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How Teachers Identify Characteristics of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy in Practice: A Case Study

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HOW TEACHERS IDENTIFY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGGIO EMILIA PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education

in

The School of Education

by
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Abstract

The Reggio Emilia philosophy has been guiding early childhood practices since its development by Loris Malaguzzi in 1963. Originating in Reggio Emilia, Italy, this approach to early childhood education emphasizes building and nurturing relationships between the adult and child. This philosophy is guided by eight core tenets – *The Environment as the Third Teacher*, *100 Languages of Children*, *Long-Term Projects*, *Teacher-Researcher*, *Image of the Child*, *Negotiated Learning*, *Documentation*, and *Social Relations*. Research shows that young children's engagement with the Reggio Emilia approach benefits their academic, cognitive, and social-emotional development. However, there is currently no school accreditation or teacher certification program associated with the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of the Reggio Emilia philosophy as determined by teachers who follow this approach in their practice. The leading research questions of this study are: How do Reggio practitioners define the Reggio-inspired approach? and What does the Reggio Emilia approach look like in practice? 75 practicing teachers who self-identify as Reggio-inspired educators consented to participating in this study. The participating teachers identified seven characteristics of the Reggio Emilia philosophy – *Child-centered*, *Learning from the Environment*, *Documentation*, *Inquiry*, *Observation*, *Collaboration*, and *Community*. Additionally, materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices were identified for each tenet of the Reggio approach. The findings of this study can contribute to the creation of professional development resources and trainings on adopting the Reggio-inspired approach.

Keywords: *Reggio Emilia philosophy, socio-constructivism, child-directed learning, early childhood education*

Chapter 1. Introduction

Justification

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of the Reggio Emilia philosophy as determined by teachers who follow this approach in their practice. While the Reggio approach is defined by eight core tenets, these concepts may not translate to the materials and interactions found in the early childhood classroom setting. As there are no formal means or standards for evaluating the degree to which a classroom or school aligns with this approach, the distinction of being “Reggio-inspired” is left open to individual interpretation.

Young children’s engagement with the Reggio Emilia approach provides them with lasting developmental benefits. Davies et al. (2012) found that children who are immersed in creative learning environments, a key component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, experience a positive influence on their, “academic achievement; increased confidence and resilience; enhanced motivation and engagement; development of social, emotional and thinking skills; and improved school attendance” (p. 88). However, children cannot experience these rich advantages if their teacher is not providing them with an authentic Reggio-inspired classroom setting.

Currently, there is no school accreditation or teacher certification program associated with the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. As the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) points out, “the only ‘Reggio schools’ are located in Reggio Emilia, Italy.” (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, n.d.). The data collected through this study will be used to establish distinct characteristics that practicing teachers associate with the Reggio philosophy. This study will also identify materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices present in the Reggio-inspired classroom. These findings can be utilized by educators hoping to implement the Reggio Emilia approach in their own practice. Furthermore, the results of this

study may inform researchers on the development of Reggio-inspired trainings or classroom assessment tools for formal use.

Background

The Reggio Emilia approach is an educational philosophy originating from the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Developed by Loris Malaguzzi after World War II, the Reggio Emilia approach is described as, “a philosophical approach which is focused on listening and respecting children and their potential by witnessing their actions towards reformulating everyday practices, ideas and projects” (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 50). The first Reggio Emilia school was established under Malaguzzi in 1963 and placed a great emphasis on nurturing relationships between the adult and child. The approach is guided by eight core tenets – *The Environment as the Third Teacher*, *100 Languages of Children*, *Long-Term Projects*, *Teacher-Researcher*, *Image of the Child*, *Negotiated Learning*, *Documentation*, and *Social Relations*.

Theoretical Framework

The goal of this study was to develop a classroom assessment tool that can serve as a guide for educators in improving their professional practices, specifically, their pedagogical practices and decisions, based on the Reggio Emilia approach. The concepts and models presented in Malcolm Knowles’ adult learning theory will inform my research on creating an assessment tool for the purpose of expanding and improving educators’ understanding of this approach in practice. The adult learning theory has several foundational concepts, beginning with andragogy, or “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43, as cited in Merriam, 2001). This model of adult learning is based on four assumptions of the adult learner. The first assumption is that the adult can independently regulate their learning. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) found adult learners “self directed, take responsibility for their own actions,

