement of Effective Learning (PEEL) (Baird & Northfield, 1992) and the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools Project (BELS) (Department of Education, Science and Training; 2005).

COP frameworks are not accepted at face value, however. Butler et al., (2004) regard independence from outsiders (such as university researchers) and the generation of self-sustaining change, as important components. In the context of school improvement, Tafel and Fischer (2001) argue not only for personal responsibility, dialogue with colleagues and ownership of their teaching but also for the creation of caring relationships within learning cultures (p233/4). Burnaford (2001) refers to such a culture as "a learning social system" that features participation and democracy for students and teachers but warns that personal change is insufficient to survive the next educational reform initiative—for this, support systems and structures are necessary (p195). These are concerns shared with those involved in partnerships between universities and schools integrating

professional development, teacher research and teacher education (Carpenter & Matters, 2003; Krieg & Sharp, 2003).

Thus, the democratic, dialogical society referred to by Parker (1997) and McNiff et al. (1996) as an end of education, is also its means.

> *The metatheory about the method or way in which this living knowledge is constituted by this knowing community, is what we call an epistemology of educational practice* (p130).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) share such an epistemological perspective. Their construct of "inquiry as stance" problematizes the construction and evaluation of knowledge and they see richer possibilities for professional learning than those afforded by distinctions such as formal and practical knowledge, practice and theory, expert and novice, research and practice (p18/19).

Within the above outlined orientation to teaching or to teachers as researchers, theorists, reflective practitioners and so on, the theme of 'connection' is chosen here, to capture not only those links between values and practice, classroom and context, teacher and colleagues, but also between past, present and future. Teaching as inquiry presupposes that teachers see themselves as lifelong learners (Raines & Shadlow, 1995). Hopkins (2002) and Clarke and Erickson (2003) link this orientation to teacher professionalism and the latter authors to "teacher knowing" rather than "teacher knowledge", to shift the focus to "learning that is in a state of evolution" away from an implied stasis (p3). Indeed, Bullough and Baughman (1995) link a progressive problem-solving disposition to the development of teacher expertise.

This positions inquiry as generative. Hogan and Down (1998) seek a perspective on research that allows "innovations [to] remain self-renewing, rather than solidify into

dogma" (p58). This requires, as Pape (1992) found, that teachers have "an internal learning orientation" and that teaching is seen as "self-guided discovery" (p70). Franke, Carpenter, Fennema, Ansell and Behrend (1998) refer to this as "self-sustaining generative change" (p67). The teacher is not only engaged in ongoing learning but may also be reorienting his/her basic epistemological perspectives, as well as practice. Like Smyth (1992), these authors take a broader focus, beyond the pragmatic inquiry of practice in terms of efficiency. Just as Clarke and Erickson (2003, p5) distinguish between a preoccupation with "student learning" and one with "how students learn", Franke et al. (1998) point the lens to focus on practical inquiry in terms of teacher and student thinking. They see the former, purely pragmatic view, as self-sustaining but only the latter, broader focus is seen as generative.

While the above outline of conceptions of teaching as inquiry focuses on some of the broader views of teaching, teachers and research in the literature, it nevertheless also rests on a highly rationalist approach to the relationship between teachers' minds and practice. This rationalist perspective also informs the previously outlined conceptions of teacher thinking. However, there is a small body of the literature (outlined below) that takes a broader and more complex view of the theorizing, researching or reflection of teachers.

While presupposing both the making of connections and critique of thought and practice, as outlined above, this literature and its attendant research base, sees the relationship between teachers' minds and action as extending beyond the purely rational. Greater breadth and complexity are evident in the room made for the intuitive and the personal, for an interactive view of mind, context and action and a

rejection of linear and dichotomous perceptions of their interplay within teachers' construction and re-construction of personal, professional meaning.

Teacher re-construction of personal contextualized meaning

> *Educational research has typically…failed to acknowledge that classrooms are sites where the histories, cultures, minds and bodies of thirty individuals meet as they engage in activities that themselves have complex social meanings* (Hogan & Down, 1998)

This perspective on classroom research views teachers' research as "heavily contextualised" (p54). It is a timely reminder of the complexity of the micro context of the classroom and hints at the complexity of the macro world teachers and students inhabit and bring to it. This wider conception of context is evident in the literature.

Ross, Cornett & McCutcheon (1992) perceive the research on teacher socialization as demonstrating the interplay between individuals and institutional cultures, a point echoed by Clement and Vandenberghe (2000) in relation to teachers' professional development. Ross et al. point to a dialectical conception that allows room for the influence of personal biography and an understanding of constraints, within teachers' active construction of professional identities. Though it falls within a top-down perspective on change, Tobin and Jakubowski (1992) interpreted their research as suggesting that curriculum change involved not only reflection, but also a personalized commitment and personal, contextualized vision. They perceived teachers' metaphors for their roles, as important to teacher learning and when teachers reconceptualized these metaphors, they found the requisite personal meaning in change. Wood and Bennet (2000) see teacher knowledge as "situated", with the teaching context playing a role in teachers' learning and in mediating between their knowledge and practice. Like Moallem (1997), they also gave attention to teachers' past. Prior experience and memories are important in the construction of

theories that are subject to mediation in context and in practice. This harks back to Pape's (1992) earlier research where an intern teacher's theory building was taken to arise from the consolidation of the known and the new.

Skrtic and Ware (1992) highlighted the importance of the school in their focus on the organizational context of collective reflective practice. They concluded that current institutional models were antithetical to the achievement of this kind of reflection. In similar vein, Fang's (1996) review of the literature drew attention to the effect on teachers of implicit and explicit mandates in institutional environments. These mandates often presented teachers with dichotomous choices. In turn, these could lead to the construction of a "conflicted self" or a "constructively ambiguous" identity. This is reminiscent of the crucial importance given to teaching context by Connelly and Clandinin (1995) and their conception of teachers negotiating two distinct landscapes of professional knowing in schools—the one in, and the other out, of the classroom.

Connelly and Clandinin's (1996) conception of contextualized meaning is placed within a narrative approach. In this narrative conception, teachers' lives are viewed as storied. Teachers are the creators of their stories. Their stories are told, retold and lived. Their "personal practical knowledge" (p111), which connects "personal, professional and practical ways of knowing" (Black and Halliwell, 2000, p104), emanates from these storied lives. Reflection, retelling and reliving involves awakenings and transformations that are essentially educative (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The process allows teachers to make meaning of personal experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996).

It is the creation of meaning that is perceived as capturing teacher change (Franke et al., 1998). In the context of student teacher change, Sumsion (1997) concludes that an epistemological perspective of constructed knowing is required, while Smyth (1992), in the context of teacher development, believes "reconstructing" is needed, a process that views reality as "essentially contestable" and locates the teacher self historically (p299).

In considering teachers' construction of contextualized meaning, the self should not be ignored as part of the context. Though Lipka and Brinthaupt have labelled "the personal" as one of the major and mostly missing aspects of the meaning of teaching (1999, p2), its importance to teacher development is receiving increasing attention (Nias, 1987; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Hawthorne, 1994; Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1999). For some, this involves consideration of self outside work and its impact within it (Hawthorne, 1994); reflecting on personal connections as but one of four possible goals of reflection (Louden, 1992); or achieving a better balance between personal and professional development (Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1999).

For Agne (1999), this latter balance of the personal and professional was more entwined. Her study of master teachers revealed a personal belief system incorporating a strong sense of self, internal locus of control and a 'caring' orientation toward students. Additionally, Gallego, Hollingsworth and Whitenack (2001) perceived that "less than compassionate teaching" resulted from a pre-service education focused on understanding others "primarily in a rational dispassionate manner" (p244). They concluded that reform initiatives required "relational knowing" which includes a dynamic knowledge of self and others (p240). Connelly and Clandinin (1995) attributed "the desire for relationship" as one of three human

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desires—along with "the desire to tell stories" and "the desire to think again, to reflect on actions taken and things thought—as the foundations of their view of professional life as educative (p154).

Additionally, others, from various traditions, also take a more embedded view of the self in teaching and teacher development. Tremmell (1993) links insights from the Zen tradition to conceptions of 'mindfulness' and 'paying attention'. These are seen as steps into the self, important to reflection and to the long journey, without destination, that is teaching. Sumsion (1997) echoes the call for utilising certain 'Eastern' traditions in viewing reflection as involving emotional intensity, imagination and intuition. From the different direction of psychology and perception Prawat (1993) highlights the "intimate connection between affect and cognition" (p6), the role of imagination and of "powerful ideas" in the transformations associated with learning (p12).

Within the relationship of self and teacher, the importance of images is highlighted by both McLean (1999) and Black and Halliwell (2000). In McLean's view, where teaching is embedded in a personal context, images provide vision for the future and guide experience of the present.

> *Images of 'self-as-person' and 'self-as-teacher' are critical to the process of becoming a teacher because they constitute the personal context within which new information will be interpreted and are the stuff of which a teaching persona is created…* (p58).

For Black and Halliwell (2000), the focus on images in the collaborative reflection of teachers and researchers helped teachers uncover more of "how their sense of self as teacher was caught up in these images" (p106). Like Lipka and Brinthaupt (1999), they conclude that teacher development requires the insertion of self-knowledge into, and as a subject of, teachers' deliberations. Demulder and Rigsby (2003) bear this

out. An analysis of the papers of teachers enrolled in their Masters program revealed that the teachers' perceptions of their own transformations included a greater knowledge and sense of self. Hamachek (1999) refers to earlier work on emotional intelligence to support his argument for a counterbalancing of the "doing part of a teacher's work" with "the being part" (p219) and similarly Hobson (2001a) recognizes the 'intra-personal' dimension in teachers' knowing.

Like Sumsion (1997), who drew attention to certain 'Eastern' traditions that gave a role to emotion within reflection, Zembylas (2003) recognized the role of 'Western' culture in undervaluing and under-researching teacher emotion. Drawing on post-structural and feminist analysis, he credited dominant patriarchal structures replicated in educational research, with validating the traditional dichotomy of reason and emotion. This led to a research agenda that favoured cognition over affect and emotion, as valid researchable issues. In reviewing the research on teacher emotion that has found a place more recently within educational (rather than psychological) research, Zembylas categorized it into two waves.

The first wave established awareness of the role of emotions in teaching. He cited Nias (1987) as articulating that "teaching, especially in primary schools, called for a massive investment of the self" (p108). The second wave focused on teaching as an "emotional practice" primarily manifest in social relationships, though school policy as a site of linkage with teacher emotion has also been studied (p109). Zembylas finally, added post-structuralist and feminist ethnography and theorizing to his overview of research on emotion. This work emphasized the nature of emotion as embedded in culture, ideology and power relations and he cited Boler's (1997) highlighting of the 'silences' and negation in educational institutions around emotions. He called for a

reconstruction of teacher emotion that enables "subversion of the emotional rules that determine how teachers should or should not feel about curriculum, teaching and themselves" (p118/119). Such a reconstruction is thought to bring certain potentials: for teachers to interrogate the self and the role of emotion in teaching and social solidarity; and for the advancement of new pedagogies that inspire both empathy and the practice of teaching as learning.

The need for reconceptualizing teacher deliberation around emotion and the self, echoes Louden's earlier call (1992) for a reconceptualization of teacher development contexts. Reconceptualized contexts would acknowledge the link between personal and professional dispositions. They would include reflection on the roots of commitment and on understanding the personal grounds underlying professional work. In short, they would move the starting point of development from "teacher-as-practice" to "teacher-as-person" (p117). To some extent Grundy and Robison (2004) have done so. In their review of recent trends in professional development in Australian schools, they pointed to the importance of personal as well as systemic drivers of professional change. They concluded that life events or critical incidents in teachers' professional lives are more likely influences on change, than the passive models of career stage theories would suggest.

Carson (1997) takes the point further in a consideration of educational action research "as a living practice". In his view, an investigation "both shapes and is shaped by the investigator" (pxiii), such that "who one *is* becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does" (pxvii). Indeed Feldman (1997) viewed existing models of teaching and teacher expertise as lacking the perspective of "teaching as a way of being" (p757). This reconceptualization of teacher development is a

perspective shared by Reggio Emilian educators who are responsible within their system of education for the whole of the professional development of their teachers. This perspective is captured by Gandini (1997)

> *To reach the awareness that work time is not only productive but also life itself, is neither a simple nor a rapid process* (p6).

This reconceptualization of context, that takes an embedded view of self and teacher, is not an island in a sea of otherwise dichotomized thinking. There are calls in the literature for reconceptualizations of teaching—including in early childhood (Kessler & Swadener, 1992)—that bypass these other dichotomies as well. Drawing on critical, postmodern, post-colonial and feminist theory, power dynamics are called into question (Beyer & Bloch, 1996; Soto & Swadener, 2002; Kilderry, 2004), and inequities in society are uncovered, interrupted and interpreted (Carson, 1997).

The traditional dichotomy of theory and practice, that privileges academic theorizing and research, gives way to a conceptualization that acknowledges and foregrounds localized, teacher created theory and makes room for teachers' voices (Keyes, 2000; Loughran, 2002). Moreover, according to Smyth (1992), the dichotomies of mental and manual labour, of thought and action, become obsolete in the process. Distinctions between theory and method, the individual and the social, and between ideas and discourse, become questionable (Kemmis, 1999).

From these theoretical frameworks, the relationship between teachers' minds and practice, between thought and action, is both interactive and reflexive (Kemmis, 1999). There is room for a more complex, holistic conception of teaching as a search for meaning and for teacher development as the recreation of personal meaning within the reflexive and interactive relationship of self, context, mind and action. For

the teachers in this study, the provocation that is Reggio Emilian pedagogy provided a stimulus for the potential recreation of meaning through personal praxis. McLean's (1999) words, written in another context, could equally apply within this study to

> *…people with a lifetime of personal and social experiences behind them, embedded in a present in which they are totally engaged as meaning makers, constructors of knowledge, and authors of the teachers they are becoming* (p86).

Summary

The previous chapter described the context and identified the need for research focused on the process of Australian teachers' responding to their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy. In addressing this gap, the present study is located within certain theoretical and research traditions, as outlined in this chapter. Firstly, in exploring a response process, the study is grounded in the concept of teacher agency and in the active choices the teachers made as constructors of curriculum. Secondly, in asking about teachers' thoughts and actions, it is focused on the explicit understandings of participants' own ideas, behaviour and processes. Thirdly, in highlighting the local context, the study is also situated in a theoretical home that acknowledges context as a broad and holistic concept, from which the teacher herself is not divorced.

Irrespective of the range of constructs—teacher reflection, teacher theory, teacher research, teacher inquiry, teacher meaning making—that at various times, visit or inhabit this studys' theoretical home, the relationships pursued there include those among mind, action, local situation and self. A study of teachers reconstructing pedagogical meaning, inherits the legacy of this theoretical environment. It also inherits a methodological legacy; thus the next chapter will delineate this study's methodological niche and debts.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Methodological approach

The research problem that is the focus of this study—*How do teachers create meaning from their experience of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice?*— is of a particular type. Both this problem and the open-ended questions that emanate from it, are concerned with process, meaning and interpretation, rather than cause and effect. Further, they are directed to a topic that needs to be explored, rather than tested. As such, they are more suited to the methodological traditions of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Ezzy, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). According to Punch (1998), qualitative research, as "a site of multiple methodologies and research methods", constitutes an umbrella term (p139). Rather than being associated with a single discipline, it is multidimensional and pluralistic, drawing from a range of theoretical frameworks, including symbolic interactionism, post-positivism, critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism and constructivism (Flick, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Punch, 1998).

It has been argued also, that the umbrella of qualitative research includes five qualitative traditions of inquiry—including ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study and biography (Creswell, 1998). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that qualitative research draws upon the broader base of "the human disciplines", in keeping with their view that the boundaries separating the humanities and social sciences have become blurred (p28).Thus multiple possibilities of approach and methodology are available to researchers working with a qualitative

design. This study makes use of this range of possibilities, within the limits of its undergirding aim and assumptions.

In approaching the problem, this study seeks to understand a specific phenomenon from the multiple cases of participants' perspectives. It assumes a relativistic ontological stand in attempting to interpret the common features of the multiple realities of those perspectives. It assumes that these realities are value-laden and socially constructed within an individually self-reflexive process of meaning creation.

In approaching the analysis, this study also draws on multiple possibilities based in these assumptions. In line with Punch's view that there is "no single methodological framework or prescription" for qualitative analysis (1998, p201), the study uses certain of the coding strategies of grounded theory; has borrowed from phenomenology to develop a "structural description" of the experiences of each participant; has sought "themes and patterned regularities" in the data as demanded in ethnography; and has aggregated categories across transcripts, in the tradition of the case study (Creswell, 1998, p148-9). All these methods contribute to the

> *interpretive process at the heart of qualitative data analysis [which] involves trying to understand the practices and meanings of research participants from their perspective* (Ezzy, 2002, pxii).

While the approach taken to both the problem and the analysis encompasses a number of possibilities, the approach taken to the research tools, was deliberately narrow. Following Denzin and Lincoln's advice (1998) that the choice of research tools and practices depends on the research questions and that these are, in turn, dependent on the research context, the design seeks to "maximise the fit" in the "reciprocal interaction between question and method" (Punch, 1998, p5).

Research Design

This study was designed in the context of a paucity of research, particularly in Australia, that foregrounded the responses of practitioners to Reggio Emilian philosophy and practices. It is argued that such a situation calls for research that is exploratory or discovery-based (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989; Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Moreover, in a review of the qualitative research literature in US early childhood contexts Browning and Hatch (1995) concluded that this research base was in the early stages of development. Indeed, those studies reported by Browning and Hatch were mainly focused on children, classroom interaction, and teaching practices. Very few studies targeted adults or adult perceptions of their professional contexts. These few studies tended to use the standard research tools, widely identified with qualitative methodology, of participant observation and interviews, generally conducted with a range of participants in a setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 1998). One such cited study, similar in orientation to the present study, not only focused on adult participants but also dealt with the adults' perceptions from their point of view (Nelson, 1990, cited in Browning & Hatch, 1995). In focusing on the experience of family day care providers, it relied heavily on semi-structured interviews in its design.

This choice of research tool is replicated in the present study. There are a number of interrelated additional reasons for this choice. They relate to 'maximising the fit' between the problem, questions and focus of the study as a preliminary investigation in an under-explored area.

This study focuses on the explicit theories of a small group of teachers about the impact of Reggio Emilia. It does not seek to uncover implicit theories about their work, nor does it seek to apply, as a comparative standard, an outsider's judgement of the essential issues in translocation of Reggio Emilian principles. It is the participants' "definition of the situation" (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995, p72) to "understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Kvale, 1996, p27) that is being sought here. With such aims, a researcher and participants could negotiate a collaborative approach to observation and reflection on the consistency of theory with practice, but the scope of this study precluded such an approach.

The study follows the ethical stance of the "contextualised-consequentialist model" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p38) that perceives acts of research to be imbued with consequences and hence, with moral and ethical decisions. In this model, such decisions are necessarily contextualised and should therefore give credence to mutual respect, non-manipulation, and support of democratic values. The ethical stance of the study was also informed by feminist and post-modern influences. For example, feminist theory has helped to highlight the unequal relationship between the researcher and the researched (Haig, 1999) and postmodernism has elucidated the connections between power and knowledge (Punch, 1998).

In this vein, it is argued that the methodology, the analysis and findings of research, should bestow on practitioners the right and responsibility to make judgements about the consistency, or otherwise, of their theory and practice. Further, it is argued that when this is not possible through collaborative means, the non-practitioner researcher should direct research processes to findings related to the participants'

interpretations of their experience and the assumption of sole responsibility for interpreting these findings within the study's conclusions. The role is that of "active learner…rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgement on participants" (Creswell, 1998, p18).

With a research focus on individual lived experience and a study bordered by the parameters just described, the interview, with its great flexibility in data collection and its potential for sensitivity and proximity to the participant's world (Kvale, 1996), was chosen as the sole tool of methodological 'best fit' (Punch, 1998). As Marshall and Rossman (1999) contend, the use of in-depth interviews as the sole source of data is appropriate in a conceptual framework that demonstrates the importance of the subjective view of participants. It is only

> *studies making more objectivist assumptions* [that] *would triangulate interview data with data gathered from other methods* (p110).

Scope

This exploratory, small-scale study required the single interviews to be lengthy, while simultaneous considerations of transcription and analysis requirements, limited the number of participants. The problem focus (as it related to translocation) as well as the analytical focus on common themes, nevertheless, also required that participants be drawn from a variety of working contexts, experienced a range of sources of exposure; and were recruited from more than one interest group and state.

Recruitment procedures

Recruitment thus aimed for maximum variation within a purposeful sampling approach (Punch, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1999).The typical case participant was a female, tertiary graduate teacher with several years of teaching experience, who had

a self-declared interest in Reggio Emilian philosophy and was actively pursuing this interest within her practice, in a well-resourced, early childhood setting. The sampling brought forth multiple cases that allowed for "replication across similar and contrasting cases" (Punch, 1998, p193)—for example, contrasting cases included a TAFE trained child care worker and a teacher in a school environment encompassing pre-school and the entire thirteen years of schooling. Variation existed in the range of traditional early childhood settings in which participants were working. The variation extended across types of employers, organizational and regulatory environments, structural relations with co-workers, and ages and attendance patterns of children. Initial teacher education and methods of exposure to Reggio Emilian philosophy as well as the professional and life experience of the participants, also varied.

Eight participants were recruited in an arms-length procedure through the co-ordinators of two self-declared professional interest groups (the Reggio Emilia *Re-Search* network groups) in two Australian capital cities—Sydney and Melbourne. Information was provided and informed consent obtained in writing, for the single interview per participant. Three interviews were conducted in the greater Sydney metropolitan area over a two month period in late 1997 and five interviews conducted subsequently in the greater Melbourne area, over a four day period in early 1998. The researcher's involvement as co-founder of a regional *Re-Search* network group in New South Wales was considered in the recruitment process and this group was eliminated as a source of potential (albeit convenient) participants. Prior to data gathering, there had been no contact between the researcher and the relevant *Re-Search* groups or with individual members, save the co-ordinators of each group, who knew the researcher well, as a professional colleague. In this situation, rigour regarding privacy could not be too excessive. Mechanisms used are detailed below.

Data Gathering

While the single interview employed here does not constitute a case study, it was structured in length, breadth and depth to provide some of the advantages of this approach which is appropriate to searching in a new research area, for the "important features, developing an understanding and conceptualizing them for further study" (Punch, 1998, p155).

The interview schedule **(Appendix A**) for the semi-structured, in-depth interview was constructed to cover a range of topics using the interview guide approach. The semi-structured interviewing technique was chosen for its "appropriateness to the subject under study" and is well suited to a research aim of reconstructing subjective theories (Flick, 2002, p129). The schedule covered "knowledge", "structural" and "feeling" questions that asked participants for description, contrast, comparisons and categorizations (Burns, 1997). Opinion, beliefs and values, as well as current and future expectations were also sought. The general emphasis of the questioning tended to seek from participants "more sophisticated analysis upon the raw data of their experiences" but also included "descriptive questioning" (Askham 1992 cited in Minichiello et al., 1995, p85).

Personal/background information was deliberately excluded from the interview schedule, for three reasons. Firstly, the study would focus on common themes of experience, rather than individual biography; secondly, participants would have control of the process of revealing such information and finally; this control would reveal the participants' perspective of the relevance of the personal to the professional.

Consequently, the schedule did not contain a beginning series of questions indicating the kind of personal/background information the researcher considered relevant and important. Thus, rather than prejudicing or pre-empting participants' contributions, the way was left completely open for the interviewees to introduce, explain, and connect with this information according to their own determinations of what was important and relevant.

In this same spirit, the order of, and the questions themselves, were used as a guide to topics, so interviews were conducted in an open-ended fashion, following, rather than leading the participants (Minichiello et al., 1995). The time and venue of the interviews were determined by each participant and in all cases interviews were conducted in a venue of choice in familiar surroundings at the participant's workplace or home. Permission was obtained for audiotaping.