and resist having information arbitrarily imposed on them” (p. 88). The second assumption is that an adult's life experiences can provide significant contributions to their learning. The third assumption of andragogy is that adult learners have, “learning needs closely related to changing social roles” (Merriam, 2001, p. 5), meaning they are prepared to learn and improve themselves through their education. The fourth assumption is that adults are concerned with acquiring knowledge for practical purposes. In his later work, Knowles (1998) articulated two further assumptions of andragogy, the first of which involves adults’ motivation to learn. Regarding this assumption, Woodard (2007) explains that adult learners are thought to be more intrinsically motivated, as opposed to extrinsically motivated. The second assumption of Knowles’ concept of andragogy is that adults must first understand the reasoning for learning certain knowledge before beginning the actual learning process. Knowles discovered that “knowing why an adult needs to learn something is the key to giving them a sense of volition about their learning” (p. 45).

The central criticism of Knowles’ andragogy is that the adult learning process is described as being decontextualized. Merriam (2001) notes the following:

Little or no acknowledgment that every person has been shaped by his or her culture and society, that every person has a history, and that social institutions and structures define, to a large extent, the learning transaction irrespective of the individual learner (p. 7).

Research Questions

Two overarching questions guide this study. The first leading research question of this study is: How do Reggio practitioners define the Reggio-inspired approach? This question will be addressed by collecting data on teacher perspectives and classroom practices from questionnaire participants who identify as Reggio Emilia-inspired educators. The second guiding

research question is: What does the Reggio Emilia approach look like in practice? This question will be explored by analyzing photographs of materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices provided by participating educators for each of the eight core tenets of the Reggio philosophy.

Benefits

One of the most notable benefits of using self-report questionnaires is that it allows for the collection of a significant amount of data with minimal effort from the researcher. Because self-report questionnaires are completed by the subject themselves, the presence of the researcher at the time of completion is not necessary to the process (Demetriou et al., 2015). Furthermore, this unique component of self-report questionnaires allows for a wider range of data collection. Without the need for a present researcher, self-report questionnaires can be disseminated through online formats. This factor creates access to an increased population of potential research participants, making the results of the study more suitable for generalizations (Demetriou et al., 2015, p. 1).

Limitations

Several factors of the research design have been identified as limitations of this study. The primary drawback of using self-report questionnaires as a method for collecting data is that the credibility of the participants' responses is not necessarily guaranteed. When the subject is individually responsible for completing their questionnaire, there is a risk that they may feel obligated to respond in a particular way. This occurrence is commonly known as "response bias" (Celis-Morales, 2012, p. 2). Another limitation of relying on self-reporting measures is the potential for participants to misinterpret items on the questionnaire (Demetriou et al., 2015).

Without the presence of the researcher during the completion of the questionnaire, subjects may not receive clarification if they do not understand a question.

Assumptions

The researcher posits that there are several underlying assumptions of this study that must be acknowledged. The first of these assumptions is that the subjects participating in this study are truthfully educators who implement the Reggio Emilia approach in their professional practices. Subjects will be recruited online from self-identified Reggio Emilia Facebook groups and are expected to be practicing educators who adhere to the approach. Another assumption of this study is that the participating subjects have a literature-based knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach and truly understand its philosophy and implications. As the subjects are active members of online communities inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, it is assumed that they are familiar with the current research on the approach.

Definitions

The *Reggio Emilia approach* is defined as, “a philosophical approach which is focused on listening and respecting children and their potential by witnessing their actions towards reformulating everyday practices, ideas and projects” (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 50).

The Environment as the Third Teacher

The Environment as the Third Teacher is defined as, “the belief of three educators, the teacher, the child, and the environment” (Edwards, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2009; Thornton & Brunton, 2014).

100 Languages of Children

100 Languages of Children is defined as, “language is defined beyond verbal language and considers visual language, mathematical language, scientific language, etc.” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017; Vecchi, 2013).

Long-Term Projects

Long-Term Projects is defined as being “focused on interests of children, who have control over the direction the project takes” (Cagliari, Filippini, Giacomini, Bonilauri, & Margini, 2012; Loh, 2006; Santín & Torruella, 2017).

Teacher-Researcher

Teacher-Researcher is the idea that “the teacher serves to not only provide information, but to listen, observe, and document” (Rinaldi, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017; Thornton & Brunton, 2014).

Image of the Child

Image of the Child describes the child as, “competent, creative, curious, full of potential and ambitious entity” (Gandini, 2012; Malaguzzi, 1993).

Negotiated Learning

Negotiated Learning explains that “children’s ideas are given serious consideration” (Santín & Torruella, 2017; Thornton & Brunton, 2014). *Negotiated learning* involves “design (plan or intended solution), discourse (reflective study of what is being said), and documentation (record of performance)” (Forman & Fyfe, 2012, p. 249-250).

Documentation

Documentation is defined as being “used to promote communication, collaboration and reflection among children, teachers, and families” (Dahlberg, 2012; Foreman & Fyfe, 2012; Fyfe, 2012; Rinaldi, C., 2012; Schroeder-Yu, 2008; Thornton & Brunton, 2014).

Social Relations

Social Relations is defined as the “recognition that learning is socially constructed” (Cagliari, Filippini & Giacomini, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017). *Social relations* “defines children as co-constructors of their learning, rather than passive recipients” (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Reggio Emilia Approach

Santín and Torruella (2017) conducted a literature review on best practices for arts education in early childhood based on the Reggio Emilia philosophic approach. The Reggio Emilia approach is described as being based on respect and consideration for the child. In their review, Santín and Torruella found that “Reggio Emilia’s municipal early childhood program (...) is committed not to the development of more and better child artists, but to the development of creative, critically thinking and collaboratively engaged citizens” (p. 51). They argue that the arts education models observed in Reggio Emilia schools support self-expression, communication, and critical thinking skills in young children. Traditional early childhood programs can hinder young children’s development of creativity through its arts education practices. Such practices were found to reduce the learning of arts and artistic expression to replicating or recreating a piece of art chosen by the teacher. In contrast, the teaching of arts under the Reggio Emilia approach views the child as an artist and places no limitations on their creative process.

The literature review also yielded eight defining components of the Reggio Emilia philosophic approach. The first of these components is *The Environment as the Third Teacher*, which considers the environment to be as meaningful to the child’s learning as their classroom teacher and the child themselves. This understanding of the environment as the teacher promotes children’s learning through exploration and experimentation. Secondly, *100 Languages of Children* includes verbal communication, as well as child interaction and the ability to express themselves through scientific language, art, and play. Another theme of the Reggio Emilia approach is *Long-Term Projects*, which are directed by the child. The authors elaborate that,

“through the projects, children can acquire cognitive, physical, social and language skills. Also, as they apply these skills into different contexts and situations, they may gain independence and confidence, taking their own decisions and responding to their own problems” (p. 53). The fourth component of the Reggio Emilia approach is the *Teacher-Researcher*. In Reggio Emilia schools, the teacher does not simply transport knowledge to the child but rather engages children’s thinking through observation and dialogue. The *Image of the Child* views the child as a curious, able, and active participant in their learning, allowing children to practice autonomy, solve problems, and gain independence. *Negotiated Learning* supports giving children control over the learning that they engage in.

“Reggio Emilia educators, give much importance to the debates, the negotiations and to students solving problems cooperatively” (p. 53). The seventh core understanding of the approach is *Documentation* as a means of interpreting and representing children’s learning. *Documentation* allows teachers to gain insight into children’s thoughts and understandings while also giving meaning to their work. The authors found that the Reggio Emilia approach considers, “the child as the main priority and not the subject to teach therefore, the learning process is key, and not just the final product. For this reason it is necessary for both teachers and learners to observe, document and discuss” (p. 52). The final defining component of the Reggio Emilia approach as determined through the literature review is *Social Relations*. Rooted in social constructivist theories, the approach contends that knowledge is actively built through interactions and social engagements with others.

The Environment as the Third Teacher

The Reggio Emilia approach values *The Environment as the Third Teacher*, meaning “three educators, the teacher, the child, and the environment” (Edwards, 2012; Santín &