Coverage of topics by each participant was judged on-the-spot and ensured by direct questioning. Thus, while there was a consistent line of inquiry, the stream of questions was "fluid, rather than rigid" (Yin, 2003, p89). The actual wording of questions reflected, rather than replicated the guide, allowing adaptation to the speech patterns and tone of the participants (Minichiello et al., 1995). This approach rests on a researcher's familiarity with the culture and contexts of the participants and the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). Sensitivity was enabled through genuine curiosity, a critical consciousness of presuppositions, the assumption of a "deliberate naivete" (Kvale, 1996, p33) and the aforementioned familiarity of foreknowledge. This foreknowledge covered both the Reggio Emilian perspective and experience in interview technique. The former was gained whilst working in early childhood teacher education as an academic, through first-hand experience in both

Australia and Italy and through secondary sources. Interview skills were achieved through prior, extensive, professional experience in a range of early childhood contexts, where the conduct of interviews (appropriate to these non-research milieux) was common practice.

Rapport was established by informing participants of this background experience of Reggio Emilia and by the expression of curiosity about their unique perspectives as interested practitioners. General enthusiasm and interest were also conveyed before and during the interview but careful attention was given to the possibility of "the double hermeneutic" (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p203), by excluding articulation of the researcher's own views or attitudes to the specifics of Reggio Emilian pedagogy or of participants' descriptions. While parroting and minimal encouragers were used, mutual understanding was also expressed and where needed reflective probing and follow-up questions seeking clarification of meaning or rationales, also featured (Minichiello et al., 1995). The aim was for a non-threatening and "non-judgemental interviewing environment" (Cannold, 2001, p184).

Participants responded eagerly and talked freely. The quality of the interviews is attested in Kvale's criteria (1996). The transcripts reveal a highly disproportionate rate of questioning and response featuring rich, lengthy, relevant answers and spontaneous provision of relevant anecdote, opinion, value and feeling (example at **Appendix B).**

Data analysis

The processes of data analysis detailed below, began with transcription, developed through coding and were assisted by memoing. The subsequent horizontal and

vertical analyses of coded data were aimed towards a search for those common

themes that are reported as findings in the following chapters 5-7. Data analysis

culminated in the selection of the "core category" (Punch, 1998). This theoretical

outcome is detailed in chapter 8.

Memoing

From the beginning of these analytical processes and through to final reporting,

memos were used as a memory aid, a tracking device, a tool for direction setting and

an adjunct to theory building. Their use was more strategic than regular, though

monthly progress reports were also significant for these purposes. Many of the types

suggested by Robson (2002) as "useful means of capturing ideas, views and

intuitions" (p478), were employed through the project. Some were more formal than

others—their content surviving the process of being noted, found wanting and

discarded. Such formal memos were important in the continuous refinement of code

definitions. They were significant in the analysis of themes, both for tracking

variations of sub-themes and in the speculations and pursuit of both connections and

surprises. Various incarnations of category formation—from an original six to a final

three—were birthed through memos while the final theory emerged from memoed

byways of possibilities. (Examples of formal memos are included at **Appendix C**).

Transcription

Decisions about transcription involved the degree of accuracy needed through the

editing and correction (Fleet & Cambourne, 1989). Transcription of recorded pauses,

breaks and breath intake was deemed to constitute unnecessary levels of accuracy

and were ignored. Transcripts are then, verbatim, except for "anonymization of data"

(Flick, 2002, p173) and the non-verbal utterances and repeated words that were

excluded. Some repeated words, however, were included if judged to be deliberately used for effect. Underlining to indicate emphasis was also used sparingly. Such judgments were made by replaying the tape and using memory of the context, tone and content. "And" rather than "and" was used where a new thought was indicated. Only after repeated listening was an unintelligible word or phrase indicated with a "?" and "(slide)" respectively. All transcripts were sent to participants with an invitation to correct or add comments to clarify. Where provided, these were included in the transcripts and all transcriptions were completed prior to analysis.

Approach to analysis

In overall terms the approach is interpretivist. In seeking to understand a phenomenon from participants' perspectives, this study analyses the data inductively in an effort to reconstruct it across the individual, constructed realities expressed in the interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Analytic induction developed concepts from the data at increasing levels of abstraction and was also interspersed with deductive analysis to examine and verify developing ideas or propositions (Punch, 1998). There were also moments of abduction—the creative leaps into potential theories—that were tested through the processes of inductive and deductive analysis (Ezzy, 2002). In defining codes, themes or categories and concepts, the process of analysis attempted to take up the challenge of the negative or exceptional cases, to identify similarities and differences across the perspectives in the transcripts, so as to reflect these in the findings.

Coding

Following immersion in the data through the transcription process, coding was conducted transcript by transcript. Large sections of a printed transcript were read

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and initial codes entered on the computerised manuscript. These were basic codes (Punch, 1998)—the "in-vivo codes" of Glaser and Strauss (1977)—and were used originally in an attempt to keep as close to the data as possible and allow codes to emerge rather than be imposed. Three transcripts were treated in this way before a more abstract and inferential coding process (Punch, 1998) took place across all eight transcripts. Some in-vivo codes were maintained (working up from the data) while other codes were derived theoretically, down from the research questions, previous theory, hunches and the researcher's expectations, experience and education (Punch, 1998; Richards & Richards, 1994). It should be noted that in keeping with the purpose and approach of this study as well as with the ethical stance already outlined, no theoretical codes were derived from Reggio Emilian principles and practices. Coding aimed to categorize the participants' interpretations—particularly if these principles and/or practices were mentioned— rather than impose an outsider's upon the data. In other words, thematic rather than content analysis (Ezzy, 2002) was the preferred strategy.

This process, of beginning with exclusively in-vivo codes and then settling on a broader set of carefully defined codes, allowed for a dialectical approach between category and data (Dey, 1993) and for the "data-theory bootstrapping" that connects small, heavily data-conditioned in-vivo codes to anticipated larger structures built from them (Richards & Richards, 1994, p449).

The entire set of eight transcripts (approximately 300 pages) was read three times before finalisation of "operational definitions" of the codes, indispensable to the single researcher working over an extended time frame (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p63). The result was a set of 44 original codes listed in alphabetical order, numbered

(**Appendix D**) and defined (**Appendix E**). Analysis then proceeded along two axes, fluctuating between them.

Vertical analysis

Connections between codes were explored through a vertical analysis. Written prose summaries of the important ideas expressed in the coded data and incorporating quotes from transcripts, were developed for each participant interview (Example in **Appendix F**). These case descriptions provided a manageable overview of the data along the vertical axis and assisted in revealing connections for each participant and across the group (and sub-groups) of participants. These summaries and indeed, the transcripts themselves, were data sources that were constantly mined and were used, in tandem with the horizontal analysis techniques described below, for checking and double-checking occurrences and absences of sub-themes and themes. This was the "constant comparison" of cases, data and concepts that also included addressing questions to the text (Flick, 2002, p177) (See Appendix C).

Horizontal analysis

Coding for retrieval involved the assignation of codes using their operational definitions, and each code was combined with a numerical 'key' differentiating each participant and page of transcript. This was aimed at ensuring reliability in the code/retrieve process. It was done manually on the eight printed transcripts, which were then cut up and placed in folders for each code. A check was made of the minuscule amount of left-over transcript. This was found to represent personal information that was not linked with, or relevant to, any specific code. Horizontal (across the eight participants) analysis of these folders (44 codes in all) began with checking that each participant was represented in each folder and a visual display

(Huberman & Miles, 1994) was created—a matrix that tallied new ideas (rather than every instance) expressed within each code by participant (see **Appendix G**). The matrix revealed those codes which were not common across all eight participants. These were subsumed or amalgamated (as traced in **Appendix L**) by reassigning coded data and/or redefining codes accordingly (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen 1993). This resulted in a final set of 30 "fixed" codes common to all participants—a set of codes with the most substantiation and that a researcher would want to explore (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p177). These 30 codes were grouped into an initial set of five categories, covering major topics and including leftovers (Creswell, 1998) (**Appendix H**). Original code numbers (that is, 1-44) were retained—the 14 reassigned codes simply ceased to exist.

The hard copies of the code folders were then "pored over, looking for patterns and themes" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p177). An initial longhand table of notes (**Appendix I**), of similarities and differences across participants, was made in each folder revealing surface distinctions as well as commonalities in the topics covered within codes (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). These code tables began to point to some of the common themes that emerged more convincingly through the rigour of further analysis.

An attempt was also made to search for patterns by mapping any connections between the codes for each of two participants but this process did not provide the anticipated revelation of any pattern and was abandoned as an analysis technique. A second technique involved examining three process codes (where the teachers engaged in some kind of analysis)—"Practice analysis", "Influence analysis", and "Self analysis"—and tracing connections to other codes. While this did not reveal any

single grand pattern, it did offer threads that expanded and broadened the final thesis.

The most productive approach focused on common themes and was continued as the basis for analysis and refinement. Clusters of data topics were isolated and examined, comparison and contrast across the eight participants became second nature and occasional surprises were investigated further, via the folders, summaries, transcripts and memos.

The final set of 30 'fixed codes' folders was also duplicated in computerized (and slightly summarized) form. (Example at **Appendix J**). After working with the hard copy folders, the computerized versions were used to construct summaries that assisted both the vertical and horizontal analyses. Cross referencing the code files to individual participants (**Appendix K)** helped produce the participant prose summaries (mentioned above)—that kept the vertical threads in the foreground. A further summary of code files (**Appendix L**) highlighted the horizontal threads, by revealing the major topics that were covered within each file. This code files summary not only traced the reduction of codes from the original 44 to the final 30 but more importantly, the memos threaded through it, highlighted gaps and patterns. These summaries and the aforementioned data displays—overall code x participant matrix (Appendix G) and the individual codes' hard copy folder notes and computerized files (Appendices I and J)—assisted comparability across data sets, and helped beget further analyses (Huberman & Miles, 1994). These further analyses uncovered those themes which formed the findings of the study.

These themes, also known as theoretical codes (Glaser cited in Punch, 1998) and which reflected the research questions, were formed from the 30 code folders and files. Grouped into categories, and analysed category by category, some codes yielded a sole theme, most of which are discussed in Chapter 5, the first chapter of findings. Analysis of themes also proceeded by cross-referencing several related codes, after the codes summary revealed those codes embodying topics in common.

This process involved creation of a computerized grid for each theme (example at **Appendix M**) constructed by cutting and pasting relevant data from each code file. This procedure better highlighted interconnections and relationships, giving them meaning. It also offered a method for systematically checking that data was used once only and for keeping track of data that did not connect to any theme.

Emerging patterns in theme clusters for each participant and across participants were examined in the way described above. Additionally, the formation of theoretical clusters was also assisted by more and less formal and systematic approaches of creating diagrams and memos of potential connections between codes and sub-codes, codes and themes and codes and categories (as per Appendices).

Themes that emerged are described in Chapters 5-7. These techniques exhausted the set of themes that were deduced from the predominant analytic technique of identifying potential themes common to all participants, with sub-themes delineated as variations. When this major group of themes, with their sub-themes and attached data, were isolated from the code files however, a much reduced but substantial body of data remained, requiring further analysis. As there were no themes common to all participants, the analytic process was reversed. Sub-themes were identified and

aggregated (see **Appendix N**) using an "indigenous typology" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p154) and three further themes were uncovered inductively (**Appendices N, O, P**). All eight teachers are represented within each of these themes, though none appears in every sub-theme and no sub-theme is representative of all eight teachers. Emerging from this inductive processing of the remaining data, these three themes are outlined at the end of Chapter 6.

Finally, a check of unused data in code files revealed no surprises, contradictions or disconfirmations of the theory or "core category" (Punch, 1998, p217) that was developed (as explianed below) to explain the convergence across the eight participants, of these revealed themes. This point in the analysis constituted a clear and intended break in the intention and process of the study. Up to this point, as represented in the findings chapters, the effort was directed to understanding and depicting the perspectives of the participants. The details of the themes are the thick description of those reconstructed perspectives. However, when it came to selecting the core category, the perspective overtly shifted from the participants to the researcher, in theorizing the relationships among these themes and drawing conclusions and interpretations based upon them.

Selecting the core category

During the stages of the analysis described above, there was a shifting of gears back and forth between codes and themes and higher levels of abstraction. Modification and development occurred along the way as "emergent understandings" were tested and alternative explanations sought (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p157). Certain processes were significant in the development of these alternatives.

As outlined earlier, the 30 fixed codes had originally been grouped into five categories. However, some coded data crossed category boundaries. It became clear that certain artificial distinctions had been created in the data. The five categories were eventually amalgamated into three and are addressed consecutively in the three chapters of findings.

Further, as detailed in these findings chapters, some patterns that emerged in the first category of codes only partially held through the second. This was unexpected. Thus an initial overarching theoretical proposition, mapping the participants into a typology of theoretical groups, was abandoned when the process of tracing connections failed to bear the promised fruit across the categories. Finally, the three themes referred to above (as being derived inductively and outlined at the end of chapter 6), added depth to the others, allowing for the development and enlargement of a more promising and encompassing, emerging theory.

This final pulling together of a developing analysis into a central theme or theory, is the "selective coding" to produce a "core category" referred to by Punch (1998, p217). The process delimits theoretical analysis and development to those parts of the data that relate to this core category. In the case of this study, it encompasses and accounts for all 30 fixed codes. Detailed in the conclusion, it indeed describes the patterns that have emerged in a "basic social process" of how people deal with their main problem in a given situation (Punch, 1998).

Soundness

Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to the "criteria of soundness" or "canons of quality" by which "the trustworthiness" of a project can be "evaluated" and to which

"all research must respond" (p191). In a single sentence they managed to capture a healthy range of the many terms used in the qualitative research literature to address the substantive issues around reception of research reports. Describing this "part of the current methodological scene" as "essentially contested" Marshall and Rossman (1999, p192) also simultaneously assert that not only must these issues be addressed but that qualitative researchers are constantly devising alternative strategies to do so. The area is certainly complex, not least because it is a casualty of 'the paradigm wars'. In an arena encompassing epistemological and ontological battles over the nature of reality, knowledge and truth, and where the roles of research, power and values are increasingly questioned or problematized within theoretical frameworks, methodological controversies inevitably follow.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) have traced these contestations through the overlapping and still operating "historical moments" of qualitative research paradigms, resulting in the current "triple crisis" confronting qualitative researchers including this "crisis of legitimation". In a break from the positivist, quantitative framework, there has been a "serious rethink" and retheorizing of the concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability (p28). One outcome has been a flowering of typologies of terminology to accompany alternative reconceptualizations.

For example, in 1998, Creswell preferred the term "verification" though he later switched to "validating accuracy and credibility" with reliability and generalizability playing "a minor role" in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2003, p195). Nevertheless, he discerned four alternative perspectives in the literature. Firstly, there are those researchers who seek to find "equivalents" to the quantitative concepts; secondly, are those who legitimize naturalistic research through "a distinct language"; thirdly, there

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are reconceptualized metaphors within a postmodern framework; and finally, the view that these notions are "a distraction to (*sic)* good research" (Creswell, 1998, p200). Creswell himself suggests regarding "verification" techniques as a strength of qualitative research and employing Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terms of 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' to establish "the credibility of a study" (1998, p201) and therefore reader confidence in the findings (Creswell, 2003, p184).

Lincoln and Guba (2003) themselves regard validity as an "irritating construct" which leaves in its wake multiple mandates for rigour in qualitative research (p274). Citing Swandt's (1996) reference to a 'virtual cult around criteria' (p276), they nevertheless suggest that these issues of reception cannot be ignored and that rigour should be separated into two forms, related to method and interpretation, respectively—a distinction others have made (See for example, Flick, 2002; Silverman, 2000). With their take on valid knowledge as arising from the relationship among members of some stakeholding community, Lincoln and Guba suggest 'authenticity' as a kind of warrant to action by stakeholders. This holds resonances of Stake's concept of 'naturalistic generalizability' in case study research (Stake, 1995) which emphasizes an active reception by its consumers who integrate their existing experience and knowledge with the vicarious experience of the cases under study.

Yet another alternative approach is offered by Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) who perceive differences in paradigmatic traditions regarding issues of reception, as centering on "theoretical and operational definitions" of the concepts of reliability and validity (p140). This conception focused not so much on criteria to establish a study's worth in these terms, but on procedures to deal with "threats" to reliability and validity. This conception echoes in later recommendations of procedures to enhance

or increase them by diminishing the threats. Thus Taft (1999) suggests interpretation is "susceptible to reliability checks" and that description of procedures produces "more credible" reports (p117); while Silverman (2000) argues for data analysis aimed at "more valid findings" to overcome the problem of "anecdotalism" (p177). In the same spirit Guba and Lincoln (1999) suggest that techniques "cannot guarantee the 'trustworthiness' of a naturalistic study", but could "contribute greatly to persuading a consumer of its meaningfulness" (p148).

While these might be termed incrementalist approaches to the issue they are unsurprising in light of Creswell's first category of seekers of equivalence to quantitative concepts. Silverman (2000), for example, defines validity as truth (p175). Creswell's other categories suggest reasons for Smith and Hodkinson's contention that lists of criteria are "contested, contradictory, fluid and changing" (2005, p930). Ontological differences are not the only reason. Types of research account for some of this variability. Thus Connelly and Clandinin's narrative approach de-emphasises reliability and validity in favour of "apparentness and verisimilitude" (1999, p139).

While there is no agreed protocol applicable to all qualitative research and while ontological differences within the same research tradition differentiate suggested handling of issues of reception, there is nevertheless remarkable agreement that any research report must set out its approach and methodology for dealing with them. There is also some degree of uniformity in the nature of acceptable procedures. Thus the approach and procedures used in this study are set out below. Following Scott, (1996, citing Hammersley, 1992), it is argued that judgements about this study's worth should take cognizance of, and be made within, the boundaries of its

ontological, epistemological and ethical assumptions as well as its aims and scope (outlined previously).

Intended to contribute to small scale, local theory rather than to a grand educational narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), this study has borrowed from several traditions rather than following the methodology of one. It does not seek to represent and account for the phenomenon of interest as a process over time, but rather to represent through its thematic depictions the perspectives of the participants captured in a given moment, and to build in its conclusions, a theory to account for them. It should be judged against these dual aims and thus, following Edwards, (2001), on the extent to which it "has captured important features of the field and has analysed them with integrity" (p124). This study drew on a number of these commonly agreed procedures to do so as explianed below.

Purposeful sampling garnered a wide range of cases, and with interview technique, audiorecording and careful transcription ensured the twin aims of researcher distance yet familiarity with the created texts (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Member checking of transcripts was also employed, while collaboration over theory building, prolonged engagement and observation in the field, were not. While Silverman (2000) regards triangulation and respondent validation as "flawed method" (p177), they were excluded in the methodology as beyond both the scope and the aims of the study.

Transcripts yielded a wealth of data over a significantly wide range of topics as befits an exploratory study. This data source enabled the thick description across the respondent cases, not of their respective contexts but of the themes of their respective, interpreted experience of the phenomenon under study. The deliberate

coding strategies—of beginning with in-vivo codes and inductively searching for influences then deductively checking the emergent themes—built on both the grounded nature and the faithfulness to the participants' perspectives, of thematic description.

The comprehensiveness of the data treatment is supported in the encompassing nature of the study's conclusion, accounting as it does for all 30 fixed codes. As the analysis proceeded through the entire data set, the constant comparative method was employed as defined by Silverman—"the repeated to and fro between different parts of your data" (2000, p180). This method also included the "minimal" and "maximal comparison of cases" as defined by Flick (2002, p231). The emerging theory was also tested through questions to the text and the analysis and explanation of negative and deviant cases. This dialogue between discovery and verification as described by Taft (1999), resulted in a substantial revision and development of the theory. These procedures were tracked, leaving a trail through formal and informal memos, data tabulations and the kind of peer debriefing associated with the production of a thesis in a tertiary institution.

While the above methods bolster this study's credibility, it makes no claims to objectivity or replicability. Another researcher with a different ontological, epistemological and ethical stance would analyze the data differently and/or ask different questions of participants and data. It also relies on its thick description of themes and Stake's (1995) notion of generalizability, to enable judgements by readers of the extent of resonance with their own experience and perspectives.

Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodological choices made in this study and the assumptions upon which they are based. Noting the flexibility inherent in qualitative design, the chapter outlined an eclectic approach based on the principle of methodological 'best fit' to the aims and scope of the research. The processes used in the project were described in detail and were followed by an analysis of discussion in the literature of the issues in reception of qualitative research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the particular procedures adopted to advance the credibility of the study's findings and conclusion, to which the following chapters now turn.

CHAPTER 5

TEACHERS' INTERPRETATIONS:

THE IMPACT OF REGGIO EMILIAN PEDAGOGY

Introduction to Study Findings

This chapter is the first of three that detail the common themes emerging from the analyses of the eight participant interviews. The themes thus detailed provide answers to the study's questions regarding the teachers' perceptions and valuing of their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, of its effects on their thinking and practices and of its relevance to their own contexts. The three chapters therefore focus respectively on a) the impact, b) the influence, and c) the local context, of the participants' exposure to, and pursuit of, Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

Following these three chapters of findings is a concluding chapter to this study, which explicates the "selective coding" of the research and highlights the central finding of the study or its "core category" (Punch, 1998). This central theme answers the overarching question that prompted the study—*"How do local teachers create meaning from their experience of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice?"* The conclusion relates to the process of transformation that formed and reflected the participants' reactions and responses. This process resulted in the teachers' re-creation of pedagogical meaning and this core category of the study is characterized as the "quest to contextualize" (Baxter, 2001, p1).

It should be noted from the outset that while the study focuses upon a transformative process neither these chapters, nor the study itself, attempt to track this process over

time. Rather, the following chapters provide a snapshot of the participants' conscious interpretations of changes that they perceive to have occurred during this process. The conclusion adds a thesis regarding the significance of the patterns analyzed from the teachers' interpretations.

A note on style, used through these chapters to reference quotations from participants, may be of assistance to the reader. The system preserves the anonymity of interviewees via the use of pseudonyms in the text, while numerical keys are used to refer to participants, transcripts and data code files from which a quote is taken. Thus 03/22/41 refers to the participant's code number/transcript page number/data code file number. Additionally, pseudonyms are related alphabetically to participants' numeric code. Thus, 01 is Anna; 02: Barbara; 03: Cate; 04: Diane; 05: Emma; 06: Frances; 07: Grace; and 08: Helen. All long quotations are indented but for shorter quotes, participants are distinguished from other sources by the use of italics. Shorter quotes from other scholars or writers are depicted in the usual way in double quotation marks.

This first chapter of findings focuses on the impact of Reggio Emilia from the perspective of the interviewees. Several themes emerged from the codes related to their exposure and many, though not all, themes in this chapter, emerge from single codes. (In later findings chapters, themes were almost exclusively derived from the comparison of multiple codes). This chapter explores the teachers' initial reactions and interpretations of their responses. It commences with their first contact with Reggio Emilian ideas and practice. It will highlight a variety of pathways, not only in their routes into Reggio Emilian pedagogy, but in their perceptions of the connection between the known and the new in their individual pedagogies.

Routes into Reggio Emilia

For the teachers who volunteered for this study, there was no single, predictable route to their first encounter with Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Professional networks were the common, though not sole entry point, but their sources were quite varied. Barbara decided to attend an employer-sponsored workshop. Both Emma and Helen responded to flyers that arrived in the mail and thus Emma attended a conference and Helen began subscribing to the Australian newsletter *The Challenge*. Diane heard about it in a presentation to staff by her immediate superior returning from Reggio Emilia, and *sort of tried things that she had brought back* (4/1/35). Personal contact with colleagues provided the initial route for Anna, Cate and Grace. For Grace, this came in a professional association meeting. Anna was given a flyer by a staff member. Cate reported that she was asked more than once*, 'are you doing Reggio?'* so decided *I better find out who this dude is* (3/1/35)*.* Similarly, Frances thought she should find out *who the heck he was* (6/1/35). She became aware of the newsletter and decided to attend a six-session course. Initially for her, the imperative was competition. After reading in the local paper about a neighbouring kindergarten, she thought *if the local community kindergarten teacher was doing something it was about time I learned… So it was more in a marketing sense, I thought I needed to know what was happening* (6/1/35).

Continued Pursuit

Without exception and irrespective of the initial route, these teachers actively and voluntarily sought out more information. They went out of their way in pursuit of an increased knowledge base. As Emma stated: *It provoked me to find out more, I couldn't lay it to rest* (5/29/40). Not only were they unsatisfied with a single exposure, they pursued their interest in Reggio Emilian pedagogy down a number of avenues.

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They all read from several sources. They all attended more than one type of formal forum, drawing from among the workshops, seminars and conferences available in their state and some attended Reggio Emilia's travelling exhibition in Melbourne—*The One Hundred Languages of Children.* Not all have first hand experience of Reggio Emilian educators discussing their work. Six of the eight teachers have travelled to Italy to participate in study tours of Reggio Emilian centres and some have also seen Reggio Emilian educators present their work to Australian audiences. Yet, two of the interviewees, Cate and Barbara, have had neither experience, while three others, Emma, Frances and Grace, have been to Reggio Emilia twice or three times. They have all participated in *RE-Search* group meetings and the Melbourne teachers have visited colleagues' centres to discuss their Reggio Emilian interests. Some of the teachers received employer support in these professional endeavours, while others operated in a neutral climate of professional autonomy or supervisory ignorance.

Time is an important factor in the teachers' universal pursuit of their interest in Reggio Emilian ideas and practice. Without exception, these teachers have spent many, many hours seeking information. However, just as their routes into Reggio Emilia vary, there is, also, no discernible pattern in the individual time frames within which they acted upon their initial exposure or pursued it.

For Cate, the pursuit was significantly delayed. She remembered hearing about Reggio Emilia in her pre-service professional education but *sort of stored it back there* (3/1/35) until asked about her practice as reported above. After finding some basic information, she wrote *a very firm letter* (3/7/35) to gain entry to a short university course. Emma attended a conference shortly after reading a flyer, while

Anna reported maintaining her interest from the initial exposure for a period of twelve months until her study tour of Reggio Emilia. Barbara and Helen, for some time, engaged in a process that could be characterized as open-minded monitoring. Helen subscribed to the Australian newsletter, *The Challenge,* for two years *and just read what people were saying and picked up on little bits about it here and there from other teachers* (8/1/35). Barbara attended more seminars and read articles but *nothing else happened—I didn't take anything into my teaching* (2/1/35).

The exact point at which these teachers 'took something into their teaching' as Barbara describes it, is also highly individual. No single exposure, type of reading material or staff development exercise, prompted this development. Rather, the teachers followed individual though intersecting pathways in their pursuit of ideas from Reggio Emilia, through the various avenues outlined above. What they had in common was their persistence. At the time of interview, all had been maintaining their interest for at least two years. All reported that it had affected them in multiple ways.

Strong Reactions

While initial reactions to their first encounter with Reggio Emilia were variations on the theme of curiosity, as their pursuit continued and they discovered more about the philosophy and practices, their reactions strengthened. They used unequivocal language and often colourful metaphor in describing their responses.

Anna described *the whole experience* as *mindblowing, totally mindblowing, it really has had a huge impact* (1/3/40). Referring to her response in Reggio Emilia itself, she

> *was just speechless. The warmth and passion that radiated out of those talks. I was spellbound. The love for their children, I never forget it* (1/4/40)

For Barbara, *the interest was sparked and it never went away* (2/23/40).

> *I find it very inspiring, I find it extremely motivating. It's something that makes teaching exciting* (2/17/40).

Excitement was a common response among the teachers. Helen

> *hardly slept the whole time I was there* [in Reggio Emilia]. *I was just so stimulated by everything I heard, I laid awake looking at the roof every night and planning what I was going to change when I came back* (8/7/40).

Cate acknowledged it as an early response. *I'd been to the Reggio weekend and came back all excited* (3/6/40), while Barbara, Emma and Frances used the present tense, characterizing it as continuing. *It makes teaching exciting* (2/17/40),…*it really does excite me professionally* (5/29/40). She also echoed Anna's response in being *absolutely blown away, like it was unbelievable…I was thinking 'wow, this is really wild!'* (5/2/40). Incredulity featured for Diane also, though she characterized its effect in differing terms. She recalled her cynicism of a colleague's description that *it was almost a religious experience* but went on to declare

> *It was, yes, I mean it <u>was</u> a religious experience I suppose. It was just unbelievable. I'd never seen, I've never, ever been to a conference where there is this match between theory and practice…But to go to Reggio Emilia and everybody's doing it, everybody lives and breathes it, that was just fantastic* (4/2/40).

Grace had a similar reaction to the conference she attended.

> *I had never, ever been so swept away with a conference in my life. I was absolutely stunned by Carlina Rinaldi, in particular, she impressed me enormously* (7/6/40).

Frances was unequivocal. *…I've come back from both trips in an absolute turmoil* (6/14/40). She also neatly sums up the common thread of the teachers' pursuit.

> *So you can't ignore it, it's just so extraordinary. I still find it extraordinary if I think about it* (6/15/40).

Anna's perception that her exposure to Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice *just had me hooked* (1/1/40), proves apt for them all. In addition to the excitement they all felt, their reactions were often, though not universally, depicted in very emotive

terms. Participants were 'stunned', 'overwhelmed', 'frustrated', 'speechless', tipped 'right on your head', and 'in turmoil'. Some interviewees characterized the effect as intellectually appealing. They talked of being 'stimulated' or 'intrigued', 'fascinated', 'inspired' or 'challenged' and also of 'wonderment' and 'awe'. Many of the participants used both kinds of descriptors to explain their responses.

The place of theory

When the analysis examined which teachers used one type of descriptor over the other, it became clear that two teachers did not refer to the intellectual appeal of their experience. This prompted a search in the data for a connection between those who did so and those who seemed to have a theoretical bent. The data revealed no such easy correlation. Rather, they showed that the Reggio Emilian philosophy struck intellectually exciting chords with both the theoretically minded and those for whom theory seemed irrelevant.

Some of the eight participants referred to their exposure to Reggio Emilian ideas as provoking them to revisit theoretical work in the future. Three of the teachers freely interspersed theoretical references to explain their responses to Reggio Emilian philosophy and to influences on their thinking. Barbara had a kind of theoretical barometer. She calibrated her responses to Montessori, Steiner and Feminist Post-Structuralism against her more intense interest in Reggio Emilian thinking. Grace made links between the ideas of Reggio Emilia and those of theorists she valued, such as Gardner. At the same time, two of the teachers made no links to past, present or future interest in particular theorists or theories. Yet this was not the same duo of teachers whose language eschewed descriptors of an intellectual appeal in their experience.

Thus the universality of strong reactions to exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy was not dependent on a personal theoretical bent, nor consistent with a preference for either emotive or intellectual language in describing its appeal. Moreover, the teachers' persistence held in spite of—or for some, possibly because of—the way they interpreted their encounter. While one interpretation was almost universal there was an exception; there were degrees of difference; and there were multiple perspectives.

Confronting and confirming

All but one of the participants, perceived their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy as in some way confronting, or to use a Reggio Emilian term, 'provocative'. They saw it as prompting them to question or as a challenge to either their beliefs or practices or both (see **Appendix Q**). Cate was the exception.

> *…it was more like a confirmation that I was on the right track* (3/7/21*)…. When I came across Reggio and the way they were thinking it was like 'well, this is how I feel inside'…and that was like coming home* (3/3/21).

While Cate focused exclusively on confirmation, at the other extreme, Emma and Frances found Reggio Emilian pedagogy to be pure challenge. Emma put it succinctly…*it challenged everything that I believed in* (5/10/21). Frances

> *felt that nothing I was doing was any good, you know it was all dreadful and it had to be thrown out and it was just appalling* (6/14/21).

She had accompanied a colleague to a short course and was *very frustrated. We were beside ourselves…*

> *I realized that there was something much more deep…there was something there that I was missing but I still didn't know what it was. And she [the Lecturer] couldn't give me any answers because I was still at that time looking for a step 1,2,3; this is the way you do it; this is the best way, this is the best practice* (6/2/23).

Between these two extremes were the five participants whose experience of learning about Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice prompted both interpretations. Anna and Barbara used the phrase *it made me question* (1/12/21) (2/30/21), a reaction shared with Helen who characterized questioning as *the biggest impact it has on anybody* (8/31/21). Grace and Diane had similar views.

> *You can't help but bring your baggage to it but it also challenges you to think about what you're doing and why you're doing it and to reflect on what you do and look at what the children got from that…*(4/19/21).

At the same time, these five teachers, in company with Cate, all felt confirmed in some way. Anna came to Reggio Emilian pedagogy from a position of existing doubt about her practice and a change of direction already begun.

> *I was thinking about that last year already but after being at Reggio, it sort of confirmed my gut feeling—'you're not totally on the wrong track'. …We were very much regimented the way we programmed and what happened during the day. And I had already eased up over the last few years* (1/7/21).

The other teachers found confirmation not in existing doubt but in aspects of their existing beliefs, or as Helen stated, *it reinforces what I believe, it makes me feel that yes, this is what we should be doing (*8/10/21). Barbara found common ground, among other ideas, in her attitudes to independence and interdependence.

> *That was already in my mind, anyway, before all this and so* [when] *the word interdependence came up and things like that…there were things that came out that just started sitting with me, that made sense, that felt comfortable with me* (2/2/21)*.*

Diane and Grace, working within different school systems, also found some common ground with Reggio Emilia in their respective philosophical orientations.

> *There's a lot of stuff in the primary area coming through at the moment, particularly Integrated Studies, which is very much along the same lines as what Reggio Emilia is saying and incorporating you know, Reggio principles* (4/13/21).

But Reggio Emilia was much more powerful in its effect on me because it went to the heart of opening up possibilities for children which I deeply, deeply believe in…(7/28/21).

While most of the teachers found their exposure confronting, they nevertheless, stayed 'hooked'. While it must be acknowledged that many had the comfort of confirmation to assist them, nevertheless they all additionally had to deal with the paradox and conundrum of translocation—Reggio Emilian 'influence without emulaton'. And still they persevered.

Resistance to replication

All eight teachers perceived Reggio Emilian pedagogy as non-transferable. They clearly expressed a resistance to the notion of 'copying'. They believed that they could not merely replicate, nor follow steps in a model, nor trace the path of a Reggio Emilian 'approach'. Cate was annoyed by the whole idea.

There's no way I would turn around and say I'm 'doing Reggio' because you're just not! …it irks me when people say that sort of thing (3/16/1).

Emma and Grace both reported discussing the issue with their respective Heads.

The Head and I have talked quite carefully about our thoughts, our feelings [about] *using Reggio as a model—we can't! …we would not copy. We would say that it's an inspiration to see it and it's something that can't be transferable* (7/10/1)*.*

Barbara took a personal tack with this theme.

I'm not hung up on Reggio—'this has got to be done the Reggio way'. (2/30/1).

Helen and Frances referred to some of the replication they had seen in centres outside Australia.

Although when I saw the centres in America, I didn't particularly like what I saw…because I thought that they had not been influenced by it, they had copied it (8/19/1).

We have been to Europe and we have been to the United States and we've seen that you can do a very good cut-and-paste job if you want to…I think it's very easy to make a centre look like a Reggio Emilia centre. If you've got a good art mind or somebody who can give you that skill, then you can make a centre look identical. You can do all the panelling, you can bring in all the flowers and the plants and you can bring in open shelving. It can look identical. I've seen them in the [United] *States. They've done a very, very good job. It's almost a carbon copy...And if you don't want to do that, you have to find out what you do want to do and that's the process I think we're in* (6/4/1).

An alternative process

While all the teachers resisted the idea of replication, Frances articulated (above) the

implication of this resistance which Grace framed as a comprehensive question.

So how do you actually galvanize it all and draw upon it and think of it and use it? (7/23/1).

No participant was asked a direct question in interview regarding such a process, yet

all the teachers spontaneously expressed thoughts around it.

Helen suggested that uniqueness was important, as did Anna.

And do we really want to copy them? Do we want to copy them? Don't we want to have something that is uniquely ours? (8/31/1)

Yet I am also convinced I do not want to change my little centre and its uniqueness. I don't want to turn it into a Reggio centre (1/22/1).

This view is reflected in Grace's belief that *we are original ourselves* (7/10/1). Diane

expressed it as a suggestion. *Try and find your own, your own way* (4/23/1).

A number of the other teachers raised the issue of cultural and contextual difference

as important factors in seeking an alternative to replication.

…and we will never have all the pieces because of the cultural differences and the money differences and the regulation differences and all of those differences. We will have some of the pieces. May be we just take the pieces that are really valuable for us (8/31/1).

When they say they're 'doing Reggio' I think 'well, you're not!'. Say you're developing your own culture, say that you've taken on a concept (3/16/1).

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Diane perceived these factors as relevant during her visit to Reggio Emilia.

> *But to go with someone you know, you can talk about your culture in your school and your situation and how you can sort of adopt and adapt it to your own classroom* (4/1/1)*.*

Grace connected her perception of local originality to local culture and to an alternative to replication.

> *We will interpret within our own culture, within our own way, some of the principles that we've seen demonstrated there* (7/10/1)*.*

In similar vein, Emma believed that seeing *what other people are doing as well and how they've interpreted what they've seen,* was important to her own process (5/25/1). She also proffered a view on the process of others.

> *I think that a lot of teachers, rather than assimilating and accommodating what they're learning, think it all has to go out and something new has to come in* (5/10/23).

However, none of the teachers in this study described the alternative to replication in this way. Rather, they used metaphors that implied incorporation of the new rather than annihilation of the old. Frances put it simply, …*we just want to expand and enrich what we're doing* (6/17/1). Barbara characterized her process as *taking ideas and looking at it and debating with myself* (2/22/1). Both Diane and Cate wanted to *adopt and adapt*. Cate thought this involved being *realistic* about local possibilities and as cited above, developing the local centre culture. Diane thought it *part of the learning process* that required time, experimentation, her own creativity and failure (4/16/1) (4/15/1) (4/6/1). Emma referred to 'assimilating and accommodating' and to the need to *merge philosophies* within the context of *how my philosophy's developing* (5/25/1). Grace was concerned with 'interpreting principles' which is reflected in Cate's 'taking on a concept', and Helen's 'being influenced' (see above), while Anna was focused to *get that awareness* of children (1/22/1). Thus, though they expressed it differently and approached it from various angles, they all saw themselves as

actively engaged in some process of incorporation of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, rather than its replication.

Incorporation proved to be a complex process. While other aspects will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, this chapter concludes with the teachers' interpretations of the connections they began creating between their existing philosophical ideas and Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Consistent with the variety of interpretations outlined previously, the participants also interpreted these connections in various ways.

Consistency, confusion and consolidation

Not surprisingly, Cate, who experienced confirmation but not challenge, in her exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, perceived consistency between her own philosophy and that of Reggio Emilia.

> *I think my philosophy, my own personal philosophy was in line …[there] wasn't anything that was 'wow, missed that, I'm totally on the wrong track', it was more like a confirmation that I was on the right track (3/7/5).*

Helen, who had been both challenged and confirmed, took a similar view in relation to her philosophy but made an interesting distinction about her practice.

> *I don't think my ideas on early childhood have changed, I think I had reinforced what I had always believed but probably not been able to put into practice as much as I would really have liked to (8/18/33).*

In sharp contrast, Emma and Frances, who both perceived their exposure as almost pure challenge, were aware of pre-existing, but largely un-delineated doubts, creeping into their belief system and interestingly, both reported being professionally bored. Emma's doubts created feelings of philosophical insufficiency.

> *I didn't feel as though I was being challenged at work and that I was really making such a difference in the lives of children that I was teaching and was I teaching them the right thing and all that sort of stuff. We had a lot of fun with the children ...but you know it was just sort of thinking about different ways of teaching and things…I didn't feel I was being*

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professionally challenged, I felt like I was doing the same thing year in and year out…it was almost a bit 'ho-hum'. And I did have role models around me so I could see how different people were teaching, but it just wasn't enough (5/1/34).

Emma's encounter with Reggio Emilia left her feeling somewhat at a loss.

> [It] *almost made me feel inadequate in what I was doing because I came back and thought 'where do I go from, now, you know what do I do?'*

She also struggled with

> *all this stuff in my back pack...all these truths I'd been taught in College, what was right and what was wrong, if you did this you were a good teacher if you did this you were a bad teacher. So there were lots of things about my own teaching I had to challenge when I was there* (5/4/40).

Frances reported a total philosophical void.

> *I built up over two years what I thought was this unbelievably good program. It was very, very involved. We did a whole set of activities for two days and then a whole set of other activities. And it was all based on themes and it was so jam-packed and all the parents were delighted and the children had a great time; staff were happy and the kindergarten flooded with people and everyone was fine. And I was bored out of my brain. ….After two years I had it all boxed, I knew what was happening on a certain day. Everything was beautifully planned and I thought I had it just right and I was absolutely bored senseless. I suddenly realized that this was all a terrible sham, that there was something frightfully missing and I didn't have a clue what it was* (6/2/34).

For these two teachers, building links to Reggio Emilian pedagogy started from perceptions of philosophical confusion, whereas the other five participants, who saw their exposure as both confronting and confirming, began the process of connecting with Reggio Emilia by recognizing opportunities for consolidation.

As noted previously, Anna's existing doubts about her 'regimented' programming, as well as the change of direction in her practice, were solidified and consolidated in Reggio Emilia. Barbara recognized points of connection in her own curriculum and consolidated existing approaches.

So the emergent curriculum was kind of in there without totally being in there. So activities were sort of planned out based on what the children were doing. (2/3/5)

She also made negative connections—consolidating her views on early childhood

practice that she abhorred

…you know, that theme approach. So if they're interested, say in caterpillars, you move like caterpillars, so you draw, [do] *paintings of caterpillars, all that sort of stuff. I've never, never, been involved with that, never! So again that's probably why Reggio sort of sat with me. I was quite interested in Lillian Katz' Project Approach before I really read much about Reggio and I found that really interesting and I've been involved with some projects with the children but not to the degree. I mean it's been different, to me, to what I've done with the Reggio stuff* (2/10/5).

Diane likewise made philosophical connections and she regarded her encounter with

Reggio Emilian pedagogy as offering substantial development in ideas to which she

already subscribed.

Everything was in context and to me, Integrated Studies is and Reggio is very similar to that idea and seems to match what we are trying to do in literacy…(4/30/27). *I think it appealed to me because of what ELIC had been saying for years and years and ...also because of what Integrated Studies had been saying about these global ideas. It seemed to be offering us that next step in how to develop that whole idea globally into your classroom, to consider everything really* (4/31/21).

Grace, similarly, recognized points of connection, looking back over years of her own

pre-Reggio philosophy and practice.

So to be able to be in a place and to feel certain that by offering children multiple opportunities in the early years and to try and help them develop what attitude, and skills and dispositions they have, was in me (7/6/5). *The ways in which children make sense of their world, their ways of knowing, the ways they construct knowledge—that really was exciting to me because I could see things that had happened over the years, sort of slotting into place* (7/7/23).

Thus, while some of the teachers were able to 'slot things into place' to a more or

less extent, Emma and Frances felt the impact of Reggio Emilian pedagogy

extremely differently. These latter two teachers found confrontation and confusion,

which contrasted sharply with Cate's perception of confirmation and consistency (see

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Appendix Q). Thus two extremes of reaction appear, with the five other teachers' reactions situated between them. These five recognize their experience as both confronting and confirming (rather than one or the other) and as offering opportunities for consolidation of their beliefs. Yet on closer examination this pattern does not hold firm. Helen has a foot in two camps joining the lone Cate in her perception of consistency but otherwise belonging as one of the five. Moreover, within this group of five there were substantive differences. Barbara, Diane and Grace consolidated existing philosophical beliefs, Anna consolidated existing doubts and Helen saw opportunities to consolidate links between her practice and her philosophy.

Thus, while Reggio Emilian pedagogy had an impact on these teachers in certain common ways, where variation existed, there emerged no pattern that would consistently group some or indeed all, of the teachers. Like their routes into Reggio Emilian pedagogy, their reactions and interpretations of its impact, intersected each other in a variety of ways, creating similarities but also dissonances.

Summary

This chapter commenced an examination of the pedagogical meaning the eight participants re-created, as a consequence of their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy. It began with the teachers' routes into Reggio Emilia, noted the impact in their strong reactions then highlighted the interviewees' perceptions of their engagement in some alternative to mere replication of Reggio Emilian practices. Further, this chapter revealed the teachers' varying (though not consistently patterned) perceptions of the collision and connection between Reggio Emilian philosophy and their own. Yet, irrespective of whether they perceived these connections as consistency, confusion or opportunity for consolidation (or indeed in some combination), they all reported being influenced by Reggio Emilian pedagogy. They all made changes to both their thinking and their practice. They all grafted new ideas onto old and a great many of these incorporations were shared. The next chapter details the teachers' perceptions of these influences of Reggio Emilian pedagogy upon their belief systems and their practices.

CHAPTER 6

THEMES OF INFLUENCE: REGGIO EMILIAN PEDAGOGY AND TEACHERS' PHILOSOPHIES AND PRACTICE

While the previous chapter examined the impact of the participants' exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy, this chapter focuses on the common themes of its influence. The eight teachers reported not only aspects of their experience that impressed them but also subsequent changes to their practice. However, this is neither to suggest a cause-effect relationship nor even necessarily, a consistent correlation between their impressions and practices. Moreover, the participants reported a wide variety in both. Nevertheless, there were common influences. With a few notable exceptions, these were discernible in all eight interviews and cover both ideas and practices. The themes that emerged most obviously, in the deductive analysis of the influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, comprise 'aesthetics', 'the capability of children', 'children as social learners', 'projects', 'documenting', 'the parents' place' and 'the environment'.

While they reveal the nature of common influences, these themes did not account for all the data concerned with teachers' beliefs and practices. When this remaining data was analysed using an inductive rather than deductive approach, three additional themes emerged. These themes—comprising 'teaching capable children', 'a stronger role for children' and 'more open planning and programming'—are particularly revealing of the processes engendered as the teachers responded to perceived influences from Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

While all of the themes discussed in this chapter contribute to the depiction of the commonality of these teachers' incorporation of such influences, they also speak to important differences. Within each of these themes and in the patterns across all ten, there are nuances that add depth to a thesis of transformation and re-creation of pedagogical meaning.

It should be noted that the names of all the themes discussed in this chapter, were chosen to reflect their content. They represent an analysis of influence, based on the participants' perceptions, rather than a deconstruction of the proximity of these perceptions to Reggio Emilian pedagogical principles or practices.

Aesthetics

The first of these common themes of influence (all are depicted at **Appendix R**), relates to the aesthetic of Reggio Emilia. All of the teachers reported being impressed by some aspect of an aesthetic appeal. For most, this appeal is reflected in Anna's remarking upon *the beauty, the sheer beauty* (1/5/19). For Grace, Anna and Helen, the aesthetic appeal was broad. They referred to a pervasive beauty *(1/11/19)*, to *the aesthetics of the place* (8/4/19) and *a sort of aesthetic life* there (7/8/19).

At the same time Anna also noticed this beauty in the centres*, even the bathrooms were beautiful! (*1/11/19). Indeed, all the participants shared this focus on the centres, irrespective of actually visiting them. Diane encapsulated its strength in her almost exasperated declaration that

> *the environments are just beautiful, aren't they just beautiful? What else can you say?* (4/39/19)

Barbara, remarking on the slides she had seen, observed that *beauty was definitely there* (2/1/19), while Helen appreciated that the centres were *aesthetically beautiful but not over the top decorated* (8/4/19).