Torruella, 2017, p. 53; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2009; Thornton & Brunton, 2014). Davies, Jindal-Snape, Collier, Digby, Hay, and Howe (2012) identified components of learning environments that best support children's creativity and academic success. Such components include indoor and outdoor environments, learning through play, pedagogical environment, and appropriate use of time and materials. The organization of the environments should revolve around the child. The teacher should allow children to plan and contribute to the layout of the classroom, the props used during play, and the work displayed. Play as a means of instruction that nurtures creative skills in young children by providing meaningful opportunities to experiment with language. The pedagogical environment should support learning activities that are directed by and relevant to the child. Davies et al. elaborate on this idea, writing, "From a range of case studies of practice in Reggio Emilia schools, Gandini et al. (2005) suggest that, rather than being explicitly planned for, creativity emerges from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources" (p. 85). This creative learning environment is further developed through the use of time and materials. In order to maximize children's learning and development, they should be provided with a variety of open-ended materials, as well as ample time to fully explore and create with such materials. Davies et al. conclude that these components of the creative learning environment, which align with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, can support young children's development and learning beyond their creative skills. By creating a supportive, child-centered environment, educators can promote children's social-emotional development, academic achievement, attention, and personal motivation.

100 Languages of Children

100 Languages of Children is the understanding that "language is defined beyond verbal language and considers visual language, mathematical language, scientific language, etc."

(Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53; Vecchi, 2013). Kang (2007) identified three approaches from her observations of Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. The three approaches that are used to support children's language development include, "(a) the combination of diverse materials, (b) the respect for children's abilities, and (c) the belief in working with others" (p. 47). Diverse materials refer to a range of open-ended supplies that children can manipulate to express themselves with endless possibilities. This includes materials of various colors, textures, and natural elements. Respect for children's abilities promotes their language development by acknowledging their contributions and supporting further creative expression. The common belief in working with others that was present across all of the Reggio Emilia schools observed allows children to share perspectives and learn from one another. These approaches to language development are made possible when educators provide children with sufficient opportunities to build language and express themselves beyond verbal communication. Kang concludes, "If children combine the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of types of materials in hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of ways, can you imagine how many languages they could speak?" (p. 65).

Long-Term Projects

Long-Term Projects are, "focused on interests of children, who have control over the direction the project takes" (Cagliari et al., 2012; Loh, 2006; Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53). Rahman et al., (2011) explore the effects of participating in long-term projects on young children. This approach, which is rooted in the Reggio Emilia philosophy, is based on a "constructivist pedagogy that emphasis on deep learning process through inquiry method in which the child is preoccupied with issues and questions that are rich, alive and relevant to their daily live" (p. 476). This study was conducted at a preschool in Bangi, Malaysia. The project-

based approach was implemented across two cycles. Each cycle involved phases of reflection, planning, execution, observation, and evaluation among the researchers and the teachers. The researchers noted an increase in academic motivation from the students. They noted, “one important claim by the teachers is that the approach was a good idea as it can attract and retain children interest in the teaching and learning activities” (p. 479). The findings also indicate a positive influence on young children’s cognitive abilities, social-emotional development, and overall learning process as a result of the project-based approach.

Teacher-Researcher

The fourth tenet of the Reggio Emilia approach is *Teacher-Researcher*. This is the idea that “the teacher serves to not only provide information, but to listen, observe, and document” (Rinaldi, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53; Thornton & Brunton, 2014). In their article, “Learning to Document in Reggio-inspired Education”, authors Wien et al., (2011) discuss pedagogical documentation as a form of teacher research. Under the Reggio Emilia philosophy, observation and documentation are crucial responsibilities of the teacher. Documentation is a critical component of the teacher’s role as a researcher in that it supports, “the educator’s study of learning in order to figure out how to teach” (p. 2). It creates opportunities for teachers to examine and reflect on children’s perceptions and understandings. These practices provide teachers with important information on the actual learning that is taking place, as well as the structure of that learning. The authors elaborate on this notion, writing, “Conceptualizing pedagogical documentation as teacher research calls upon the teacher not to know with certainty but instead to wonder, to inquire with grace into some temporary state of mind and feeling in children” (p. 2). In order to truly understand what children are thinking and learning, the teacher must watch and listen.

Image of the Child

The *Image of the Child* is the belief that every child is a competent, creative, curious, full of potential and ambitious entity (Gandini, 2012; Malaguzzi, 1993). Authors Gencer and Gonen (2015) examine how the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach can impact young children's creativity. As the creator of the Reggio Emilia philosophy indicated, "all children possessed a natural capacity for creativity, and needed to be provided with opportunities for cultivating this capacity to its full potential" (p. 457). This study was conducted at a preschool in Kırklareli Province in Turkey. During this time, the children engaged in activities and projects inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking was used to assess the children on fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration. The results indicated an increase in fluency, originality, and elaboration as a result of the introduction of Reggio-inspired projects. These findings support instructional activities that nurture children's creativity and allow them to pursue their interests. The authors warn against ignoring children's curious nature, explaining that, "relying on a pre-packaged program runs the risk of hindering the development of the child's creative thinking skills, and depriving them of the opportunity to follow their natural curiosity to where it would take them" (p. 459).