This aesthetic appeal was thus essentially visual in nature. For some participants, such as Frances and Emma, it was exclusively so. To Emma the appeal lay in *the art work; that was 'the wow!'—that was the visual* (5/2/19). This was shared with Diane and Grace, both of whom nevertheless, also felt its appeal more broadly. Diane thought it appealed to all the senses (4/11/19) while Grace liked the *attention to detail* but also connected it to her great interest in *visual education* (7/7/19). For Helen the breadth of appeal lay in the plainness, simplicity and practicality of *the wonderful sense of design* about the centres (8/4/19).

Cate was the exception in the group, though not because she failed to be impressed by any aesthetic appeal. On the contrary, she alone reported a pre-existing aesthetic sense and pride in the look of the environment of her own classroom (3/2/3). She was further distinguished from the others in relation to this first theme by her questioning of the "workability" of Reggio Emilian aesthetics in her own context.

> But the aesthetics of the place at Reggio, like having little glass jars with all bits and pieces all over, I thought 'well that's really cool but you have to, it has to work as well (3/11/19).

The capability of children

The second common influence related to beliefs about children. All the teachers expressed views on this. Seven of the eight were impressed by aspects of Reggio Emilian conceptions of the capacities of children, and these seven all referred directly to the Reggio Emilian phrase "the image of the child".

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For Barbara, it was *the thing that got me more than anything* (1/15/19), and Anna was equally unequivocal in declaring, that from Reggio Emilia

> *The most important thing is 'the image of the child', the way they view the child as a producer of knowledge* (1/15/19).

Diane, Emma and Helen also quoted the Reggio Emilian description of children as 'rich, strong and powerful' while Grace referred to 'rich' children and Frances to her changed conception of children—from *cute* to more 'powerful'.

Cate was the exception. Her interview did not make these same references, nor did she report being impressed by these conceptions. Rather, she portrayed her thinking about children as having been confirmed by her Reggio Emilian exposure. She highlighted two aspects *that children have rights* and *I expect maybe a lot from them....*

> *I've always treated children a little bit older that their age…I expect children to be a lot more in control of what they are and what they're doing and I believe they should be treated the same way that I would want to be treated. I think that's just a really basic thing…*(3/16/5).

A highly positive view of the capacities and abilities of children figured universally and prominently in the interviews. For some of the teachers, these ideas about children predated their exposure to Reggio Emilia, were confirmed by it and built upon, while for others, this positive view represented a definite change in thinking.

For example, Anna already believed that *adults, in general, in our society here, underestimate the abilities of children* (1/7/3) and that the experience of Reggio Emilia *confirmed my gut feeling—these children are brilliant!* (1/5/5). Like Anna, four more of the teachers—Barbara, Cate, Grace and Helen—had existing beliefs about the capabilities of children confirmed. This process varied by degrees. Helen thought her experience *reinforced…how capable children were* (8/32/5). Grace felt, that while

she had noticed the stability of children's varying capacities throughout their

schooling (7/6/3) and had believed children more capable than some of her

colleagues, her Reggio Emilian experience allowed

> *for me to see what the child was capable of and I hadn't really noticed, I mean I had, but I hadn't. It made me think there's so much more to children than we, there's so much more to them than even I'm thinking!* (7/9/21)

For the remaining three of the eight teachers, this positive view of children's

capabilities represented a change in thinking. Frances looked back on her own

limited thinking and contrasted it with the Reggio Emilian concept in very honest and

dramatic terms:

> *I think the very first time Carlina* [Rinaldi] *opened her mouth and asked that first question 'What is your image of the child?' From then on, it was just a nightmare--because I didn't have one!* (6/6/19)

Where Frances perceived a void in her pre-Reggio thinking, which Emma's interview

echoed in its silence on this topic, Diane referred to existing beliefs about children

that were negative. There was mention of short attention spans, limited fine motor

skills, *beliefs and theories from who knows where* (4/11/3). In contrast to the other

teachers, whose ideas about the capacities of children were confirmed and

expanded, to these three came change. Emma talked about the post-Reggio need

for

> *recognizing them as rich, strong, powerful, competent, possessor of rights and all those things. But you know, we don't empower children enough if doing up their shoes is any example…*(5/13/5).

Frances explained her about-face, by stating it was

> *for the very first time, after all those years of teaching and all that training, that I ever really began to value the depth of what was happening and really started looking at children in a completely different way. And since then it's fairly, oh it's so different, I've just come back with different eyes altogether. I've never looked at a child the same way again. Amazing, sort of, just from barely two hours of her* [Carlina Rinaldi] *speaking* (6/6/21).

Diane's focus turned to *the idea there was no limit to what a child could do* (4/11/19).

She reported her change in awareness:

> *…so taking the focus away from them being something that has needs.*
> *They have possibilities and an awful lot to offer (4/17/4).*

She thereby highlighted a sub-theme of this positive view of children's capabilities—

the shift away from a conceptualization of children as needy.

Anna, Barbara and Grace also embraced a focus on children's strengths. For

example, Anna saw children's variable strengths as an aspect of individual

differences while Grace placed her thinking within a curriculum framework:

> *and how I see children now, not in terms of their needs or what I need to*
> *teach them, I see the children in terms of what they're good at* (7/16/4*).*

The pattern for each of the eight teachers of either change to, or confirmation of, their

thinking about this sub-theme—children's strengths, only variously conforms to the

patterns related to their thinking about the overall theme—children's capabilities,

outlined earlier. Thus, unlike earlier, Frances' and Helen's interviews were silent on

this sub-theme. Yet, Diane was consistent, as her thinking on the sub-theme

changed in line with her thinking on the overall concept of children's capacities. For

Anna and Grace, the sub-theme represented a change in thinking rather than a

confirmation, as had occurred with the overall theme. While Cate and Emma were

consistent with their respective patterns of confirmation or change, they did not figure

in this sub-theme, but instead raised another—children's rights. Finally, Barbara

neither confirmed nor changed but added to her existing views about not working

from a deficit model of children, by attending to *positives and working from there*

(2/2/19).

These changes in pattern highlight the existence of nuances in the influence of Reggio Emilia about the capabilities of children. There is no rigid or consistent pattern for each teacher. There is more of an ebb and flow in the interaction of existing beliefs with Reggio Emilian philosophy. Moreover, the findings of the previous chapter are highly relevant in this regard. Despite relentless attempts to uncover patterns in the teachers' perceptions, the data related to their exposure and to the influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy refused to line up consistently. When neat boxes of teacher patterns hovered tantalizingly over the exposure data, or over these data related to Reggio Emilian influences, one or more of the teachers strayed over the lines, refusing to conform to the superimposed grid (as noted also in the previous chapter). While intersections were found—some of the teachers, some of the time, conformed to some patterns—in overall terms, the data set and therefore the teachers' responses could not be consistently grouped.

The ebb and flow in the teachers' incorporation of ideas of children's capabilities is also evident in many of the other themes of influence that will be detailed below, and it is particularly evident in the silences and absences within these themes.

Children as social learners

The social nature of learning was the third of the influences the teachers attributed to Reggio Emilia. Although only half of them used the Reggio Emilian term translated as "collaboration", all but one were influenced by the concept that children are social learners. As before, Frances perceived a void in her thinking.

> *Collaboration was something I hadn't thought really deeply about
> …socializing being all very well but that was only in just being able to
> speak to people without conflict* (6/5/19)*.*

Then, the situation changed. She described a discussion with a colleague about two children painting together, as an example of her efforts to come to grips with the concept of collaboration. She identified her conclusion after studying children's block play: *but they weren't really collaborating together…they don't tend to work together really.* At the time of the interview she perceived that collaboration *has and still is taking a long time to understand*…(6/5/4) and she saw it as something that she would work on in the future—*so how to get them to do that is the bridge that I have to make* (6/5/33).

While Frances was the only teacher to actively acknowledge this pre-Reggio void in her thinking, most of the others were silent about their pre-existing views. Barbara and Helen however, were not. They acknowledged their existing ideas as confirmed but also clearly influenced, by Reggio Emilian concepts of the social nature of children's learning. For example, Barbara had already thought about the notion of inter-dependence.

> *It's a word I've used myself for a very long time. I don't see children as being independent …I feel we push too much in independence* (2/2/3).

She was influenced by *just looking at, say, a group* and by the question *is it a group of individuals or is it individuals within a group?'* (2/2/19). Post-Reggio, she concluded

> *the interdependence is with the children asking and working with each other and with the adults in the environment* (2/2/3).

Helen believed that

> *…we had, as educators, reinforced the selfish society and that we really needed someone to show us how we could do it differently. And I was hoping that that's what I was going to find and I think that's what I went looking for too—the individual's contribution to the group rather than what the individual can take away from the group* (8/5/19).

Having been impressed by the Reggio Emilian example of encouraging

communication and collaboration from birth (8/4/19) and *being influenced by Reggio*

and collaboration, she was

> *now more aware that if you can get a group of children to work together
> …if you can work together as a group, you'll come up with more ideas and
> it'll more interesting for everybody* (8/18/4).

Like Frances, she also focused on the future:

> *We need to encourage our children to be more collaborative because it's
> only that wealth of ideas together, that comes up with the wonderful
> solution* (8/30/33).

For the other four participants, the significance of this theme lay in its power to create

new lines of thought. There were variations in the way they interpreted the concept.

Both Diane and Emma made unequivocal statements that identified learning as a

social process (5/22/21, 4/37/26). Emma focused almost exclusively on children and

on

> *developing a sense of community and getting the children to value
> exchange and conflict and dialogue and all that sort of stuff and really
> value each other, and create that sense of community which was very
> evident in Reggio* (5/31/19).

Additionally, she expressed a desire for more collaboration with her colleagues and a

new interest in working with specialist staff. Diane's focus included children's learning

but more particularly, dealt also with adult learning. She was impressed by the idea

of *lifelong learning* and of the teacher as a *co-constructor of learning* and she

discussed these ideas with the parents of the children she taught. She also longed

for more interactions with her colleagues. Both of these teachers had been prompted

to examine their role in children's interactions and were trying to disengage from

adjudication, in favour of encouraging children to discuss their ideas directly with

each other, a process incidentally, that Barbara reported was now happening within

her project groups.

Grace's changing view of the social nature of learning shared a breadth of focus. She was influenced to examine *how it affects the children,* and *how we learn from each other* (7/12/21). She looked at her own practice to uncover where children's *social understandings were developing from* and she *organized and managed* changes to support this development (7/12/34). She had also made a carefully planned video of children's first day in the group, to show *the social aspects of learning* (7/18/30). She referred to *the social dimension* as extending from children and adults to the wider society, in terms of issues such as youth suicide and social democracy. She wanted *the social dimension* to be covered in general curriculum planning as *intentions* for both children and staff (7/12/33) and she reported her thoughts in relation to parents.

> *…they don't see that that child is embedded within the group and they don't see that the child being in the centre and being in the school is actually enlarging their life so much—it's like the child is just like a little isolated achievement machine. So actually looking at the social dimension has made me do several things for parents to understand more carefully the value of their child being within a group* (7/12/23).

Cate likewise shared a perspective on the importance of *the social side of things.* For her, this included not only children's learning, but also their friendships and social desires (3/18/21). She had altered her recording documents to reveal the social interests and involvements of the children which she perceived were more evident after changes to the environment in her centre (3/24/30).

While the concept of social learning implies a shift away from an exclusive focus on children learning as individuals, there were a variety of opinions expressed about this aspect. Some of the interviews were highly explicit. As quoted above, Helen attributed the educator's role in creating *the selfish society* to *having focused on the individual child so much* (8/5/19) and Grace's reference to *the little, isolated, achievement machine* (7/12/19) was echoed in Frances' post-Reggio insight that

> *…what I was doing in the centre was aimed very much at the individual potential of each child. That's as far as I took it* (6/5/34).

Barbara had her pre-Reggio thoughts confirmed

> *I mean through College, and this comes back to objectives and things like that, we were taught of individuals, a group of individuals, you focus on the individual, you plan for the individual and it's not like that in reality* (2/2/3).

Diane and Emma were more ambiguous about individuality. Both used the word 'individual' in a positive context in reference to their teaching. However, Emma thought children *needed to be with a group to <u>really</u> learn* (5/22/21) and Diane had come to believe that *so much more learning can happen with interactions* (4/18/4). Likewise, Cate's and Anna's interviews made positive reference to the individual. However, for these two participants, the place of individuality in social learning raised questions. Moreover, their questions reflected different perspectives on the issue.

Cate wanted to know*: but what about the quiet child that doesn't associate in a group?* (3/7/36). She clearly asked it from the perspective of appreciating the social nature of children's learning and valuing the social nature of children's lives. Anna, on the other hand, came at the issue from an almost opposite vantage point. She went to Reggio Emilia

> *…really interested in finding out how they focused on a group of children as we were taught to focus on the individual child, and I thought how does this work, if you put all the emphasis on the group how can you focus on the individual child?* (1/3/36)

Anna is thus the exception in relation to this theme and not merely because she approaches it differently. For apart from this sole question, Anna's interview is totally silent on this issue—she does not mention 'collaboration', nor social learning in relation to children or adults, nor in any other context. Moreover, Anna's silence is also the distinctive feature of the next theme to be examined here.

Projects

All the teachers, with the exception of Anna, talked about "projects", which is a poor translation of the Italian educators' process of "progettazione". Frances was the sole teacher who preferred the Italian term over the English translation, though the transcript is silent about the reason for this preference. Similarly, Cate did not use the word "project" referring instead to "investigations". (Having noted these exceptions, for ease of reference the word "projects" will be used to discuss the common aspects of this theme).

Of the seven teachers whose interviews featured talk about projects, all but Frances acknowledged influences on their practice. Barbara and Cate incorporated these influences with certain of their existing practices. In keeping with the impression she had inadvertently created that she was already 'doing Reggio', Cate perceived that prior to her exposure she had usually encouraged children's interests through further exploration at the art table (3/3/29). Barbara believed that Lillian Katz was her *first biggest influence,* but that post-Reggio her project work now had a *really different focus* (2/10/29) & (2/10/30).

Most of the specifics of the nature of this influence on practice came unbidden from those five of the participants who told detailed stories about projects that had been undertaken in their classrooms. Frances and Diane were the exceptions. They told no project stories. Yet, projects came up in their interviews also. While Diane tended to mention her project work in passing references to something else and had clearly undertaken them with children in her classroom, Frances only discussed projects in the abstract.

Unsurprisingly, since the participants were not specifically asked about projects, and not all spontaneously offered stories, there is no single aspect of this theme that is universal to the seven. Rather, of the participants who raised this theme in their interviews, various combinations expressed common ideas and referred to similar techniques. These are detailed below.

Firstly, no-one proffered a story of duplicating a project from published accounts elsewhere (including both Reggio Emilia and the US). Interestingly, three teachers mentioned children writing letters as part of a project and projects incorporating excursions, while two had featured measurement of some kind but the circumstances giving rise to these and the other events in these projects were distinctly different from published accounts that include such details. Thus the projects they worked on and reported in their interviews were all 'homegrown'. Moreover, half of the participants told stories of projects in sufficient detail that local children's ideas, interests, or questions emerged as a significant though not sole driving force in the projects, irrespective of the initial impetus (teacher or children) in starting one. The other major force that featured in the project stories was the teachers' questions and challenges. Indeed the stories featured interplay between the two. Barbara characterized it as *giving answers less, throwing it back to the children* (2/4/30). In a critique of a published American project that she described as *wishy-washy,* she elucidated the point.

> *There was no challenge of the children. It wasn't extending their thinking.*
> *It wasn't treating the children as being really capable* (2/19/10).

This foregrounding of children's contributions in the process of project development was assisted by some of the common techniques used by the teachers in steering project work.

All of those teachers who conducted projects did so with small groups of children. Though there was occasional strategic involvement of other children or of a whole class, the projects typically involved a consistent small group throughout its duration, with Helen's project stories being more ambiguous on this point. Children's involvement in the project work was also bolstered by a second technique—talk among the group and teacher. Cate referred to *conversation,* Barbara and Emma and Diane to *meetings*, Grace to *discussion* and Helen quoted sequences of such interactive talk. Indeed, these teachers told their stories in tones of excitement and amazement. They referred to children's 'wonderful ideas', to their work that was 'just brilliant' and to their questions, suggestions and decisions that emerged from exchanges between each teacher and groups of children.

They also noted a shift in their own roles. Barbara described a post-Reggio *way of teaching I've only* (recently*) started…definitely not before* (2/4/42). Cate referred to her role as *it was really facilitating* (3/11/42)*.* They thought they were listening more and, in Helen's words, challenging the children to *solve the problem themselves* (8/8/42).

Of the other common techniques of project work, drawing by children featured prominently. Teachers also mentioned photocopying and 'revisiting' children's work during projects and the use of three dimensional materials—blocks, construction materials and clay. The seven teachers also universally made efforts to record and display children's project work, often lamenting their inability to achieve their own goals in this area. The documenting of children's and teachers' work (including projects) comprises a further theme that will be detailed subsequently.

Apart from this inability to record more extensively, some of the teachers also expressed other concerns in relation to project work, that were both practical and theoretical. Grace had *found it difficult to get things from discussion*, *to record things and to find a space* that allowed children's work to be kept and built upon over time (7/8/34). Both Diane and Helen in quite differing contexts lamented the interferences of *our timetable and the curriculum standards framework* (4/3/10) on the one hand and *events–driven programming* (8/23/34), on the other. The theoretical issues that occupied three of the teachers, centred on the role of hypotheses in projects and on achieving depth of learning in project work. Both Helen and Emma expressed very similar difficulty. *I don't think we understand the hypotheses of projects properly* (8/20/34). While Barbara equated the long-termness of her post-Reggio projects with greater depth and a positive development (2/4/30) and Emma perceived that long-term projects afforded an opportunity for researching children's learning (5/26/34), Helen and Frances had misgivings

> *I think we have to get much better at deciding what's a project and what's a theme because in some centres I've seen, I think they're sort of interchangeable* (8/19/34)

> *I think I would like to change the way we discuss as a group of people, as teachers, the way in which we approach in-depth studies that children do. I don't think we deal with that aspect of progettazione very well at all* (6/18/34).

These misgivings however, point not to a questioning of the new direction project work was taking their teaching but rather, a strong desire to continue. Indeed, none of the interviews gave any hint of equivocation about projects.

Documenting

As noted in the above exposition of the previous theme, the teachers who discussed projects linked their written recording and their project work. This was a major, though not sole, aspect of the influence of their Reggio Emilian experience on the

type of records they kept. All eight teachers referred in some way to changing their written documents and displays and they also covered the various purposes attributed to these changes.

Seven of them used the word "documentation", which translates the Italian process of "documentazione", to refer to their records and displays. This time Anna was not the exception, although consistent with her absence from the project theme, her records were used for purposes other than projects. However, Diane used the term to specifically distinguish her recording from the Reggio Emilian term "documentation",

> *…because a lot of the time, because it was being done on the run I couldn't document the whole process, so I don't think I can say that. I think documentation is about the whole process of development of a piece of work with the drawings there to support it, whereas this was, you know some was taken during, end, beginning, that sort of thing. So I was just sort of taking snippets of what they had told me as the project had developed, so.* (4/25/34)

As with the theme of projects, Frances' transcript of interview made reference to recording in the context of practice aims. In the same way that she told no project stories, she also did not use the term 'documentation', rather, her references to both themes lay within an abstract discussion. Here, the reference related to planning processes to *the way in which we program, the way we do, write and see and propose our plans* (6/18/33). For everyone else, the documenting they did was linked by them to parents and with the exception of Anna, to projects. Analysis of the interviews also revealed that changed emphases in observing children were reflected in documents for both themselves and parents.

All seven (apart from Frances) noted a purpose of documenting as communication with parents. And of those (apart from Anna) who had dealt with projects in their interview, the universal subject of this communication was children's project work.

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The purpose of this communication of projects and of the other kinds of records and displays for parents was twofold. The teachers expressed the desire to provide certain types of information on the one hand and to reveal children in some way, on the other. Within these twin sub-themes there was some variation across the group.

Emma had in fact started her post-Reggio practice changes with *giving parents more information about what had happened* (5/3/32). She had made subsequent changes to *display as much as possible to make their learning visible to parents* (5/22/30). Similarly Grace used an almost identical expression to highlight one of the purposes of her documenting (7/13/36). Helen thought her Reggio Emilian experience

> *strengthened in me the importance of telling parents what you're doing and explaining to them the importance of what you're doing, all the time* (8/19/5).

She was the sole teacher who mentioned communicating to parents the planning of project work (8/22/30). Her documenting was also aimed at revealing the value of children's work to the development of faith in their own abilities and revealing the depth of children's problem-solving and imagination (8/19/30). Likewise Diane thought she had given children more scope to reveal their understanding and felt that her documenting for parents *gave them purpose and focus to what they were looking at in the classroom* (4/24/30). Cate wanted to communicate to parents more relevant observations of children including the children's interests and social involvements (3/18/30). Anna wanted to communicate to parents what had happened in each of the children's groups including examples of children's ideas and work and the *amazing* things children said (1/15/30).

Additionally, Anna changed the recording methodology used by staff to focus it on

> *what happens when you're interacting with the children, what you are discovering in the child, in those children* (1/12/32).

These types of changes, to the focus and methods of documenting observations of children, were shared by the other teachers also. While only a few of the teachers (Frances, Emma and Grace) made direct references to the Reggio Emilian concept of 'the teacher as researcher', it was clear that they were all changing the way they looked at children and these changes were reflected in the documents they made and in their communication with parents. With the new emphasis on the social nature of children's learning and the conduct of projects in small groups, came an expansion (though not abandonment) of the focus of observation from the individual, to include children working and/or interacting in various-sized groups. This came through not only the recording of project work but in other documents such as daily highlights, photos, communications books, displays and the like. While children's ideas were a feature of their records and displays for parents, and Barbara referred specifically to recording children's conversations, Helen's own analysis is relevant here, as she suggested that the local documentation was different because there is no child-to-child discussion featured, like there is in Reggio Emilia.

It could be argued, albeit tenuously, that these changes to the focus and nature of the teachers' recording points to the influence of the notion of the 'teacher as researcher'. While Anna wanted to 'discover' children and Diane declared herself to be *a learner…with your children* (4/27/33), as a group the teachers did not themselves explicitly connect changed ideas or practices to the notion of 'teacher as researcher'. Indeed, Emma and Frances perceived shortcomings in this area. Frances believed she had not developed *that sense of the teacher as researcher* (6/14/33) and Emma connected her perceived problem with project hypotheses to a need to do formal study in research methodology. Grace, however, was unique and

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thus a clear exception in that she directly linked changes in her practice to both her 'documentation' and to the concept of teacher research.

> *To be able to work as a researcher yourself, you are able to record what the children are saying or notice what they are doing or encourage understanding by staying in a space (7/2/12).*

Moreover, she connected her 'documentation' to teacher research and practice changes on various fronts. In a long passage in the interview she gave examples of actively researching *the social dimension* in *spaces that educate* (7/12 & 13), asked herself questions about the ways staff worked with children, developed recording methodology to accompany and inform practice changes and to reveal to parents, staff and children the cumulative nature of the work they were doing.

> *How do the staff work with the children—are we researching, are we developing ourselves, are we coming together and you know working with the ideas that are being expressed? So how are we affecting and making visible to the parents the work of the children (7/13/36). So they're questions that I'm really working quite carefully with and I've developed some strategies for us, this year to try to work towards doing these things. One of these is a visual diary…I'm keeping a daily record for the families to look through, for the children to flip through and for the staff also, to see there's some sort of continuity and build up to what we're doing (7/13/34).*

> *So we've moved from just listening to children to looking at the context of what they're doing. We've recorded that too. So we're trying to look at what places in the centre were the children, you know, interacting, ways they were working. The clay corner was the first place that we were able to start to do this. ...So we've gradually developed in that clay corner a new way of working. And from there the drawing corner emerged from that start. So two spaces in the preschool began to be new places for us to work differently ourselves. We gained new knowledge, we were listening. We turned ourselves into a kind of listening culture, if we could (7/13/34).*

She also reported using her recording to review the overall directions she had set (7/32/34). Thus, while the teachers all made changes to their recording methods, its subjects and purposes, Grace was the exception in acknowledging the influence of the concept of the 'teacher-as-researcher' and its interconnection with practice changes and 'documentation'.