Negotiated Learning

Negotiated Learning is the notion that children's ideas are given serious consideration (Santín & Torruella, 2017; Thornton & Brunton, 2014). Efrat (2015) strives to examine the impact of children's involvement in planning instructional activities on their learning and development. The multi-dialogical approach proposes a curriculum that is developed in collaboration with and based on the personal interests of the child. As Efrat articulates, "the learner, the child, is not considered an empty vessel that must be filled, but rather as a real

partner for investigation and learning” (p. 174). In order to successfully involve children in the design process, teachers must come to recognize their students’ unique perspectives. This can be achieved through frequent dialogue and opportunities for children to take an active role in their learning. Efrat concludes that “children’s participation in planning their activities and their learning in the kindergarten, is a personal experience in which they gain in social abilities such as listening and involvement, expressing personal opinions, acquiring methods to learn, to share their experience with peers, to practice daily decision making, to conduct negotiation, to learn to wait for their turn, and to share with friends” (p. 176).

Documentation

Documentation is used to promote communication, collaboration and reflection among children, teachers, and families (Dahlberg, 2012; Foreman & Fyfe, 2012; Fyfe, 2012; Rinaldi, 2012; Schroeder-Yu, 2008; Thornton & Brunton, 2014). Katz and Chard (1996) detail several advantages of the use of high-quality documentation in the classroom setting, explaining that the use of documentation in Reggio Emilia classrooms, “focuses more intensively on children’s experience, memories, thoughts, and ideas in the course of their work” (p. 107). Among the benefits of these documentation practices is the enrichment of children’s learning. By displaying children’s creations in the classroom, teachers create opportunities for children to reflect and expand upon their work. This method also allows children to gain new knowledge and inspiration from their peers. Displaying documentation also indicates to children that their ideas and creations are valued. When teachers display children’s work in the classroom, they are instilling confidence, hard work, and positive dispositions towards learning in their students. Documentation practices create benefits for the teacher as well as the students. Teachers can reflect upon children’s work in order to assess their progress and plan future activities and

projects. Beyond the classroom, documentation practices following the Reggio Emilia approach can improve interactions with families as well. The authors elaborate that documentation, “introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations. They reexamine their assumptions about their parenting roles and their views about the experience their children are living, and take a new and more inquisitive approach toward the whole school experience” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 64). This use of documentation creates opportunities for families to act as resources and extend children’s learning in the home. Finally, documentation of children’s ongoing work, rather than formal assessments, can provide teachers with an authentic view of the learning that is taking place. However, the authors note that these advantages of documentation are only made possible when children are involved in engaging and intricate long-term projects.

Social Relations

Social Relations is the recognition that learning is socially constructed (Cagliari, Filippini & Giacomini, 2012; Santín & Torruella, 2017). Under this tenet, children are viewed as co-constructors of their learning, rather than passive recipients (Malaguzzi, 1993). Seçken and Alúan (2011) compare the effects of constructivist learning and traditional teaching on student learning. The constructivist approach acknowledges that learning is intentionally constructed through social interactions. As the authors explain, “the children don’t wait for someone to fill their brains. They structure the knowledge actively in their brains and reconstruct it” (p. 235). This study was conducted with 100 students in a higher education setting. The students were divided equally into two groups. The control group was taught about hydrolysis using traditional methods, while the treatment group was taught using constructivist methods. The Hydrolysis Concept Test (HCT) was used as the pre- and post-assessment to evaluate student understanding.

The findings indicate that student success in the treatment group was significantly greater than that of the control group. This study suggests that learning through constructivist methods, including the process of engagement, exploration, elaboration, and evaluation, can notably increase academic achievement in students. The researchers maintain that while the participants in this study were young adults, the constructivist practices implemented can be adapted to preschool and elementary school students.