The place of parents

The role of parents emerged as a universal theme in the transcripts of participant interviews. While some teachers used the term 'parent involvement', they all described, to some extent, their aspirations and/or practices with parents. Yet the type and nature of these aspirations and practices varied, notwithstanding the connections to parents, via documenting, already outlined above. Moreover, there was also wide variation in the expressions of a rationale for the place they wanted parents to occupy in their classrooms and centres/schools and with it, wide variation in the attribution of a Reggio Emilian influence on their thinking and practices around parents.

As noted earlier, all the teachers directed their recording to communication with parents. They wanted to convey information (particularly about projects) and increase parents' understanding and appreciation of children. As Frances put it,

> *I have to help all of us understand how we can achieve, you know and how they are achieving. You just need to see it. Look, it's unbelievable. And they will then, they do see it because no-one valued it before* (6/15/33).

Additionally, Emma, Frances and Anna had been impressed by the 'parent involvement' in Reggio Emilian centres. For Emma, 'parent involvement' was one of *the five most important aspects for me* (5/10/19) and increased communication to parents was a practice change she intensified post-Reggio. Frances, though impressed, reached a different conclusion.

> *…you're continually thinking about the involvement, to start with, of the parents in Reggio Emilia centres and how that could operate here in this kind of setting, which I don't think it can be anywhere near that kind of thing. I couldn't afford to allow parents to be as involved in the centre as they are, or appear to be, in Reggio Emilia centres* (6/6/19).

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Also, after considering her own context, Anna asked herself certain questions and responded by setting about change.

> *…how can we encourage parents to be there, how can we make them feel more welcome, how can we let them know—even those parents who speak very little English, and we have a number of them—how can we let them know what goes on in this place, what we value* (1/13/36).

Thus, while all these teachers wanted some kind of 'parent involvement' and they all added to their efforts at communication to parents, there was variation in the nature of the reciprocity they encouraged. It should be noted at this point that the teachers were not asked directly or specifically about their ideas and practices with parents except in relation to the visibility of change. In this context, they all perceived that some parents were responding to their documenting methods by reading it and giving them feedback. (This feedback formed part of their local context and as such will be detailed in the next chapter.)

Additionally, Anna specifically avowed the need to 'pay attention' to what parents have to say and provide opportunities for them to communicate (1/15/26), while five of the others mentioned some kind of interaction between home and school. This took various forms. Cate and Helen made certain of their planning documents accessible to parents and Cate noted that parents wanted to take her documentation of investigations home to read and that this interest by parents extended beyond those whose children were protagonists in the investigations. Diane and Emma were welcoming and receiving questions and follow-up suggestions from parents who read their recordings and Emma displayed her own questions about children for parents to consider. There were several mentions of parents working on something at home with their children in response to, or anticipation of, an interest and/or project work

being taken up at school. In welcoming parents into her classroom, Grace commented:

> *Now these volunteers have taken an interest in my travels, they've looked at photos, they've been at discussions, they've in fact lifted a lot of the discussion that would normally just occur between the assistant and myself. They've been a wonderful, enrichment for me* (7/14/15).

Emma had instituted communication books between parents and school and Barbara was beginning to record parents' goals and expectations for their children, stating,

> *I want two way interactions starting and when I do my observations and that, I want them to put in stuff as well. I mean, I really see that as important* (2/32/33).

Both Helen and Diane expressed some frustration with the level of parent presence in their classrooms and wanted more, while Anna and Grace were keen to encourage it and additionally, provided many instances of practically supporting parent-parent interaction and communication.

Rationales for the teachers' concerns to secure 'parent involvement' did not clearly emerge through all the transcripts. It could be argued that their concerns and the strategies they were influenced to implement, in relation to parents, is at least an acknowledgment by all the teachers of the legitimacy of parents' stakeholder status in their children's lives and education and some of the teachers were explicit about this. Grace believed that *children are still embedded very much in their families until* [age] *seven or eight* (7/17/26).

Helen

> *like(d) to have the parents there because so much of the children's schooling is mystical to parents because they're not involved in it* (8/21/26)

Frances thought

> *that connection with home is extraordinarily valuable* (6/23/26) *and that the parents and teachers have just as much a part in the whole community to play in terms of inculcating some culture and some history with children* (6/3/26).

Yet Frances also examined the context of her own school and parent body and gave a detailed explanation of the reasons she *couldn't afford* in her own context, the level of 'parent involvement' (as noted earlier) that she perceived in Reggio Emilia. The brakes she applied to local parent involvement centred on parents having *control over teachers or the philosophy of what's happening* (6/7/10).

While Frances was the only teacher to express misgivings in her rationale for 'parent involvement', there was some other common ground in the rationales expressed by the teachers. This revolved around the notion of service provision to parents, but only half of the teachers were explicit about it. Moreover, their connections to a Reggio Emilian influence varied widely.

Diane made the connection in an appreciation for the common vision and direction she observed being shared by *parents, teachers, atelieristas, everybody*, *the cook even,* in Reggio Emilian centres (4/2/19). Grace connected her own sense of 'community' to Reggio Emilia

> *There are lots of similarities because the community of the school I work at is a large one. It's a community of interested and quite devoted teachers and working in a very aesthetic and pleasant environment in a very wealthy community* (7/24/10).

She perceived service provision to parents in this community context. She talked of *community needs*, *this school community,* the centre acting *like a community centre would* and she was

> *… looking carefully now at how, you know, more appropriate ways might be there for parents to meet and to get to know the school and to feel a part of it and for that school to be their community* (7/24/33).

In contrast, both Cate and Frances viewed service to parents from a business perspective.

…because to me you are providing them with a service and that's what it is, it's a service. So I think they should see value for money, they should see what their child's getting out of it (3/17/10).

And I'm also very much aware that schools are a business. And I've always had that view… It's nothing to do with Reggio, it's a service mentality, I suppose. And we do, we do work on that. It's very much appreciated I think by parents. They feel, then, they feel they can come and talk to you, I think (6/24/9).

In contrast to Frances' absolute distancing of her attitudes from Reggio Emilia, and Cate's transcript's silence, Anna made the connection very clear.

The other impact it has had on me, that concern to get parent involvement which is very difficult here, extremely difficult (1/11/21)...*To see parents sitting down with their children* [and] *have breakfast. Moments like this, I think Reggio. I say 'thank you Reggio'* (1/12/21).

Like Grace, Anna provided services within the centre that facilitated parents' social interaction and she also communicated to parents the centre's valuing of parents' cultures.

The Environment

Seven of the eight teachers made changes to their environments. Again, Anna was the exception. Significantly, no-one reported making any physical changes to her outdoor environment. The only change that involved the outdoors was made by Cate who introduced a simultaneous indoor/outdoor program. Grace wanted to do the same but both offered explanations that were not derived from a Reggio Emilian influence. Additionally, Emma wanted to bring the natural environment of the outdoors inside and to take more advantage of the large grounds surrounding her school.

Of the plethora of changes made to indoor environments only one change was shared by all seven teachers, while other changes and rationales for them were shared by various combinations of teachers. For example, change to the

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environment was the starting point for three of the teachers. For Emma and Grace, this was a direct result of the impact of seeing and hearing about Reggio Emilia's centre environments, while Helen attributed her starting point of change to necessity.

> *I started with the environment 'cause my centre needed a coat of paint and a whole lot of things* (8/15/32)*.*

Similarly, Emma and Barbara factored in opportunity in the timing of environmental change. While both were impressed by Reggio Emilian environments, for Emma setting up a new room added an impetus and Barbara felt that *things needed doing anyway* (2/21/30).

The change all seven teachers shared involved re-organizing their environments, designating permanent spaces for particular purposes and thus ceasing the practice of shifting certain pieces of equipment around. Yet the reasons for making these and other changes varied. Frances stopped thinking children would be *bored* if equipment wasn't rotated and Barbara thought it had the added advantage of cutting down on work. Emma created two permanent spaces, in part, to practically recognize children's rights to privacy in the environment. She thought these spaces at least created an illusion of privacy and separateness for children but also created a place for work to be left on display. Grace utilized her verandah as a *piazza* and re-arranged equipment between the indoors and the verandah in order to create permanent spaces inside for drawing, for a creative/construction area, home area and book corner. Diane created an entrance foyer while Cate had been impressed by the separate dining-rooms of Reggio Emilia and the attitude to lunch. *It's a real social time* (3/21/30)*.* Within the constraints of the local context, she had re-created the atmosphere if not the actual permanent space.

She had also, like most of the other teachers been impressed by Reggio Emilian

spaces known as ateliers. Cate saw it as *a room that is just for art and that sort of*

creativity and expressive language and she was particularly drawn to the role of the

atelierista (3/10/19). She rearranged her classroom, and a designated art area was

created *subconsciously; that's the way it worked out* (3/10/30). Diane too reported

that

> *I like the idea of the atelier.* [It] *was almost a combination of a science*
> *room and an art room… I like that idea and that they could, a small group*
> *could go and actually explore their project or develop their project a lot*
> *further in the atelier* (4/7/19).

Hampered by a small room she expressed her concern to manage its spatial

organization and resources to enhance children's creativity and her own (4/6/30).

She started using a verandah for painting and small group work. Emma had been

> *thinking about how the kids in Reggio have the atelier where they can take*
> *all their artwork and stuff and come back to it the next day,*

so created *like a mini-atelier,* to achieve the same thing though it wasn't a separate

space (5/8/30). Emma and Grace reported being influenced to work differently with

art specialists available to them and Diane wanted to do likewise in the future, having

already introduced different art materials to the children and been rewarded with

more detailed work. Helen linked the atelier with aesthetics and accessibility of

materials to children.

> *And also the, how much like an art studio very much, particularly in the*
> *atelier, that it looks like a studio. The paints are visible, the inks are visible*
> *and the clay is visible so that its there and accessible all the time. So it's*
> *certainly, that's influenced the look of my kindergarten at the moment*
> (8/4/19).

Indeed aesthetics and accessibility of materials to children were other influences that

affected the teachers' re-creation of their environments. Helen also reported that she

liked *the plainness of the centres* and their *simple and practical design* (8/4/19) and

thought this was also reflected in *the look* of her classroom environment, in its locally comparative plainness (8/21/30). Grace had *looked very carefully at the aesthetic environment of the centre and uncluttered it* (7/13/30) and Cate's pre-existing desire for her environment *to look nice* has been noted elsewhere. Barbara and Emma shared a concern about the sameness of local early childhood environments. While moving away from the *stock standard stuff,* Emma *deinstitutionalized* her environment and was aiming for *a nice, beautiful, homely environment* (5/8/23) that also incorporated *a country feel because we're on a country property* (5/13/30).

While Frances had cautioned about the 'cut and paste' job of merely duplicating Reggio Emilian environments and had specifically mentioned open shelving in this context, both Barbara and Helen mentioned installing it in their centres, not so much for its aesthetic appeal but for the accessibility it afforded, particularly for art materials. This concern to increase accessibility of materials to children was shared by Frances and Diane, while Cate mentioned that the art area of her room was always accessible to children.

Another aspect of the influence of Reggio Emilia was the concept of the 'environment as teacher'. Four of the participants specifically raised it in connection with environmental change. For Grace the environment was a *prime focus.* She made changes to her environment that were a direct result of having *thought carefully about spaces that educate* (7/2/19) and she reported examining the effects of these changes on children, families and staff. Emma claimed the environments of Reggio Emilia as having *the biggest impact* (5/3/19). She was influenced by the idea of the environment as provocation to learning and included parents and children within this ambit.

> *So I put those questions because part of the environment you know setting up the environment is to provoke children and encourage them to explore and ponder and all that sort of stuff. So those questions are my own questions but I put them up on the wall for parents to ponder and* [to] *provoke parents (513/21).*

Frances had changed *the whole space in which I work, that children come into* (6/12/30). She wanted to make further changes though her preference was to

> *bulldoze and rebuild it. …(It) is really just a renovation. We moved in here and I really then for the first time, really understood about the environment being such an important teacher (6/20/19).*

As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology, the themes outlined above were derived from a deductive analysis, while the following three themes (discussed below) were derived inductively. These themes (with their sub-themes derived from the teachers' actual words) throw additional light on the influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy upon the teacher-participants.

Teaching capable children

This theme reflects participants' views about the teacher's role in teaching and learning, rather than their views about children. Thus, when they referred to ideas such as 'child-centred' or 'child-focused', they were talking about their own teaching. For example, Barbara discussed her music program

> *It's sort of the developmental approach to music, but its very child-centred as well* (2/9/3).

It pre-dated her exposure to Reggio Emilia and was not changed as a result of it.

However, she speculated later in the interview

> *It'll be interesting actually the impact of it into, eventually into my music and things like that, which has not really impacted that much but I'm not really, really structured into music anyway, so maybe it might, it might not. I don't know* (2/27/33).

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In contrast, Diane referred to the concept of child-centredness in explaining the change she made from the use of stereotypical stencils to asking children to depict their own understandings by drawing. *Reggio is so child-centred, you know, look at what the child can do* (4/20/30). Further, Anna clearly attributed to the Reggio Emilian influence her desire to institute a focus on children.

> *… we're not flexible enough, we are not focusing on the interests of the children. We are doing what we think they should be learning (1/7/21).*

From these examples—of one teacher's existing belief, another's changed practice and a third's attribution of Reggio Emilian influence—the variety of sources of these ideas is clarified. This is also the case with the notions of promoting children's 'exploration', 'engagement', 'creativity', 'process not product', and 'working with children's interests'. Throughout the grid (**Appendix N)** there is a smattering of codes that indicate pre-Reggio beliefs (Codes 3, 5 and 27) as well as codes which are indeterminate as either pre- or post-Reggio. Indeed, the only sub-theme that was represented exclusively by codes that indicate pedagogical change—either in belief or practice—is that of "really listening, looking, paying attention or getting awareness". Six of the eight participants are represented in this sub-theme.

However, in aggregate, data indicating pedagogical influence or pedagogical change is more predominant than that relating to existing beliefs and practices (twenty-nine references covering all eight teachers versus ten references across five participants). In sum, the concepts used by the teachers are post-Reggio, in the sense that they have either survived the impact of Reggio Emilian pedagogy or reflect its influence. At the same time, the mix of participants' perceptions indicates the lack of some universal pattern of influence. For some, these ideas about their teaching are connected to philosophical confirmation, for others they are connected to varying degrees and/or targets of change.

The teachers' perceptions of creativity is but one example. Cate perceived that her view about *creativity and expressing that, runs pretty parallel with Reggio* (3/17/5). Helen analyzed her knowledge of various philosophies including that of Reggio Emilia.

> *And what I don't like about Montessori is how lacking in creativity it is. And Steiner I think is very creative but if you really look at Steiner, it's fairly method driven too. Monday's clay day and Tuesday's painting day, I mean that's, although it has a creative aspect. And um, Reggio seems to have taken what I valued in both of them and put them together. And that's why I thought it was very good and why I wanted to see it* (8/33/27).

Emma saw creativity in the context of pre-existing 'truths' that she needed to deal with.

> *And I always believed I could never show them a picture from a story book or help them or draw one myself cause that was hampering their creativity. So that was one truth that really stuck in my mind* (5/4/4).

Taking a different tack, Diane associated creativity with her starting point of changed practice and also with a focus on the future.

> *Things like just giving worksheets to children. Why do we give worksheets to children? They're, it's stifling their creativity. Why don't we get them to do the story map or what ever it might be or the cloze activity? Those kinds of things which are quite simple changes that you can make. Um so those, I guess small, starting small I suppose* (4/1/30).

> *I guess a lot of my research at the moment is how I can make whatever they do um more creative for them, that I can get them having theories and creating their own* (4/6/33).

Thus the picture painted by this grid of 'teaching capable children', reveals three highlights. Firstly, there is a patchwork of ideas, whose sources may or may not be Reggio Emilia, but which are nevertheless influential in the teachers' pedagogies. Moreover, they have been connected by these teachers to their Reggio Emilian experience. Secondly, as these examples illustrate, there is a patchwork of patterns in the creation of connections to Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Thirdly, the ideas are

internally and externally consistent. While the phrase 'teaching capable children' was not used by any participant, it was chosen as the theme's name to highlight the compatibility of all these ideas with each other and their compatibility with the themes of Reggio Emilian influence outlined previously in this chapter. All of these perceptions about teaching and learning are consistent with the notion of teaching capable children and none of them contradict another or are incompatible with Reggio Emilian principles. Further, a check of those concepts or beliefs which were not included in the grid—because they were exclusive to one participant—yielded no contradictions or disconfirming cases.

A stronger role for children

This theme revealed changes to, and desires for, the role of children within the teachers' pedagogies. Three sub-themes featured various combinations of participants and as before, when aggregated, they included all eight teachers (**Appendix O**). The teachers' phrases represented: firstly, an opening of opportunities for children to manoeuvre—'children to have freedom, choice, control or responsibility'; secondly, a place for children to be active participants in learning—'children's initiative, instigation, or pose problems'; and finally, the teachers' sense of partnership with children—'consult, plan with, discuss, make decisions with children'.

While there were references by three participants to pre-existing beliefs about ways of working with children, these were cited as confirmed by their Reggio Emilian experience. Additionally, the overwhelming number of references were attributed to the influence of Reggio Emilia and reflected in examples of changed beliefs and aims for future practice. For these reasons, "a stronger role for children" with its comparative emphasis, was chosen to represent the tenor of this theme overall.

Anna's feelings were confirmed by her Reggio experience, in line with her belief that

> *when you go to Reggio, your ideas and expectations are dependent on your past experiences….my gut feeling always was to have a more relaxed way of being with the children, to have a more unstructured way of being with the children, of having lots of time for the children and for giving children lots of opportunities to make choices* (1/27/5).

Diane had been impressed by, and recounted, her experience of Reggio Emilian children's *responsibility* for classroom chores and for summarizing their learning at the end of the day (4/4/19). She also commented that *when you let go of the learning they take responsibility for it* (4/7/34). Frances believed that post-Reggio, she was *trusting children more* (6/11/4) and saw them as more *powerful* and *in control*, than previously (6/22/4).

Helen's interview encapsulated the pedagogical progression along this dimension related to the teacher's and children's roles. She had existing beliefs confirmed, was provoked by her experience of Reggio Emilia and made certain changes to her beliefs and practice.

> *I think I've always consulted the children and I always would at the end of every term ask the children what they wanted in the program. And I would always say to the children, 'well I've noticed that you were interested in this, would you like to know more about that when we come back from the holidays and I'll see what I can find?' So I would always discuss with the children but I probably do more of it* (8/19/5).

In a description of her working relationship with her assistant, Helen explained her priorities

> *I was very into encouraging children to be very independent before anyway… So I'm assuming that, yeah, that there was this dependency on the teacher and the teacher being the focus and the assistant being the focus, where I'm trying to make her understand that the children are the focus and you're the follower* (8/21/5).

Elsewhere she had noted an influence from Reggio Emilia.

And when I came back I really, really tried to change the way that I questioned or gave information (8/8/30)… and it made me look, also look at some really interesting other situations that occurred. How can I turn this into a learning experience where the children can, um, solve the problem I guess, solve the problem themselves? (8/8/36)

A story told earlier in the interview revealed the extent to which her practice had been affected.

Another time a child put a little glass ball into the fish tank and I probably would have said 'oh well somebody better put their hand in and get it out or I'll put my hand in and get it out'. And I didn't. I said 'how can we get it out without getting our hands wet?' And they spent 3 weeks trying to get this out of the fish tank! (8/9/42)

Here was an amalgam of pre-existing belief in children's independence and the role of the teacher to step back and make the children the focus, combined with a reorientation to questioning and problem-solving, that was entirely compatible with the notion of capable children. Now the teacher's role was to provoke, and provide an opportunity for children to take a stronger role than in the past, for them to control their engagement in problem solving.

More open planning and programming

All the teachers had either changed their practices around programming and planning in some way, or planned to do so, though variously. These changes were made from rather differing starting points and illustrate the creation by the teachers, of a range of connections to their Reggio Emilian experience (see **Appendix P**).

Anna's doubts about her previously regimented, thematic programme, planned half-yearly in advance (1/6/29), were confirmed by her encounter with Reggio Emilian pedagogy as was the directional change she had already taken to a *more flexible* daily routine (1/7/29). Post-Reggio she introduced new recording methods. *Before it's*

what I wanted to do, now they are guiding me (1/22/30). Similarly, Barbara reported a

pre-Reggio change that was extended post-Reggio. She had never worked with

themes, had already eliminated objectives and checklists and worked through a *kind*

of emergent curriculum but without *working through the issues with the children*

(2/3/29). Post-Reggio, there were changes *in my programming, definitely* (2/3/30).

> *…I'm more broad in my, what I write…It's my projects. It's a lot more*
> *general. There'd be an evaluation and then discuss with the children about*
> *this and it would just be pretty open actually* (2/11/30).

Emma arrived at a planning system that encompassed more breadth but also

satisfied a dilemma around the Reggio Emilian exhortation to *'abandon the train*

schedule and use the compass'. She constructed a methodology that both confirmed

existing ideas and built upon them.

> *I'm very reassured now because I now believe from Reggio that it's all*
> *very well to work with progettazione, you know projects and children's*
> *interests but to provide a well balanced curriculum then you must provide*
> *some planning* (5/3/11)… *so you need a direction to start from and go to*
> *and if you go off the beaten track, well that's OK. The kids are taking you*
> *on this journey and that's good. So, that's one thing that, that I've held on*
> *to. But I've changed that too because I don't call it a plan anymore I call it*
> *a projection because its something that could happen it doesn't*
> *necessarily, a plan suggests that it will happen* (5/11/30)*…then I thought*
> *'OK I know what I'm going to do now'. I will do a two-month's projection.*
> *That will satisfy our Victorian regulations and I will also do a plan*
> (5/12/30)*.*

In relation to this theme, Frances and Grace both referred to changed practices

> *I have moved out of that sort of boxing of things. I'm more interested in*
> *what happens and talking about it after it happens and thinking about*
> *where it might go, rather than pre-planning things* (6/11/30).

> *So it's just very open. There's a dozen ways of doing anything on that list*
> *and much freedom if the person who's working with it to take up, or you*
> *know. If you're wanting prescriptive things which my young assistant is*
> *always wanting, you won't find them and that's frustrating for her. So*
> *everyone is learning as they're going… But I have to leave it open enough*
> *to weave another web, if I need to, if I need to put another little ribbon*
> *through I need to have it open enough to do that* (7/31/30).

Cate changed her programming documents to accommodate children's interests (3/18/30) and Helen wanted to make a change to incorporate projects (8/22/30). Both Diane and Helen also looked at this issue more broadly. Helen's attitude was revealed in her analysis of other centres' practices.

> *And even the centres that have been influenced by Reggio are all doing the beach and the sea, right at this minute. And you think, 'is there a curriculum or isn't there a curriculum in kindergarten? (8/20/34)*

Diane's views emerged from her analysis of the philosophies of specific curriculum frameworks. She had been impressed in Reggio Emilia by the use of *broad objectives* (4/10/19), a *three-pronged approach to planning* (4/9/19) and the practice of *sitting down with the children and planning the day* (4/8/19). In two long passages in the interview, Diane reveals the process of building on these impressions and other perceived connections to Reggio Emilian pedagogy. She compared her experience of the Early Literacy In-Service Course (ELIC) and her literacy work, with her four years of knowledge generated from trying an Integrated Studies approach, and with her experience of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Earlier, she had discussed the superficiality of themes versus the spiral effect of integrating and went on

> *…but it's quite broad as Reggio Emilia is and it's also one of those things which is adaptable and adoptable and flexible and very much up to individual teachers and also up to the children as well and they are very much involved in the decision making process you know, …that there are these big ideas about the world and ourselves and so the units of work that you do should be based on those big ideas … it's very much the big ideas of Reggio Emilia too… It's interesting coming back from Reggio Emilia and knowing the Integrated Studies work (4/15/27).*

> *But ELIC was you know going from this whole to the more specific, in retrospect, you ensure that learning took place in context… Everything was in context and to me Reggio, Integrated Studies is, and Reggio is very similar to that idea and seems to match what we are trying to do in literacy you know, its very, very similar ideas to Reggio Emilia. So when Reggio Emilia came along… this was saying everything that ELIC was saying about how children learned language (4/30/27).*

These examples once again illustrate the variation around a common theme, among the eight teachers. Indeed, this is the case for all the themes presented above. Consistency and pattern are discernible only at the broader level—across all the themes—while within each theme there is a variety of views represented and consistent inconsistency! Thus there are similarities in the kind of ideas incorporated from Reggio Emilia but differences in the process of connecting these ideas to each person's existing philosophical stances. Beliefs were added, confirmed, consolidated or discarded; practice affirmed, re-oriented, expanded or abandoned. Yet within this set of possibilities, no teacher reiterated the same pathway consistently, rather, each teacher traded across them.