Summary

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is characterized by eight distinct tenets – *The Environment as the Third Teacher*, *100 Languages of Children*, *Long-Term Projects*, *Teacher-Researcher*, *Image of the Child*, *Negotiated Learning*, *Documentation*, and *Social Relations* (Santín & Torruella, 2017). A review of the literature indicates a widespread adoption of the Reggio-inspired approach in early childhood settings beyond the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Researchers are interested in how the perspectives of Reggio-inspired teachers align or contradict the literature published. The purpose of the present study was to use the existing literature from Santín and Torruella (2017) to gather information from teachers who self-identified as adhering to a Reggio-inspired philosophic approach to teaching young children. Specifically, the present study sought to determine how participants incorporated the framework set forth by Santín and Torruella, (2017) within their early childhood classrooms.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of the present case study (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999) was to gather information from teachers currently working in early care environments who self-identify as embracing a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to early childhood education in order to identify characteristics of the approach in practice. The particulars of the research design are described hereafter.

Research Design

As the goal of this study was to gain insight into the everyday classroom practices from Reggio Emilia-inspired educators, a qualitative research approach was taken. As Starman (2013) states, qualitative research “is characterized by an interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual” (p. 30). Among the types of qualitative research, the *case study* was determined to be the most appropriate for this study. A case study is defined as, “a method of obtaining a ‘case’ or a number of ‘cases’ through an empirical examination of a real-world phenomenon within its naturally occurring context, without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context” (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999, p. 372). Within the case study approach, there are several methods to choose from based on the goal of the research. Exploratory case studies are used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is being explored through the perspectives of the subjects. The goal of the exploratory case study is to, “provide a cogent, detailed portrait of the phenomenon – the attributes it assumes, the variations it displays, the ways it appears to operate, and the combinations of factors that seem to shape the patterns observed in natural settings” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 274). To understand what the Reggio Emilia approach looks like in practice, a qualitative exploratory case study was conducted.

A case study aims to uncover meaning and understanding from social experiences in their natural setting (Yin, 2009). This single case design (Yin, 2009; 2013; 2014) is rooted in constructivism and based on the understanding that social phenomena and one's perspectives must be examined in order to identify concepts and interpretations (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Case studies can also offer descriptions of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Gustafsson (2017) stated, "a case study can be defined as an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units" (p. 2). The single case research design offers a more meaningful understanding of specific social experiences, in this case, an understanding of what it means to teach from a Reggio-inspired point of view from the perspectives of teachers who identified with this approach.

When implementing this study, as a researcher, I determined it was critical to gather knowledge of the early childhood teaching profession from an insider's perspective on what the Reggio-inspired approach meant to them as practitioners. As researcher, I also selected this research design because I believe that what it means to be Reggio-inspired has yet to be determined.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to address two leading research questions. The first research question is: How do Reggio practitioners define the Reggio-inspired approach? The second guiding research question is: What does the Reggio Emilia approach look like in practice?

Setting

In order to gather information from those who self-identified as embracing a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to educating young children, a search was conducted via the social

media platform Facebook for special interest groups. This search yielded four groups that identified as both focusing on Reggio Emilia-inspired approaches and being comprised of those who were currently teachers (i.e., Reggio parent's groups were not included). These groups included *Reggio Inspired Early Childhood Educators* (created in 2017; 60.8K members), *Reggio Emilia Inspired Resources* (created in 2017; 17.4K members), *Inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach* (created in 2019; 47.1K members), and *Reggio-Inspired Startup* (created in 2015; 9.5K members). As these Facebook groups were not associated with specific regions, it is assumed that the members represent a global population.

Participants

This case study was conducted by accessing Facebook groups associated with the Reggio Emilia approach. A total of 79 educators participated in the online questionnaire. 75 of those participants gave consent for their responses to be used in this study. For each questionnaire item regarding demographic data, responses were recorded for 51 (68%) participants. According to the data collected, the majority of questionnaire participants were female (92.16%), have earned a master's degree (37.25%), have been teaching for over 10 years (64.71%), and adopted the Reggio Emilia approach between 2010-2015 (37.25%). See Table 1 for complete demographic information.

Table 1. Demographic information on participants' gender, years of teaching experience, education, and years of implementing the Reggio-inspired approach in the classroom.