Thus, for all the teachers, a broad pattern is discernible in their creation of connection between Reggio Emilian influence and existing pedagogy but for each teacher experiencing the tug and pull of Reggio's philosophical currents, a response was created differently (albeit with sometime consistency from each or occasional consistency of individual pattern across all eight). From a common set of incorporated influences, these teachers re-created individual, pedagogical meaning.

Summary

Where the previous chapter illustrated the teachers' attitudes to Reggio Emilian influence, this chapter has revealed its nature, as well as the teachers' philosophical and practical responses to it. It began with the theme of 'aesthetics', revealing the universal nature of the impression made upon all eight teachers. The remaining themes, derived as they were, from more than one code, revealed not only the commonality of Reggio Emilian influence but also the variety in the types of

connections created by the teachers, between these influences and their own existing ideas and practices.

The findings presented through these themes of influence reveal several sources of variation. Firstly, there were differences in the teachers' perceptions of confirmation, consolidation or change in relation to ideas about children's capabilities. Secondly, there was variety in emphases around social learning. Thirdly, there were differing rationales for choices pertaining to documenting, to parents and to the environment, and the recognition by some teachers of non-Reggio rationales for their post-Reggio actions. Finally, there were certain absent or exceptional voices. Additionally, with the inclusion of the final three themes—'teaching capable children', 'a stronger role for children' and 'more open planning and programming'—in the mix of influences, the chapter provides some insight into the ebb and flow of the interaction of existing beliefs with Reggio Emilian pedagogy, of the process of blending new ideas with old and of consolidating and re-orienting ideas and practices through the incorporation of Reggio Emilian influences. In short, this chapter has revealed some of the workings of the teachers' re-creation of their pedagogies.

While this chapter has confined itself to influences from Reggio Emilian pedagogy, there are within its themes, hints of other influences at work. For example, local considerations, as well as Reggio Emilian influences, figured in the teachers' alterations of their environments. The next chapter will explore these other influences. It will commence with an examination of the teachers' considerations of context while assuming that context is a broader concept than place. It will examine three major arenas that mediated the impact and influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy in the teachers' reconstruction of their own.

CHAPTER 7

RELEVANCE TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Previous chapters have outlined the eight teachers' reactions to their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy and their perceptions of its influences on their thinking and practices. It was noted earlier that they took an unequivocal stance against replication and characterized themselves as being engaged in an alternative process. This chapter adds weight to this characterization. The themes that are acknowledged here, emerged from the data covering the participants' comparisons and analyses of their own and Reggio Emilian contexts, their perceptions about the visibility and feedback generated by their changes, as well as their ideas for the future. Moreover, additional data, that arose spontaneously within the interviews and were coded as 'self-analysis', constitute another important aspect of the individualized contexts within which these teachers operated.

This chapter takes the view that context is a broader concept than place. The teachers were not making changes in a social, political or cultural vacuum. They were not working alone. They were receiving feedback from various quarters and they were self-referential about their efforts. This chapter reveals that rather than ignoring these aspects of their contexts as irrelevant to their project, the teachers were prompted to reconsider and reconnect with them and in so doing, ventured both inward and outward, and far beyond their classrooms. The similarities and differences in their considerations and reconsiderations will be outlined here, around four major themes of teaching in context: a) the cultural; b) the political; c) the social and; d) the self. This chapter concludes the research findings and the chapter to

follow will argue the significance of the patterns the findings contain and draw conclusions based in them. (Given the subject matter of this chapter, the reader may be assisted by the notes in **Appendix S** which briefly describe the nature of the eight teachers' early childhood workplaces.)

The teachers were asked to compare their own working contexts with those of Reggio Emilian centres. Their responses covered a range of issues and influences and included effects on children, teachers and teaching practice. Their thinking, across the four themes outlined below was characterized by diversity of opinion and conclusion, although along with contrast in participant opinion, correlation did occur.

Teaching in a Cultural Context

The participants engaged to a greater or lesser extent across a number of sub-themes (see **Appendix T**) dealing with issues of culture and cultural difference, though no single sub-theme captured the attention of all.

Culture as question

Some teachers raised the issue of culture as a question. Barbara stated that she had started thinking *…what is our culture?* (2/22/10). Helen had observed this phenomenon adding *and everybody starts looking for it!* (8/29/10). Grace related the issue of culture to influences *from America really* on early childhood education in Australia.

> *…we hadn't valued the history of our own country and our own place…and not really given a lot of thought to our own particular interests and well our own particular environment* (7/2/10).

Cultural diversity

Surprisingly, only half the teachers referred to the issue of cultural diversity in a consideration of contextual difference. Where they did so, the references were positive and covered either the staff of their own centres or the broader Australian society-wide canvas or both. Barbara thought *here is so multicultural* and referred to the diversity of backgrounds of staff members and their input into her centre (2/22/10). Cate also raised diversity on both levels adding that *you have to cover and cater for everybody's different beliefs and values, etcetera* (3/15/9). Helen thought that the Italian as well as other cultures had influenced the *ordinary and bland society* of her girlhood and had *made our society much richer* (8/28/10). Anna saw *this tremendous multicultural setting which offers so much* and the contribution of staff members, who *all come from different parts of the world*, as *so special and so unique about us* and something to preserve (1/16/9).

Influences on children

Several teachers speculated about influences and effects on children. Anna thought the children of Reggio were *better behaved, more disciplined,* while *our children* were seen as more *unruly* and having *more freedom* (1/18/9). Diane commented on the depth of children's thought, noting *our children are quite superficial* (4/10/10) *like 'de-de-ding, I'm done' kind of thing* (4/24/10). She attributed this in part to the system of fractured curriculum and timetabling as well as pressure on children to finish and move on (4/24/10).

> *We don't encourage children to reflect…nor are teachers given the time to reflect on learning and children. It is on to the next test or meeting* (4/11/10).

This analysis was echoed by Helen.

>*...our children need instant gratification for most things they do. It has to be here and now and they get distressed if it's time for lunch and it's not finished* (8/17/10).

Both Diane and Helen believed that the depth of children's thought and expression was influenced by a Reggio Emilian culture of discussion between the generations, lacking here (4/10/9; 8/29/9). Helen believed that *there's not this wonderful discussion between the children about things,* and here, *teachers see themselves as being the focus* (8/27/9). She also thought that children in Australia lacked four years experience of collaboration (8/26/10). On the other hand, she thought Australian children were practical and imaginative thinkers.

>*…what I learned from the children when I came back from Reggio Emilia is that our culture and our way of thinking is like fixing tractors with rubber bands...I've seen a lot of that sort of thinking from the children…*(8/29/10).

Frances had also reflected on perceived cultural differences and their effects on the children. She noted that by the time her group comes to pre-school at three years old

>*…already they are very much attuned to the society of the individual and answering questions. At three they're probably learning ballet and swimming and they're about to take up tennis and the violin. So they're already performing…performing for their parents, doing 'the right thing' being the mould that they would like them to be. And you know, I'm a parent like that too and I understand that very well* (6/15/9).

Frances' focus on family contrasted with Diane's and Helen's attention to local aspects of educational organizational systems. Such a wide range in participants' attribution of local cultural influences on children continued into their considerations of community.

Notions of community

Ideas of cultural difference also emerged around notions of community. Several of the teachers had been impressed by the sense of community they perceived as part of their experience of Reggio Emilia and were prompted to reconsider it at home.

Emma thought that *a lot of our community systems have broken down,* and that *a lot of people think about community service as something we do instead of going to jail* (5/31/10). Where Helen was attracted to the aspect of social democracy (8/6/19), Frances found it discomforting and *quite alien to the way in which we worked here* (6/8/9). Grace referred to differences in parents' mobility, family structures and lifestyle. She saw the relative absence of networks among parents in her centre, as an opportunity to provide assistance for parents to create them (7/24/9)—an opportunity that Anna perceived and acted upon as well. In contrast, Cate thought the level of community involvement in Reggio Emilian services *unrealistic here …you couldn't even dream of it happening here* (3/15/9). On a broader note, Helen had not only noticed the sense of community in Reggio Emilia but she had been impressed by a pervasive sense of respect within it. This prompted localized remarks about a perceived, society-wide lack of respect between the generations with consequences for local parenting practices and skills, which were exacerbated by the *incredibly materialistic* nature of the local culture. However, she also thought *we are eternal optimists in Australia* (8/29/10).

The Outdoors

Another major socio-cultural sub-theme centred on the outdoors. Six of the interviewees referred to its place in their local early childhood programs and significantly, none of the eight raised it as a negative. Emma summed it up.

> *… they love going outside…I think it's a cultural thing. …And so they* [in Reggio Emilia] *don't have those fantastic playgrounds and I was thinking that these kids are very industrious and very serious and do spend all morning working on things because they don't have the option to go outside* (5/32/10).

She wondered about the effects on project work if her children likewise did not have the option to play outdoors. Frances' view about the outdoors in Reggio Emilia was even stronger.

> *I felt they were cocooned within the centre once they were in it. It was like a fabulous jail that you couldn't get out of, but I quite like our attitude to outdoors and our feeling of openness and space….so what we had to do was try and make it like that everywhere* [in the centre] (6/14/9).

Cate thought the Italian winter meant *they can't have an outdoor time as much as we do* (3/14/9). While Barbara wasn't sure, she felt there wasn't a big focus on the outside environment in Reggio Emilian centres (2/23/9) and regarded the outdoors of her own centre as a great asset, while Grace had rethought how to better utilize the centre's extensive verandahs. Likewise Anna appreciated the *quite different* context of doing *lots of things outside as compared to inside…and I wouldn't want to change it, you know.* She declared w*e are an outdoor country* (1/17/9). With Frances, she shared the view that children should be outdoors and out of the centre, going on lots of excursions.

In contrast to the other six teachers' considerations of their cultural contexts, Frances and Anna both saw negatives in Reggio Emilian centres in their comparisons. Additionally, they both added to the outdooors sub-theme, local elements they wanted to keep. Both thought of Australia as more relaxed. Anna perceived *a different emphasis* in Reggio Emilia with an absence of *singing and dancing and stories,* while Frances *just didn't feel there was a nurturing warmth.* She wanted to keep a priority on laughter and enjoyment (6/9/9) while Anna wanted to preserve the *music and yeah, sunshine, in the whole atmosphere* of her centre (1/17/9).

The above examples attest to a universal reconsideration by the teachers of their own cultural contexts. Two aspects stand out. Firstly, there is wide variation in their

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preoccupations and opinions and secondly, their conclusions (also varied) are largely pedagogical in nature—identifying effects on children of cultural differences and/or aspects of their local programs worth preserving.

Teaching in a Political Context

All the teachers also made connections to socio-political influences operating in their local contexts. They referenced the effects of two major government functions—the resourcing and regulation of early childhood settings. Again, there was a diversity of views.

Resourcing

Grace compared her school favourably with the well-resourced nature of Reggio Emilian centres. Referring to the *interested and quite devoted teachers,* as well as the *very wealthy community*, she

> *came back thinking there are many aspects of the contexts that I'm working in that are similar. The parents are interested. The environment is aesthetic although different and the resources are there* (7/23/9).

The others, however all thought there was a comparative lack of support in relation to resources they worked with. Frances and Diane wanted more space and staff, others wished for more staff or other assistance to help specifically with documentation or environmental change, while most complained of relative underfunding. Cate, Diane, Emma and Helen all felt that funding for early childhood was more of a priority in Reggio Emilia. Emma thought the Australian government had used its funding mechanisms to hand the *responsibility of child care away from the community and back to individuals* (5/21/10). Diane's desire for a shift in funding priorities from the end to the beginning of education (4/36/44) was echoed in Helen's analogy—

> [If] *education was a tree, Reggio Emilia knew how to feed the roots* [but] *in Australia we throw everything at the leaves* (8/27/10).

Helen wanted change in resourcing priorities and Diane thought this required being *more political.* There were other calls for change. Cate was worried by the prevalence of a one-day-per-week attendance pattern and wanted fee structures altered to affect children's attendance and well-being (3/22/10). Helen wanted responsibility for early childhood services to be transferred to education departments as a necessary step in altering community and government perceptions of a dichotomy between education and care and in fostering perceptions that education begins at birth (8/24/10).

Regulatory frameworks

Helen's comments allude to the social impact of certain historical differences within Australia of government influence in early childhood, particularly through its frameworks of statutory regulation. These frameworks vary, not only across states but more significantly across schools, pre-schools and child care centres. Thus, the teachers in the before-school sector are bound by the various state government-based licensing regulations and in child care by the federal government's Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). In schools, teachers work within mandated state-based curriculum standards frameworks. It should be noted also, that at the time of interview, some of the Victorian teachers who were working in the pre-school sections of schools, reported dealing with new conditions attached to recently introduced, government funding for their pre-schools. Thus, while perceptions about their respective regulatory frameworks were a feature of all the interviews, unsurprisingly, these perceptions also varied.

Both Anna and Cate commented on the Federal QIAS standards for child care. Anna related *a very positive experience* of self evaluation for her centre (1/19/11) and Cate

thought the principles *really good,* but she also believed that the system was flawed.

She thought it allowed standards that were too low.

> *You should be at the highest standard but that should be the basic….to say you got the basic—to me you're not doing enough, you're not, you're not doing enough…*(3/24/10).

Diane and Grace both saw the State regulatory frameworks of schooling as an unwelcome imposition in early childhood education. Diane thought the number of expected outcomes was *just ridiculous* (4/13/10) and fed primary teachers' unwarranted but

> *great concern…that following children's interests would leave great gaps in their learning* (4/3/10).

Grace held the curriculum standards responsible for skewing primary teachers' image of the children (7/10/10). She wanted

> *a more humane system of educating…communities that are looking at the social dimension and what is happening to children...* [rather than] *the expectations of measurement and government expectations that you'll meet certain standards* (7/30/10).

Across all early childhood sectors, regulatory frameworks were perceived as restrictive and were variously condemned. Barbara, Cate and Diane took issue with the requirements around setting objectives for children, as too narrow or too specific. Helen, Grace and Frances perceived restrictions in schools on teachers' roles, caused by a requirement for children to be supervised by early childhood trained staff, while Emma thought the supervisory requirements restricted children's right to privacy. Grace and Helen felt confined in the space with children, unable to engage in physically separated small group work. Cate wanted some restrictions on leaving the premises with a child, to go to the bin for example, to be *lightened up just a little bit* (3/25/10). Frances thought excursions were difficult and Helen believed she was

prevented from operating a simultaneous indoor/outdoor program. In reference to the

comparative management of 'risk' in Reggio Emilia and locally, Cate

> *thought there was a couple of things that just wouldn't work in our* [regulatory] *climate…. If* [the regulator] *walked in and saw that, I think they'd have a heart attack* (3/14/9).

Emma and Frances both worked their respective versions of more open planning

around a perceived regulatory demand for a weekly program in advance.

> *But we managed to get around that. We're in the process of working out how to plan to make them* [the regulator] *happy but plan to make it useful for us* (6/12/10).

Additionally, some of the teachers expressed views about their restrictive regulatory

frameworks on a broader socio-political canvas. For example, Helen strenuously

objected to the regulatory body's perceived role in dichotomizing care and education

while others indicated that the frameworks of their own contexts exemplified social

attitudes to children. Frances thought they were

> *one of many elements in society* [that] *is making life more difficult and more restrictive, in the sense of the relationship between a teacher and a child. Every year it seems to get more protected, more cocooned and more cotton-woolled* (6/13/10).

Anna believed that

> *our society sees the child as a child with needs—the child is totally incapable—I guess that's why we have all these high fences everywhere around child care centres. In Reggio I didn't see that anywhere. You know their expectations are totally different* (1/21/10).

Helen had similar thoughts about mandated fences and compulsory constant

supervision. *I think that they teach trust and we teach mistrust to our children*

(8/12/10). Grace was particularly concerned about the pressures placed on children

and by a *push down* curriculum operating in early childhood (7/23/10) and Diane

thought the Australian community's thinking about its children needed to change

(4/36/44).

While the diversity of their own regulatory contexts could explain some of the above cited differences among the teachers' perceptions, it masks their universal attitude to the restrictive nature of these frameworks. Yet they held various rationales for their views. Thus their experience of Reggio Emilia prompted individual reappraisal of local socio-political influences on their own practice, on children and on local education.

Teaching in a Social Context

The third major theme of 'teaching in context' concerned the teachers' ideas and post-Reggio analyses of the social factors influential in their work. The teachers' social context included the staff they worked alongside in their classrooms, (excluding Diane to whom this does not apply) fellow teachers and staff members who worked in other classrooms, management personnel in their schools and centres, parents and of course, children. It should be noted that while all the teachers dealt with colleagues, five of the teachers in this study had middle management responsibility as Directors of pre-schools or centres (see **Appendix S**).

Three major social sub-themes emerged in the teachers' consideration of social context. The teachers firstly, made a variety of comments on the working relationships in their own rooms and schools/centres and on perceived staff responses to change. Secondly, they universally expressed a desire for greater collaboration. The third sub-theme arose from questions about the visibility of changes made and concerns the feedback the participants encountered from various quarters. While Diane was the only teacher working solitarily with a group of children and she thus did not cover the related ground, she joined the others in thinking about issues of collegiality and in considering feedback about their work.

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Working with staff

Post-Reggio working relationships exercised the minds of all the teachers. No one reported completely smooth sailing but the degree of difficulty in working through changes with staff members varied along with the nature and focus of the teachers' comments.

Anna, the sole teacher in her centre, thought she *already had a great team,* who were *working really beautifully together* (1/18/44)*.* They were *really interested in Reggio Emilia* and had attended an in-service about it together (1/3/16). She did have one staff member who *found it difficult not to stick to this regimented thing,* yet Anna had successfully introduced changes and felt that the staff was *all sharing this interest* (1/7/16). She wished they could all go to Reggio Emilia together (1/18/44).

Barbara's experience ran counter to this. Although similarly, she perceived some misgivings from staff members, unlike Anna, she did have a teacher-colleague in her centre but Barbara did not share Anna's sense of working in a team. She perceived unwillingness, fear and conflicting views from her fellow teacher, *she's very into negatives—you know, what a child can't do* (2/14/16). She was also unsure of her own classroom staff and mused that they probably found the changes threatening. She hoped that a coming change of staff would bring a new teacher-colleague with *a passion for teaching* (2/15/44).

Cate reported *support and praise and encouragement from other team members* and thought they were either open-minded and watching her efforts (3/20/16). Diane noted her isolation as a grade teacher in a school. She described at length, her current and former workplaces and their organizational cultures that encouraged or

discouraged exchange of ideas and teachers' input in decision making. She missed

the previous *open group of people,* whom she described as very interested and keen

professionally, *and a great team to work with* (4/32/11). Emma experienced interest

from visitors and some colleagues but resistance from others. She theorized about

some teachers' unwillingness to deviate from past practices.

> *I think that a lot of teachers rather than assimilating and accommodating*
> *what they're learning, think that it all has to go out and something new has*
> *to come in* (5/10/16).

Frances thought there was great camaraderie among staff in her centre, although

she also believed that untrained staff had difficulty appreciating and contributing to

the educational value of their program. *I think sometimes they think it's all a lot of*

baloney! (6/18/16). Grace encountered philosophical differences among staff

members that both pre-dated and post-dated a joint experience of the Reggio

exhibition. Her classroom *staff took no notice, they didn't engage in anything* (7/9/16).

Additionally, Grace reported three reactions from her colleagues in the wider school,

after she had given a presentation on her Reggio Emilia experience. It was seen

variously as a 'seven day wonder', something that had been done already, or

something with possibilities that a few teachers pursued (7/10/16). Yet three years

on, Grace believes that some suggestions have been taken up, there has been

rethinking of *the ways we work* and some major changes have occurred (7/17/16;

7/21/12). Helen felt her colleagues' substantive interest was limited to one teacher,

while the others had 'to get back to the curriculum' (8/13/16).

There were other concerns expressed. Training was an issue for half the teachers—

interestingly, those of the eight who worked in the pre-school sections of schools.

Emma and Frances shared the view that training was essential for people to work

with children. Where Frances thought they needed a *solid background in child*

studies (6/18/10), Emma believed children *need qualified people with them that*

recognize how to challenge them to their fullest potential (5/21/26). Grace expressed

her desire to work with qualified staff,

> *so that they've got some understanding of development and some interest*
> *in ways in which children learn* (7/20/44).

Helen wanted to change her state's current training system of separated courses and

institutions for *child care, kindergarten and early primary*, on the basis that

> *the people who get the least information are the ones who work with*
> *babies… and they need the most!* (8/34/44).

Expressing ideas as desires was not confined to Grace and Helen in regard to

training. The second sub-theme from the data about working contexts emerged from

the codes related to the teachers' thoughts about the future.

Working collaboratively

All the teachers wanted more collaborative working relationships, irrespective of their

own position in the management structure. As a corollary of this desire, many of the

teachers also expressed a sense of isolation at work and alternatively or additionally,

discussed their attitudes to conflict and its place in their own contexts.

Helen had recently changed workplaces and working collaboratively was one of the

reasons for her choice.

> *I thought that probably it would be good to go and see what it would be*
> *like to be part of a team that were all trying to work collaboratively…[that]*
> *were all headed in the same direction* (8/14/26).

She also thought more broadly about collaborative work. She wanted pre-school and

primary teachers to learn from each other*….a bit of overlap there would be wonderful*

because they both have something to offer each other (8/28/44) and she wanted a

training regime where *there wouldn't be this hierarchy thing then, it would all be more collaborative* (8/34/44).

Grace was one of the teachers who remarked on her isolation, in terms of having an early childhood outlook. *There's only me in the entire school* (7/23/9). She wanted to establish more networks for discussion

> *I'm finding that I need to have someone with me who understands, who I can talk with, who's had similar experiences to me. I find that I'm isolated and I'm very aware of the wonderful dialogue that occurs in some schools where there are two kindergarten teachers…*(7/19/44).

Grace had attempted to work with her classroom staff member *in a collaborative way* but found it *very difficult …we have very little common ground* (7/20/11). Yet at the level of the whole school her experience was different.

> *It's also been useful for staff because when you're working in a team of people, for us to be able to compare the ways in which we work and to see the diversity amongst us creates an enrichment, not a depletion, not a conflict* (7/21/12).

Like Anna, Frances wished to be able to take the whole staff to Reggio Emilia together and was pleased to gain Helen as a staff member as she would no longer be the only person in the centre who had been to Reggio Emilia. She would now have someone else to talk to.

> *…its really important here to have another person and we can get stronger and better and deeper into things, now that we've got another person on board. We really need another person* (6/17/23).

Frances stated clearly that after visiting Reggio Emilia, she had been thinking about leadership and change. She thought of achieving change as a *democratic process* where compromise occurred for the sake of *harmony*. She described her leadership as a *dripping tap syndrome* (6/17/12) of persisting with incremental changes over a long period. She thought that as a team *we're very much at pains not to raise our voices or be that volatile* (6/10/10). Yet with likeminded and trusted colleagues who

were also exploring the impact of Reggio Emilia in their own centres, she felt

differently.