	Number	%
Gender		
Female	47	92.16
Male	2	3.92

(table cont'd)

	Number	%
Gender		
Non-binary/third gender	1	1.96
Prefer not to say	1	1.96
Years of teaching experience		
Less than 3 years	3	5.88
3-5 years	3	5.88
5-10 years	12	23.53
More than 10 years	33	64.71
Education		
High School or GED	1	1.96
Early Childhood Certificate or CDA	10	19.61
Associate Degree	2	3.92
Bachelor's Degree	16	31.37
Master's Degree	19	37.25
PhD	3	5.88
Year Reggio-inspired approach was adopted		
Before 2000	5	9.80
2000-2005	2	3.92
2005-2010	12	23.53
2010-2015	19	37.25
2016	4	7.84
2017	5	9.80
2018	3	5.88
2019	1	1.96

Tool Creation

The Reggio-Classroom Assessment Measure (R-CAM) was designed for the present study using the basic tenets of the Reggio approach, as described by Santín and Torruella (2017). These tenets include eight components: (a) *The Environment as the Third Teacher*; (b) *100 Languages of Children*; (c) *Long-Term Projects*; (d) *Teacher-Researcher*; (e) *Image of the Child*; (f) *Negotiated Learning*; (g) *Documentation*; (h) *Social Relations*. In order to determine necessary components of the classroom environment, teachers were asked within each of the eight tenets to list examples of the materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that were present in their classroom. *Materials* were defined as, “tangible objects, which may be oriented to, sensed, touched and handled in the course of social activities” (Jakonen, 2015, p. 102). *Artifacts* were defined as “actual materials generated in classrooms” (Martínez, et al., 2012, p. 43); “what students do, say, and produce” (Chism, 2018, para. 2). *Teacher facilitation* was defined as, “a type of educational interaction in which the main goal of the teacher is to create favorable conditions for self-development of the learner ... the teacher’s impact on the learners” (Ogienko, 2016, p. 86).

Self-Report Questionnaires

Self-report questionnaires are those in which the participants complete the questionnaire independent of the researcher. Demetriou et al., (2015) describe the design, reliability, and validity of self-report questionnaires, as well as the benefits and limitations. One advantage of self-report questionnaires is that they can be conducted through an online system as well as in person. An advantage is that the researcher does not need to be present in order for the participant to fill out the questionnaire. Self-report questionnaires provide researchers with a means of data collection that is cost- and time-efficient. Additionally, because the participants

themselves are the ones doing the reporting, information obtained from self-report questionnaires may provide a better understanding of the subject than if it had been collected from an outside perspective. However, self-report questionnaires do present several drawbacks.

One of the primary limitations of self-report questionnaires involves the accuracy of the information given by the participants. There are several reasons why participants might provide misleading responses. Celis-Morales et al., (2012) acknowledge that “information derived from self-report is potentially subject to response bias (e.g. imprecise recall, influence of social desirability)” (p. 2). Participants may demonstrate an internalized expectation to respond to the questions in a particular way. This situation can also occur if the researcher is present during the completion of the questionnaire. Another challenge of collecting information through self-report questionnaires is the risk of participants misunderstanding the questions, which can create data that does not represent the research goals. These disadvantages can be addressed through the design of the self-report questionnaire.

Demetriou et al., (2015) note that the questionnaire questions should be written in language that is easy to understand and should only address a single concept with each question. Depending on the type of data one wishes to collect, questions can be open-ended, allowing subjects to answer in their own words, or closed, in which subjects are given a limited number of responses to choose from. Another crucial component to consider is the layout of the survey itself. Demetriou et al. emphasize that “the layout of a questionnaire is also important as good layout encourages respondent engagement and minimizes possible irritation” (2015, p. 2-3). The authors recommend designing the questionnaire to be short, logically structured, and easy to follow.

Sampling Procedures

In the summer of 2019, the Reggio-Classroom Assessment Measure (R-CAM) was distributed via Facebook to the four identified Reggio Emilia teacher educator groups. The post invited participants to complete a Qualtrics questionnaire and offered an entry into a drawing for a class set of blocks.

We are seeking input from practicing teachers who work in a Reggio-inspired classroom or program. We are developing a tool to share with educators who are interested in implementing a Reggio-inspired approach but are not sure how to begin.

Please take a look at the chart, below, and note which materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation support each of the core tenets of the Reggio approach in your center (i.e., if someone came and observed in your classroom, what would they see that demonstrates your adherence to the Reggio-inspired approach?).

Your responses will be anonymously entered into a database; there are no known risks in participating in this study.