> *that's a nice feeling, to feel comfortable with each other to be able to argue about it* (6/27/10).

Frances linked *that sense of trust* with isolation, describing it as

> *rather a nice feeling, because you're not so lonely any more. And I think teaching can be a very lonely experience* (6/27/10).

Emma wanted time to *collaborate more with staff* (5/32/44) and valued the

differences of opinion that art teachers brought to working with children. She also

declared

> *… that's something that Reggio's made me realize about our culture. You know, that we don't like to be confrontational and tend to avoid it* (5/32/10).

Diane's isolation and desire for collaboration were clear and came up more than

once through the interview. She lamented the absence of meetings in her workplace

and found it *very difficult not to talk to anyone at my own school about it* (4/12/9). She

thought that *good teaching should be about talking to colleagues about what you're*

doing (4/23/26). In fact, *even to talk to two other teachers or three other teachers* was

described as *my deepest wish* (4/28/44). She valued Reggio Emilia for its openness

and sharing of ideas and described her own context as *very, very different to Reggio*

Emilia where discussion and debate are welcomed. (4/33/9) She harked back to the

national, now defunct ELIC program.

> *And it opened up classrooms enormously. You know, teachers were talking to one anther and going in and looking at what they were doing, but then* [at the end of the program] *everyone went back to their classrooms and closed their doors…and maybe Reggio is going to start that going again* (4/35/9).

Diane was also ambivalent about conflict. She held to the view that learning and

change required *an element of conflict* and had been impressed by the Reggio

Emilian educators' attitude to it but she was unsure about what she believed about its place in her own context (4/22/9). While she ascribed a tendency *to shy away from conflict* as a *cultural thing*, she also held that being in *direct conflict* with people who believe and work differently was *not going to help anybody* (4/34/10). So she was *not sure* [this] *is the way to go in our culture* (4/23/33).

Cate wanted discussion in team meetings, *to toss around ideas with other staff—I think I would really like to encourage that.* She thought of meetings as an opportunity to not only share ideas and information but to give and receive help (3/21/33). Cate expressed her sense of isolation in terms of being undervalued in the larger community.

Community support was also important to Barbara who contrasted the level of support for teachers in Reggio Emilia with her own relative isolation. She believed that the support structures that had evolved in Reggio Emilia had not had time to develop here.

> *The isolation is my biggest problem I feel and that's why I trudge myself over* [to RE-Search network meeting] *once a month and that's wonderful* (2/21/35).

She also had experienced some conflict with some staff members over the environment changes (2/6/16). Yet she was not discouraged, planning to bring more focus to the discussion in meetings and to keep debate over the centre's philosophy going (2/16/44). She wanted time for debate, and also to discuss, record and revisit issues with staff (2/31/44).

Due to the size of her centre, Anna, unlike the other teachers in this study, did not have a broader group of colleagues with which she worked, apart from her immediate

team. Thus, Anna's comments were not as explicit as the others on this issue. However, as outlined above she considered she had a well functioning team that had taken time to work together through the QIAS principles and process. She wanted to take her team to Reggio Emilia together and she had also continued contact with other Reggio-inspired teachers.

It is not surprising that these teachers would express hopes for collaborative working relationships, since all were recruited as participants for the study from Reggio Emilia RE-Search network groups. Most of them were explicit about the importance of these groups. Grace stated the case for many who returned from Reggio Emilia….*we've all felt the need to talk to one another* (7/2/35). Barbara found it *really supportive* (2/15/35) and Emma went even further.

> *If I hadn't been going to that group I reckon I could almost have given up on what I'd seen* (5/7/35).

Frances believed

> *you need those people to keep talking to, you know, and keep rethinking 'is this really what it meant?'* (6/16/35).

Both Diane and Grace had visited Reggio Emilia with a colleague. Diane described this experience as *great* and the group as *fantastic* (4/2/35). Anna and Frances have regular contact with others who shared in their visits (apart from the RE-Search meetings) and likewise Emma and Grace were keen to discuss aspects of their own work with people who had experience, rather than beginners, in exploring the principles of Reggio Emilia through their own practice. Barbara described it as being

> *interested in other people's ideas and where they're going and their interpretations and things like this* (2/19/35)*.*

The above discussion illustrates the varied nature of the teachers' deliberations about the social context of their work in the light of post-Reggio changes. Working

relationships were obviously important to them. There was a range of positive and negative perceptions about their experiences of working with others through pedagogical change, yet the desire for collaboration was universal. A sense of professional isolation could explain it but Emma, Anna and Helen did not refer to feeling isolated. Moreover, their perceptions about the role of conflict in Reggio Emilian pedagogy, their own workplaces and professional networks varied significantly. Although Grace was positive, a number of other participants were ambivalent about its local relevance, while Frances' attitude at work, differed to that in her RE-Search network group. While some clearly wanted to build more collaborative relationships with staff, they all desired and sought out collaborative pedagogical companionship with the like-minded.

Feedback

All the teachers in this study, in answer to a question about the visibility of the changes they had made, reported receiving feedback from some or all of various sources. These sources comprised the children, parents, management and as detailed above, workplace colleagues. This feedback was an additional and/or different element in their social context, consequent to the practice changes they instituted.

Children

The participants' perceptions of the responses of children were described in various levels of generality. Grace was not sure about children, believing that they *take their situation for granted* (7/19/14) while other interviewees cited specific examples of children's behaviour. Emma reported children looking at and discussing photos. Cate said they were revisiting documentation of the investigations and responding to the

respect shown by staff, to their work and to the room (3/19/14). Diane thought

children were discussing more school topics at home, displaying *an excitement about*

learning as a response *to being listened to more* (4/27/14). Barbara referred to work

coming in from home and children debating more with each other (2/7/14). Helen

observed the children's increasing observation skills, while both she and Diane

believed that children were producing much more detailed work (8/10/14; 4/11/12).

There were also more generalized analyses. Frances thought the children were

taking more pride in their work (6/23/14). Helen believed there was a huge difference

in their thinking (8/10/14). Anna saw increased engagement and more harmony

among the children (1/12/14), an observation echoed by Frances who perceived less

conflict and more self motivation (6/23/14).

Parents

All of the teachers perceived that at least some of the parents responded positively to

their efforts in increasing communication or changing the way they worked with

children. (The rationales for these efforts and the nature of the parent-school/centre

relationship were included in the previous chapter.) Parent responses varied, but

included showing interest by reading documentation or taking it home, by coming into

the classroom, or by asking for more of something. Anna reported that parents

wanted more of the breakfast social events the centre had staged (1/15/15) while

Cate and Diane had parents asking for their children to be placed with teachers who

were working this way (3/10/15; 4/34/15).

Most of the interviewees also mentioned parent initiatives connected with the

teaching practices they were observing in their children's classrooms. These varied

somewhat. There was mention of parents photocopying material (2/26/15); following

up discussions at home (4/27/15); bringing extra work back into the classroom (2/7/15; 4/27/15); asking questions (5/24/15); offering to pay for photographs (3/5/15); using strategies at home that were used at school (2/7/15), making an end-of-year class book for their children's teacher (4/27/15); participating in projects (5/29/15; 7/8/15); being involved in learning (7/17/15); and vouching for the program to other parents (5/22/15).

Some of the teachers also interpreted the parents' responses. After making a presentation to parents about her work and the influence of Reggio Emiia, Helen felt that these parents were *really, really enthusiastic…very, very supportive and very keen* (8/12/15). Frances thought that parents *are more amazed by children and what they're doing than I think they were before* (6/23/15). She also thought that this was due in part to engaging with the visual aspects of Reggio Emilian work—*they immediately seem to understand more deeply* (6/5/15).

Others also saw as important the link between visual documenting and positive parental response. For Cate, her early efforts of photo observations were something concrete (3/5/15). Diane believed parents were seeing their children's own work rather than a standardised worksheet (4/26/15). Barbara felt that parents *see the academic coming through the projects* (2/27/15) and Cate thought that those parents who asked for their children to be placed with her did so *because they could see the work* (3/10/15). Additionally, Diane thought that her presentation to parents about her interest in learning and exploring Reggio Emilian ideas may have contributed to their eagerness to ask questions and learn. She also thought that some parents had had previous positive experiences of *Reggio kindergartens* (4/24/15).

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None of the teachers claimed that these parental responses came from all parents. They all acknowledged that these responses and initiatives came from pockets of parents. Additionally some of the teachers expressed some misgivings about parent responses and/or attitudes in their interviews. Cate believed that while parents were giving her feedback (3/19/15) they *don't always* do so *or* [say] *thank you* (3/26/15). She expressed a desire for parental and broader social recognition of the professionalism of her work with children (3/3/15). Grace referred to her long experience of parental focus on the individual.

> *Year in and year out I get parents that come in with only their own child in view…* (7/12/15).

Helen had a similar view about parents' focus on their own children. She also expressed strong misgivings about parental understandings of early learning and about parenting styles.

> *…they will spend lots and lots of money on their education but virtually do nothing with them themselves* (3/24/15).

Such misgivings notwithstanding, the teachers' consistent view, was of positive feedback from parents attributed to better visual communication about their Reggio-inspired efforts with children.

Management

The only universally experienced aspect of feedback from management was non-interference in classroom changes. Irrespective of an interviewee's status within the management structure of their centres/schools, they were all given professional autonomy in their classrooms. Additionally, they experienced various degrees of support from above and of encouragement to be influential within their organizations.

The status quo proved limiting for Diane who wanted to extend her practice with parents but had to be subversive in doing so and was quite frustrated by management's lack of support for collegiality. In contrast, Cate and Emma were given opportunities and encouragement to communicate changed practices and Reggio Emilian ideas to other staff in their respective organizations. Indeed when Emma's service expanded, management assisted her to choose staff with compatible approaches to pedagogy and Cate's planning innovations were promoted in other centres in the organization. While Barbara's efforts were not opposed and indeed she felt supported in her endeavours, she was enjoined not to mention Reggio Emilia any more, due to the discomfort of her counterpart in the organization. Grace reported on practices such as 'multiage grouping' and 'integrated studies' that had been post-Reggio proposals taken up by management and practiced more widely in the organization. Anna's transcript was silent about management attitudes though practice changes had been made. Occupying a middle management role seemed immaterial to the support the teachers received or the influence they wielded. What mattered, were respect for academic freedom within limits, and a match between the open-mindedness of management and the enthusiasm of these teachers.

The self in teaching

The final theme of this chapter came unsolicited from the interviews. The teachers all made some kind of connection to the self in their teaching, despite the fact that no question in the interview schedule sought to enter this territory. Additionally a deliberate choice had been made not to seek background data from the interviewees. The closest the questioning came to this theme concerned the interviewee's feelings toward their Reggio Emilia experience.

A wide range of ideas was expressed within this theme. The statements the teachers made reveal perceptions about their personality, interests, feelings, personal qualities, personal history, professional history and/or themselves as learners and teachers. The nature of these personal references and the links the teachers made varied across participants. They made personal connections to their encounter with Reggio Emilia, to Reggio Emilian ideas, to their changed or confirmed beliefs and/or to previous or current practice. In one of these ways or another, they all seemed to be embedding their experience of Reggio Emilia and their pedagogical ideas within some sense of self. The expression of feeling and the strong terminology described previously, as part of the teachers' response to their exposure, is echoed here.

Anna made several mentions of *gut feelings.* Her experience of Reggio Emilia connected to *what my real deep gut feelings are saying* (1/20/23). She thought the personal was important in understanding Reggio Emilia.

> *…your own personal experiences, your previous experiences in life, when you go to Reggio (they affect) your ideas and expectations* (1/20/23).

She also acknowledged that certain curriculum decisions connected to her personal interests.

> *I'm a very physical person and I love exercise. We go on big walks, we go on lots of excursions* (1/17/41).

As a learner, Anna felt she was now engaged in a process of rediscovery and *continuous learning* (1/5/23). Post–Reggio she is *much happier and I'm learning much more from the children* (1/22/23) and finding the results she's getting *reassuring and convincing* (1/12/18). Moreover, Anna connected the power of the impact of her experience to a broad sense of herself as a learner.

> *It made me look much harder at myself and much deeper…that's why I think it's so powerful, you learn so much more.* (1/18/23).

Barbara made various references to aspects of her personality and connected them to her initial and continuing interest in Reggio Emilia, to her teaching style and to her philosophy. She described herself as *interested in different viewpoints* (2/9/41) and *other people's ideas and interpretations* (2/19/41), as someone who likes to be *open to ideas and to change* (2/23/41), enjoys challenge (2/1/41) and will read again and again for understanding (2/19/41). Barbara questions and debates within herself, she *won't just do it* (2/31/41). *So I don't rush, I tend to think a lot and change my ideas* (2/12/41). As a learner, she had a preference for debate but not discovery.

> *I'm not a discoverer learner. I need someone to put me on the right track and then I'm fine* (2/13/41).

She attributed the appeal of the 'image of the child' to the fact that she's *not cutesy* (2/19/41) and thought that the idea of *emergent curriculum fits with me as a person* (2/23/41). She also connected her professional history to her philosophy and practice. She explained the sort of teaching style she rejected whilst a student on practicum (2/8/41) and several curriculum decisions she had made before and after her experience of Reggio Emilia. On a number of occasions through the interview, Barbara depicted this connection between her self and her experience of Reggio Emilia by using the metaphor of comfort

> *So you know over time, the more I got to know it, the more it felt very, very comfortable. There were things…that just started sitting with me, that made sense, that felt comfortable with me* (2/2/41).

Cate saw connections between her own interests, her personality, her work and her experience of Reggio Emilia. *I sort of started off because I'm arty* (3/2/41). She was attracted to the idea of the atelierista (3/21/41).

> *Being an artist and then working with children and seeing their creativity would just be the ultimate for me… the art and everything they're exploring is fun for me, its not work* (3/10/41).

She perceived her philosophy as consistent with Reggio Emilian ideas and ascribed this to her personal history and the prior development of her own ideas (3/28/41). For example, Cate connected the Reggio Emilian concept of the rights of the child to her personal activism and sense of self. *I'm always a person who says it's not fair* (3/25/41) and she derived personal satisfaction from her work in spite of a sometime lack of recognition. *You know you've been an influence on that child* (3/26/41).

Diane made consistent references to her professional history and saw connections (outlined previously) between her earlier involvement in curriculum movements such as ELIC and 'Integrated Studies' and the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. She also questioned her personal feelings and responses within her self as teacher. One such question related to the issue of conflict and collaboration. Diane mused, *um, yes, the conflict, I don't know, I'm not that kind of person either* (4/23/41). She had clearly thought about herself in relation to change. She analysed her circumstances and related these to her feelings.

> *I think also because I was new to the school…I don't think I realized actually just how nervous I was…I miss* [former schoo] *terribly but…I needed to do it. So I think changing schools has made me change too. I wonder how different I would be if I'd stayed, whether I would have settled back into my little routine…I think I would have but I don't know.*

> *The change for me was very dramatic, in changing schools, in changing classrooms and changing classes. And Reggio was a change. I think that's probably why I was feeling insecure and plus, I was feeling insecure I suppose, with what I'd brought back from Reggio Emilia and not knowing the staff either* (4/21/41).

She used the metaphor of *that little elf sitting on my shoulder* to refer to the initial habit of asking herself constantly 'What would Reggio think?'. She connected the disappearance of the "little elf" to introducing practices that were more child-centred and to her response to change, to

> *me realizing too that change takes a long time and I think at the time you're so eager, you're seeing so much. You want to have it all there*

> *immediately and that's not manageable… So I think that was the other*
> *thing. I slowed it right down…*(4/22/41).

Diane also reported an increased philosophical and practical confidence. *I'm far more confident in what I'm doing and why I'm doing it and I think Reggio has given me that* (4/23/23). As a learner, she mentioned her own reflection on practice and was also the most vocal about wanting to collaborate with colleagues, perhaps also because she had the least access to them in her workplace.

Emma also connected her feelings to her sense of self as teacher. She had been *disgruntled* professionally and her visit to Reggio Emilia *almost made me feel inadequate* (5/4/40), but she discovered an interest in theories and ideas and a new passion—*I just love talking about the philosophies* (5/28/41). She was *in awe* and talked of *the bravery* of those teachers she encountered who had already started making practice changes. As a learner, Emma described her need to see things *because I'm a real hands-on person* (5/12/41) and had thought about her *professional development* needs. She felt unconfident about her research skills, so wanted to do a course and to pursue her interest in educational philosophy and theory. She also decided that she needed to take time to make changes in her centre because dealing with her own professional baggage had required it. She connected her starting point to feeling constricted.

> *I felt like, yes I had been bound almost in a circle of truth and I had never*
> *dared to step outside the circle and I think Reggio gave me permission to*
> *do that* (5/26/23).

Frances was articulate throughout the interview about her self as a teacher and as a learner. She made links between herself and Reggio Emilian ideas and analyzed her experience for the impact it had on her self. She declared, *You can't be the same person that you were before you heard* (6/16/41) and described her encounter with

Reggio Emilia as *something major* [that] *turns your life around* (6/1/41). Looking back

she referred to her own thinking about children as *limited* and *shallow* (6/6/41). As a

teacher she had been *looking for a step 1, 2 and 3* (6/2/41). She described some of

the shifts in her thinking in personal terms.

> *I tend to always look for order and stopping oneself from looking for order*
> *is difficult when you're as old as I am* (6/13/41)…

> *I don't see myself as being the transmitter of information anymore*
> (6/12/41).

She analyzed her post-Reggio teaching as a *very slow, I think very strong, but very*

slow process of developing (6/3/41). She acknowledged feelings associated with this

development. She sometimes felt *very threatened*, was *often quick to find the*

negative in things and is *not very good at failing, thinking I've failed* (6/26/41). She

also had a clear view of herself as a learner.

> *I'm not very good at reading and understanding. I'm much better at seeing*
> *and hearing 'cause I can absorb a lot more from people's language and*
> *how they look and move. When I'm in a centre, how it feels, so, you know,*
> *you can absorb at a lot of other levels than just reading it* (6/26/41).

Like Anna she interpreted her experience of Reggio Emilia as personally broadening.

> *It also made me reflect on how you view, not just children, but how you*
> *view yourself in that context too* (6/27/23).

This reflection resulted in a changed attitude to the meld between the personal and

the professional and she drew lessons from her own history of pre-school teaching

and of a life in the arts, to do so.

> *So I started out kindergarten teaching again as being just a nice little job*
> *with three year olds… , you know, it was a job then. It was a nice job, it*
> *was fine, but it was a job and it finished. I went home and I was someone*
> *else. I was a mum. It just didn't connect. There was no connection*
> *between one and the other* (6/28/41).

Yet as a performer, the opposite held.

> *…you're not just a dancer when you perform on stage…it's your life, this is*
> *what you are, morning, day and night. And talking about, I mean you can't*
> *be a performer unless you are continually reflecting on yourself as a*
> *person… And all those issues of truth and whose truth and reality and*

non-reality. Issues that are dealt with by performers all the time, day and night, you know... I had never seen my teaching as having any relationship with all of those discussions and that whole life of dancing and choreography and performing (6/28/41).

She credited Reggio Emilia with allowing her to see the connection. Now, teaching's

not like that at all any more. It's a whole infusion completely. I'm always here and it's just part of, part of my being now. I am just, <u>am</u>. You know, this is just me (6/28/23).

Grace, like Anna and Frances interpreted the Reggio Emilia experience as personally broadening. Indeed it was life altering. *Well, it's re-professionalized me, it's actually changed my life, it's opened out a world* (7/22/23). Grace had given a lot of thought to possibilities for her own professional development and perceived linkages to her personal qualities, interests and feelings. She saw herself as someone who was *interested in the development of educational principles,* who saw *an excitement in working with young children,* who *likes to learn new things,* who is *restless in knowledge seeking* and who likes to *explore something thoroughly and try it out* (7/22/41).

She saw her self as teacher extended to the role of a change agent and believed her personal qualities of *intellectual capacity* and *a supportive kind of nature*, combined with her training and knowledge equipped her for it, but the lack of opportunity was *a personal frustration* (7/26/41)*.* Yet Grace saw herself as *a woman on a mission,* determined in the face of isolation (7/20/41).

Helen made fewer references to the personal in her interview but a number did exist. She described feeling *totally inadequate and dumb* and *overawed by it all* (8/9/40). She was fearful of being unable to find the next project (8/16/41) and explained a need to understand the hypothesis of projects. However, she also made links

between her professional history and her post-Reggio understandings. She drew

parallels between her experience of Montessori and Reggio Emilian ideas and

between her own social analysis and Reggio Emilian political stances, for example

she believed that in Australia we were creating *the selfish society* in contrast to the

social democracy and sense of belonging to the community that she experienced

there (8/5/19).

The link between the personal and the professional also came through Helen's

language in her responses to ideas and practices. She *felt really sad* when walking

into kindergartens to find 25 little dollies all the same. Indeed, she had

> *visited kindergartens with the assistant doing everything and the child*
> *sitting and watching and I used to be devastated* (8/2/41)

She also connected feelings of anger to a philosophical issue outlined in a recent

publication.

> *They talk about care or education through the entire book and it really*
> *makes me so angry, so angry because I believe that if you're not doing*
> *one you're not doing the other. They are the same thing. You cannot do*
> *one without the other….so how can you write this document and its so*
> *divisive (8/24/10).*

In another story Helen related the history of a philosophical conflict in a previous

school that affected her personally.

> *And then I got to the point where I was so frustrated with my school I*
> *left…'cause I was really sick from I guess the comparison between what I*
> *was trying to do and the other kindergarten where we were in the same*
> *building (8/14/10).*

Her philosophical passion is clear from these extracts, as is the shared nature of all

these teachers' personal investment in their professsional lives as teachers. This

investment pre-dates their Reggio Emilian experience in some cases but is also

strongly associated by all participants with their Reggio Emilian-inspired endeavours.

In fact, the personal and professional are not only blurred but consistently connected by the teachers to their pedagogical re-constructions.

Moreover, the self is also not the only locus of connection. The influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy extended to a re-examination of the participants' work contexts. While concerns about resourcing are not surprising in many Australian early childhood settings, these teachers also reconsidered their regulatory frameworks and the social and cultural contexts of their work.

Such reconsideration of local context was universal to the eight but the nature of the conclusions reached is a diverse patchwork of pre-Reggio beliefs confirmed, local factors re-assessed and questions raised for further exploration. Moreover these reconsiderations ranged from spatial organization to local social, political and cultural influences upon children and pedagogy. Regulatory frameworks were mostly found wanting but for a variety of reasons. In some instances regulation was connected to broader philosophical imperatives both local and Reggio-inspired. The teachers also made differing forays into the interrogation of culture and cultural difference. Some reaffirmed aspects of local early childhood practice as culturally distinct and worthwhile; others contrasted childhood behaviors and/or parental expectations in the two cultures, drawing pedagogical conclusions; some re-evaluated the local meaning of 'community'; while others acknowledged that culture required further interrogation.

Additionally, the participants all expressed their views about working with others in their own contexts. They related quite differing post-Reggio experiences within a universally positive attitude to, and desire for, more collaboration with colleagues

irrespective of their sense of professional isolation. This reflected a positive view of their RE-Search group memberships but contradicted in some instances a negative experience of staff support.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the connections made by the eight participants in examining the relevance of Reggio Emilia to their own contexts. The diversity of opinion and experience has been outlined within the common themes of their analyses. The funding and regulatory environments were re-examined as were issues of culture and cultural difference. Working relationships emerged as an important theme in the teachers' considerations of context amid a universal desire for increased opportunities to develop collaborative collegial relationships. An equally strong theme emerged in the connections built by the teachers between the personal and the pedagogical. This chapter has also outlined the teachers' perceptions of feedback regarding practice changes which constitutes another facet of the local context.

Together, these themes, as outlined above, reveal the diverse nature of the teachers' valuing of their own contexts and their perceptions of connection and contrast with that of Reggio Emilia. In doing so, the chapter also attests to the teachers' perception of their engagement in an alternative process to the replication of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. It speaks to the importance of the local context in mediating the incorporation of Reggio Emilian pedagogy within the teachers' reconstruction of their own.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the way local teachers created meaning from their experience of Reggio Emilian philosophy and practice. It questioned eight practitioners about the value they placed on their exposure to Reggio Emilian pedagogy; about their perceptions of its impact and influence on their thinking and practices; and about their perspectives on its relevance to their own educational contexts. The preceding chapters of findings detailed the common themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' answers to these questions. They also detailed variation within these themes as well as exceptions to them. This final chapter will highlight both the key findings and significant patterns within them, then derive and theorize a conclusion based upon both. Finally, it will discuss the study's significance in light of the relevant research literature, detail its implications for both research and practice and demarcate its limitations.

Key findings

Previous chapters revealed the teachers' persistent engagement with Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Chapter 5 showed that there was no universal commonality in their routes into this foreign pedagogy, in their training, work experience or in their workplaces, that would explain it. Yet, the teachers all held onto an initial interest, irrespective of its strength or source and they pursued it broadly. Such pursuit was not dependent on some personal theoretical bent or on the first-, second-, or even third-hand nature of their exposure.

The teachers universally experienced strong and often emotional reactions, that accompanied their experience of a collision between the new Reggio Emilian pedagogy and their own existing ideas and practices. While Reggio Emilian pedagogy had an impact on these teachers in certain common ways, variation in its impact also existed. Thus, this new pedagogy was seen as confirming or confronting, or both, as highlighting philosophical consistency, confusion or consolidation. Yet, despite efforts to find it, no pattern emerged that would not only group all, or indeed some of the teachers, across these themes of impact but also hold consistently across the themes detailed subsequently.

For in spite of, or alternatively because of its impact, these practitioners explored Reggio Emilian pedagogy in both thought and deed. This exploration occurred within the boundaries of their universal conviction that they were translocating principles, not replicating practices. They expressed this as a sense of being involved in some kind of process—a process predicated on Reggio Emilian pedagogical influence.

Chapter 6 demonstrated the commonality of those ideas and practices from Reggio Emilia that found fertile ground among all these teachers. It showed that they were all impressed by some aspect of Reggio Emilian aesthetics, were influenced by ideas about the capability of children and about the social nature of learning. They introduced or extended 'projects', changed their environments and their methods of recording, particularly, though by no means solely, to enhance communication with parents. They also universally proffered their reappraised views on the place of parents vis-à-vis their schools/centres.

While these constituted almost universal themes of Reggio Emilian influence, there were some exceptions. Firstly, Anna was the most consistent exception. Her interview was silent about environmental change, 'projects' and the social nature of children's learning. She was also the only participant to express her engagement with Reggio Emilian philosophy as a confirmation of specific existing doubts about her practice. While superficially significant, nothing else in Anna's interview offers any clues to this connection with pedagogical doubt, while there are other details that could explain Anna's absence from these themes. Firstly, Anna talked about environmental change but as part of future plans involving a major expansion and relocation of her centre, which as yet had not progressed to any concrete detail. Thus she was in a kind of environmental limbo which could account for her absence from this theme. Secondly, Anna's stories about working with children focused more on babies and toddlers than on older children. Thus she may have perceived social learning and 'projects' as less applicable in her context. Thirdly, Anna worked with the smallest number of children in the largest age range (25 children from birth to five years) and among all the teachers, had introduced practice changes the most recently.

The second exception was Cate. While the other seven teachers experienced at least some degree of challenge in their encounters and engagement with Reggio Emilian pedagogy, Cate talked only of confirmation—it was "like coming home". A third exception was Grace, the only teacher to explicitly and comprehensively link the Reggio Emilian concept of 'the teacher as researcher' with her own recreated pedagogy. Yet Cate and Grace were represented within all the themes of influence nonetheless. Moreover, as the findings indicate, they, like all the other participants,

considered their own contexts in their engagement with Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Indeed, Cate was the advocate for being "realistic" about local possibilities.

The teachers' interpretations about these local possibilities were detailed in Chapter 7 which explicated the common themes of the teachers' ideas about local influences on their working contexts. These ranged from spatial organization to local social, political and cultural influences upon children and pedagogy. Regulatory frameworks were mostly found wanting but for a variety of reasons. In some instances regulation was connected to broader philosophical imperatives, both local and Reggio-inspired.

The teachers also made differing forays into the interrogation of culture and cultural difference. Some teachers reaffirmed aspects of local early childhood practice as culturally distinct and worthwhile. Others contrasted childhood behaviors and/or parental expectations in the two cultures, drawing pedagogical conclusions. Some participants re-evaluated the local meaning of 'community', while others acknowledged that 'culture' required further interrogation.

They also ranged over the social context of their work, detailing difficulties and rationales in working through change with other staff. All these teachers both sought out, and desired, more opportunities for collaborative, professional, pedagogical relationships while retaining a certain ambivalence and/or uncertainty about their operation in workplace contexts. Each of them, to a greater or lesser degree, experienced some opposition in their schools/centres to changes they were making, yet they all continued along changed pedagogical routes. They were undoubtedly buoyed by managerial non-interference in their classrooms and by perceived, positive feedback, due in part to changed practices in documenting visually for

parents. Significantly, they also peppered their interviews with insights (some of which were also highlighted in Chapter 5) about personal connections to their experience, before, during and after their exposure to Reggio Emilia. Unsurprisingly, these insights were highly individual.

Together, these findings reveal the diverse nature of the teachers' valuing of their own contexts and their perceptions of connection and contrast with that of Reggio Emilia. They also add credence to the teachers' universal suggestion that rather than following a blueprint, they were engaged in an alternative process to the replication of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. And it is, precisely, the nature of this process that forms the central thesis of this study.

Certain patterns in the key findings reveal elements of the process and operate across the categories of impact, influence and local context that were outlined above and in earlier chapters.

Re-creating meaning

Like their routes into Reggio Emilian pedagogy, the teachers' reactions and their interpretations of its impact, intersected each other in a variety of ways, creating similarities but also dissonances. The teachers' ideas and responses were frequently quite different from each other, covered different ground or reflected often vastly differing conclusions.

This pattern of convergence and divergence was also reflected in the teachers' engagement with common Reggio Emilian influences. Variation existed in the patterns of incorporating them—differences in choices, emphases and rationales of

incorporation; an ebb and flow of individual blending of new with old; and variation in degrees of consolidation or re-orientation that occurred. Thus beliefs were added, confirmed, consolidated or discarded; practices affirmed, re-oriented, expanded or abandoned. Yet within this set of possibilities, no teacher reiterated the same pathway consistently, rather, each teacher traded across them.

This was also the case in the teachers' reconsiderations of their local contexts. While reconsideration was universal to the eight, the nature of the conclusions reached is a diverse patchwork of pre-Reggio attitudes confirmed, local factors re-assessed, pedagogical connections deliberated and questions raised for further exploration.

Thus, while a broad pattern is discernible in all the teachers' creation of connection between Reggio Emilian influence and existing pedagogy, for each teacher— experiencing the tug and pull of Reggio's philosophical currents—these influences were incorporated and a pedagogical response was created differentially (albeit with sometime consistency from each or occasional consistency of individual pattern across all eight).

The response to Reggio Emilian pedagogical influence, was the re-construction of the teachers' own pedagogies. From a common set of incorporated influences they re-created individual, pedagogical meaning. This presents a seeming paradox: the themes in the findings suggest the teachers' re-construction of pedagogy involved a common breadth of perspectives, while simultaneously there was individual recreation of meaning.

This process of pedagogical incorporation and re-construction, where broad similarity is combined with detailed difference, is metaphorically akin to creating a 'web', the technical term that describes the product of weaving. (The aptness of this metaphor has found expression previously, in early childhood circles, most notably in the 1996 Melbourne conference, *Weaving Webs* and in the New Zealand curriculum *Te Whariki*). The findings of this study also lend themselves to the metaphor of creating a 'web'. The teachers all work the same warp but the density and colour of the threads woven into the weft and the pattern thus created, are unique to each. Together, the findings illumine the common lines of this warp and the variation in the weft, thereby indicating the breadth and depth of the process which forms the central thesis of this study—the 'quest to contextualize' Reggio Emilian pedagogy.

Contextualizing Reggio Emilian pedagogy

While Anna's underrepresentation in the themes of the study's findings have been explained, Cate's and Grace's exceptionality points to this central thesis. Irrespective of their points of contact with Reggio Emilian pedagogy, irrespective of the teachers' conceptions of the degree of familiarity or the nature of this contact, all these teachers created individualized meaning from their experience of this off-shore pedagogy and each, in the process, re-created a new, home-grown variety.

This process of re-creating individual meaning was one of contextualization. They each made connections between their understandings of Reggio Emilian thought and practice and their own contexts. As chapter 7 demonstrated, the local cultural, political and social contexts were important in mediating the incorporation of Reggio Emilian pedagogy within the teachers' reconstruction of their own.

Contextualization of Reggio Emilian pedagogy, however, goes beyond the reconsideration of place.

A significant finding detailed in chapter 7 revealed the teachers' use of the prism of Reggio Emilia to re-consider and re-construct, not only a sense of place but one very much embedded in a sense of self. Moreover, the teachers drew on their own pre- and post- Reggio professional/personal experience to create an individual pattern of contextualization that reflects not only their own past and present but also their future.

Conclusion

This 'quest to contextualize' involved making connections—between the teachers' experience of Reggio Emilian pedagogy and multiple lines of their own contexts—the philosophical, the practical, the local, the personal and the temporal. Each teacher re-created philosophical meaning by re-interpreting previous and current beliefs about children and pedagogy. They re-created practical and local meaning by re-constructing present practice, mediating through a renewed sense of place, re-creating a sense of direction and inventing plans for steerage. They re-created personal meaning by connecting their sense of self to their professional experience of Reggio Emilia, to their pedagogical re-constructions and to their renewed professional direction. They re-created temporal meaning by structuring these philosophical, practical, local and personal connections across the past, present, and significantly, into the future. They clearly brought passion to these efforts but their insights into their re-creations reveal that they also managed these processes dispassionately.

It is the intricacy of this weaving—teachers building myriad connections in an exercise of many-stranded contextualization—that explains the deeply embedded nature of the Reggio Emilian influence on these eight teachers. There was no sense of a temporary flirtation with a new idea, of an experiment that might be abandoned, of an incoming and outgoing tide of change. The pedagogical ground had shifted. These teachers had created change; they were planning more change; and they were changed themselves in the process—there was no going back.

In toto, these findings indicate that these teacher-made changes have not only been sustained (Cadwell, 2002) but are also generative (Franke et al, 1998). The 'quest to contextualize', theorized above, is key to this accomplishment, which in turn is key to resolving the paradox of translocation—Reggio Emilian 'influence without emulation'. It is the conclusion of this study that sustained, generative, pedagogical change needs to be embedded within and across multiple contexts—the philosophical, the practical, the local, the personal, and the temporal.

Discussion

In theorizing that these teachers created meaning from their experience of Reggio Emilia by reconstructing and embedding their own pedagogy across multiple contexts, this project adds a contribution to an under-researched yet significant area in Australian early childhood education. In relying on 'naturalistic generalizability' (Stake 1995), its thematic depictions may offer relevant insights for those who are engaging with, or seek to understand, the impact and influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy in other places where translocation is seen to be an issue. Further, its conclusion builds on the substantial body of existing research related to teacher

thinking/theorizing, teacher reconstruction of practice and teachers' professional development.

In general terms, this study tends to support much of the research and writing that pre- and post-dates it regarding translocation of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. Confined to a group of teachers with a track record of voluntary commitment to exploring these pedagogical principles, this study offers no take on the controversy over its 'faddishness' and it bypasses the territory of practical replication. It does not answer Katz' pragmatic questions about starting points (1997) or settle Millikan's (1997a) issues with the selective uptake of Reggio Emilian philosophy. Rather these teachers' voices lend support to views expressed about Reggio Emilian influence and local praxis.

These views were canvassed in the review of relevant literature in Chapter 2. Many of the influences reported by the teachers in this study are held in common with those reported or recommended elsewhere (see for example, Millikan 2003a; Fu et al, 2002; Dahlberg 1999b; Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002 and so on). The prompting to reappraisal of children's capabilities, of the social nature of learning and of the potential for its depth in project work, as well as of the role of the environment, led to reconsideration and reworking of teacher roles and practices. Moves by the participants to more open planning and programming, to project work and to a stronger role for children in curriculum, as well as to changed approaches to observation and documenting children's work, add weight to Millikan's (2003a) report of these role changes and practices being taken up by other interested teachers in Australia.

This study adds credence to the notion that Reggio Emilian pedagogy offers to those willing to use it, a prism to reflect on local differences and commonalities. For the teachers in this study these reflections encompassed those aspects recommended in the literature—philosophy, values, socio-cultural and systemic contexts (New, 1994a; 1994b; Nimmo, 1994; Moss, 2000; Fu et al, 2002). The resultant shift of pedagogical ground by the teachers reveals that prolonged, practical engagement with a pedagogical stimulus of Reggio Emilia's depth and accessibility, combined with prolonged, collaborative and individual reflection of the breadth and depth noted above, can indeed lead to local pedagogical re-invention.

Significantly, the kind of reflection detailed in the previous three chapters, positions these teachers as both inquirers—capable of connecting and critiquing—and as reconstuctors of personal contextualized meaning. They fit all the criteria, as suggested in the literature review's themes (see Chapter 3), in their considerations of values and practice, classroom and context, past, present and future, across philosophical, practical and personal ground.

Moreover, the kind of pedagogical re-inventions detailed in this study, are generative in nature. The teachers exhibited the relevant characteristics detailed in the literature—internal orientation to learning (both their own and their students'); self-driven, pedagogical discovery; and exploration—grounded and renewed in practice—that reached far beyond pragmatic efficiency in teaching (Pape, 1992; Hogan and Down, 1998; Franke et al., 1998).

Additionally, the circumstances of these teachers' recreation of pedagogical meaning are almost a perfect fit for the themes of successful professional development

identified in Grundy and Robison's (2004) review—relevance to needs identified by teachers; control of the program by participants; access to expertise to facilitate learning rather than deliver programmes; action learning principles grounded in investigations and critical reflection; longer time frames to allow for development through action learning cycles; collegial and collaborative programme organization. That these characteristics relate to professional development driven not by individuals but by organizational systems, suggests one of a number of implications that are explored below.

Implications for early childhood practice

The findings of this study suggest issues worthy of consideration in early childhood practice, particularly in the areas of professional development and teacher education. Firstly, the importance of personal meaning-making in the creation and re-creation by teachers of pedagogical principles is suggested by certain of the findings. These were specifically, the strong reactions to their exposure, the consistent entry of the personal in their reflections and the inconsistent valuing of 'theory' by these teachers. Secondly, the range of explicit pre-existing beliefs held across the group and the range of ideas from Reggio Emilian pedagogy that were considered valuable, suggests that not only is personal meaning important, but that it is highly individual. While exposure to new ideas was clearly a catalyst for change, these teachers were not passive recipients; they interacted with these ideas in highly individual and personal ways, which were cognizant of a range of contexts. In short, the pedagogical is personal. Pre-service and in-service programs that aim for changes in pedagogical thinking and practice, may need to take this "highly personal, idiosyncratic journey" (Hobson, 2001a, p16) more fully into account, providing more scope for personal meaning-making and its interaction with theory, practice and a

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range of contexts. However, time is also a factor that these findings suggest, merits attention in both pre-service and in-service professional development. These teachers needed and took their own time. Professional development needs to take account of the need to re-visit evolving understandings over generous amounts of time.

Early childhood employers may also find certain of these findings relevant. The teachers' obvious professional commitment and their persistence in the face of opposition may find more fertile ground if employers explored recruitment and transfer policies for pathways that enabled like-minded practitioners to share the same workplace. It could also help address the ambivalence expressed by participants regarding collaboration and conflict which is consistent with the literature on translocation (Wien, 1998; Cadwell, 1997; Fraser and Gestwicki, 2002; Dahlberg 1999c).

It is also consistent with recent views in the literature on professional development, particularly when linked with school improvement (Butler et al., 2004; Hobson, 2001b). These teachers, and presumably others like them, have built the kind of relationships in their networks that Burnaford (2001) sees as necessary to the culture of a 'learning social system', yet paradoxically, these teachers' networks operated outside their employer systems. If this is the case for other teachers interested in Reggio Emilian pedagogy who have taken the professional strides described here, then it is an opportunity going begging. Employers could deal with this opportunity by exploring methods to support both virtual and face-to-face 'communities of practice' among interested teachers.

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Further, employers could consider self-selected collaborative inquiry by practitioners within their organizations, as a meaningful and practical staff development choice deserving of acknowledgement.

Finally, regulatory bodies may also find food for thought within these findings. As mentioned above, a dialogue between regulatory authorities, employers and teachers in regulated centres/schools, particularly around mandatory recording requirements, could heighten perceptions about the degree of flexibility that may be possible and desirable within the twin goals of supporting professional development and satisfying public accountability.

On a more general level, this research highlights the isolation of self-directed endeavours to improve early childhood practice, both within and outside professional circles. The findings that point to these teachers' desire to communicate their new-found understandings to parents and colleagues, also point to a need for greater public awareness of alternative conceptions of children and their learning. While awards for excellence in teaching exist, there is room for using such schemes to work toward this objective.

Suggestions for further research

As its design as a preliminary study intended, this study suggests avenues for further research in both the narrower context of studies centred on the influence of Reggio Emilian pedagogy in early childhood education and the broader area of professional development. Both the scope of the study and its findings point the way.

The scope of the study precluded canvassing the interpretations of the parents, colleagues or the children with whom these teachers worked. Moreover, the data on practice changes, that had an impact on these groups, are limited and certainly lack their perspective. Research that focuses on children's perceptions, parents' interpretations and colleagues' perspectives would add to the range of voices being heard about Reggio Emilian pedagogy in Australia and provide additional insight into the intended effects of teacher-induced change.

This is not to advocate a research model akin to 'effects research'. Rather, the perspectives of other voices in the educational enterprise could inform and enhance the perspectives of teachers. Moreover, the existence of Reggio Emilia RE-Search networks suggests an opportunity and an avenue for a collaborative model that supports and holds exciting possibilities for practitioner, parent and child research.

The findings also beg a number of questions worthy of further research. Including, but also beyond Reggio Emilia, are influential pedagogical theories that have gripped the imaginations of teachers and spurred self-selected change. The conclusion drawn—that sustained, generative, pedagogical change needs to be embedded by teachers across multiple contexts—could provide a hypothesis that is open to 'testing' on a broader scale.

Additionally the teachers' analyses of their socio-political and cultural contexts, suggests phenomena that need investigation. Firstly, some teachers were interrogating the concept of culture. Research that focuses on teachers' theorizing of the practice of cultural construction and re-construction in classrooms would be valuable in raising awareness and generating debate. Secondly, the teachers all

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expressed views on the nature of their regulatory environment and/or the management of risk. Research that draws on the perspectives of both practitioners in classrooms and regulatory bodies, would throw valuable light on a topic that has far-reaching implications for social policy and practice. The findings related to the teachers' desire for collaborative relationships and the misgivings of some about conflict, suggests that case studies of collaboration in action, could be of interest to both practitioners and policy makers and thus prove valuable in influencing practice.

Finally, in asking teachers about their working contexts, this study revealed aspects of practice perceived as locally different, worthwhile and worth preserving. This is not only a potential site for further research as raised above, but opens a window on a possible dialogue with Reggio Emilian educators that could prove to be a mutually beneficial prism for the further interrogation of local pedagogies.

Limitations of the study

This study set out to examine a process and in keeping with its purpose and design, it did not attempt to track this process over time. Rather it provides a snapshot of teachers' conscious and recalled perceptions and interpretations of deliberations and changes that occurred in this process. The participants were free within the interviews, to range over time, with the exception of defining their ideas and practices as pre- or post-Reggio. That it provides a snapshot is not to suggest that the findings capture an end-product, rather, the findings themselves suggest that the process is continuous. However, tracking such a process over time would constitute an alternative subject and mode of research.

Yet, time was important in this study as one aspect of the broad control the teachers exercised. They were all voluntary participants in the process of change and voluntarily revealed their thinking and decision making to a stranger. They took it upon themselves to embark on their journeys, were free from managerial interference, decided on the nature and time-frames of both inputs and implementation. This was bottom-up, rather than imposed change. Additionally, this study is bounded by its focus on conscious, explicit re-creation of pedagogical meaning, rather than on implicit theory uncovered in classrooms. The relevance of the findings is restricted to the area mapped by these limits, but as the previously detailed literature suggests, in this territory lies potential for impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.

This project demanded a familiarity with Reggio Emilian pedagogy and a fascination with its impact and influence. Making this known to participants assisted the flow of information in the interviews. It also opened a potential door to opportunity bias. However, the credibility of this interpretivist research does not rest on making a case for detachment and objectivity about Reggio Emilia pedagogy, even if this were possible.

Rather it rests on a research design, implementation and report of findings that provide for a conscious and rigorous attention to separating the researcher's perceptions from those of the participants. The depth and breadth of the data analysis techniques enabled such provision. A check of the transcripts against planned interview techniques revealed only occasional lapses and thus minimal scope for opportunity bias. The conclusion is drawn from the overall pattern of findings and provides a clear delineation from the perspectives of the participants, to

proffer an explanation that draws on this pattern to account for the phenomenon under study. While it is possible that these conclusions are invalidly based in the participants' inventions of 'acceptable' beliefs and practices, the depth of individual detail and variation in the processes of connection and change captured in the interviews and reported in this study, suggest that such Herculean feats of imagination are unlikely.

Some of the language used to report the teachers' perspectives was chosen to foreground the influence and power of Reggio Emilian precepts and metaphors, as well as to forsake any illusion for the reader of a pretended objectivity. Moreover the ethical stand outlined in Chapter 4 with its focus on the teachers' actions rather than omissions, not only reflects the influence of Reggio Emilia but also the consistency of the study's design with its theoretical orientation, outlined in Chapter 3.

One aspect of this design points to response bias. Paradoxically, the attempt to incorporate 'best fit' between research problem and design, depended on the target group being composed *only* of motivated individuals. The research questions were targeted to individuals who self-selected to engage in a voluntary process of change and the results are confined to this group. Furthermore, these people were not engaged in a solitary process. This research does not claim to represent an aggregation of individual 'uncontaminated' views. The findings readily acknowledge both the participants' practice and desire for collaboration with colleagues, and any study that claims to examine the influence of Reggio Emilia must by necessity, accommodate it. Yet, a study that claims to deal with teachers perspectives, however acquired, must avoid contamination of the participants' perspectives by those of the

researcher. Restricting the sampling to strangers and the techniques outlined above assisted accomplishment of this task.

However, it is acknowledged that this study could have been improved with the addition of certain data collection and checking methods. While the data overall address the research questions, some gaps in individual responses may have been eliminated if transcripts had been checked for consistency in coverage of all questions on the interview schedule and participants given a further opportunity to respond. Additionally, more rigorous attention to eliminating interchange of the terms 'think' and 'feel' in the interview schedule and delivery of questions, may have provided better quality data. Finally, while collaboration with participants was beyond the scope of this study, member checking of the interview summaries would have been a feasible and potentially valuable contribution to the data set.

Within these limitations, this study has made a contribution to an under-researched aspect of early childhood practice, particularly in Australia. Its findings throw light on a process of local pedagogical reconstruction prompted by the challenge of Reggio Emilian pedagogy. These findings reflect the complexity of both the process itself and of the teachers' perpectives that they encapsulate. Significantly, the conclusion drawn from the findings captures this complexity, in offering an explanation of this particular case of pedagogical translocation with its inherent paradox. Moreover, the study has produced a theoretical construct—the 'quest to contextualize'—that is open to further research. As such, it has potential beyond these confines, to add to the theoretical understanding of teachers' pedagogical meaning making.

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