To participate, click here:

https://lsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9nU08m9MFEGqt13

Participants will be entered into a drawing for a 72 PCS Wood Castle Block set. Follow the instructions at the end of the questionnaire to register.

The sampling procedure used in the present study is criterion sampling. Criterion sampling involves the researcher “choosing settings, groups, and/or individuals because they represent one or more criteria” (Collins et al., 2007, p. 272). In order to be eligible for participation in this study, the participants must be teachers who self-identify as following the Reggio-inspired approach, and they must be a member of one of the identified Reggio Emilia Facebook groups.

Data Collection

A survey research design (Owens, 2002) was used in this study to collect data from educators on their Reggio Emilia-inspired classroom practices. This study surveyed a cohort, which targets the “same population each time data are collected, although samples studied may be different” (Owens, 2002, p. 3). For the purpose of obtaining information from the participants,

web-based questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires were designed to be web-based for several reasons. When compared to personal interviewing and mail surveys, online questionnaires present little to no cost, a shorter implementation period, and an international reach (Owens, 2002). The questionnaires were designed to include open-ended questions. Open-ended questions, which allow participants to respond freely rather than with fixed choices, provide the researcher with qualitative data (Demetriou et al., 2015). Research also indicates that online questionnaires that include an “open-ended question results in a more diversified set of answers” (Reja et al., 2003, p. 169).

Analysis Plan

In order to interpret the participants’ responses from the self-report questionnaires, two coding methods were used to analyze the data. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describe coding as, “a procedure for organizing the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organizational structure” (p. 31). Upon examining the survey results, each participant’s responses were labeled by keywords and phrases. This descriptive labeling process was done line-by-line for each survey response. The goal of this coding procedure was to identify repeating ideas held among the study participants. Open coding was used to interpret the participants’ responses to the questionnaire item, “In your own words, please describe the Reggio-inspired approach.” Open coding is defined as, “a method of generating a participant-generated ‘theory’ from the data” (Blair, 2015, p. 17). Because this questionnaire item was largely left open to interpretation by the participants, open coding is the appropriate data analysis technique. *A priori* coding was used for analyzing the participants’ responses to the questionnaire items regarding materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices for each of the eight tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach. *A priori* coding is defined as, “a tool for framing data into a coherent construct through

the application of an established ‘language’.” (p. 17). The data collected from these questionnaire items are framed within preconceived themes – each tenet of the Reggio Emilia approach. Because the themes are established prior to the data being analyzed, *a priori* coding was used for this set of participant responses. Once all survey responses were labeled, the codes were analyzed and organized into code concepts based on their connections. These code concepts were interpreted to reveal the overarching themes found within the data. Themes are defined as “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (p. 38). The themes identified will offer a representation of the perspectives and experiences of the participating educators.

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to identify characteristics of the Reggio Emilia philosophy based on the perspectives of practicing teachers who adhere to this approach. Participants in this study were recruited through Facebook groups geared towards Reggio-inspired educators. In order to be considered for this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: they had to be teachers who work in a Reggio-inspired classroom or program and members of the identified Reggio Emilia Facebook groups. A total of 75 participants provided consent for their responses to be used in this study. A survey research design (Owens, 2002) was used to collect data through web-based, self-report questionnaires (Demetriou et al., 2015). The participants’ responses were analyzed using two coding methods – open coding and *a priori* coding (Blair, 2015). The results of this data analysis were used to determine characteristics of the Reggio-inspired approach as identified by the participating teachers.

Chapter 4. Results

Teacher Descriptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The first goal of this study was to gain insight into what the Reggio Emilia-inspired approach looks like in practice. In order to gauge teachers' understanding of the Reggio philosophy, participants were asked, "In your own words, please describe the Reggio-inspired approach." Of the 75 consenting participants, 33 (44%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. The open coding method (Blair, 2015) was used to analyze the participants' responses. In Table 2, the themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances for this questionnaire item are presented.

Table 2. Reggio-inspired approach themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Themes	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Child-centered</i>	Child-centered Respect Support	Child interests	12
		Respect for child	8
		Support for child	6
	Competent Child	Child is competent/capable	14
<i>Learning from the Environment</i>	Natural Environment Learning from Environment	Environment as the third teacher	9
		Natural environment	7

(table cont'd)

Themes	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Documentation</i>	Documentation Reflection	Documentation	7
		Reflection	3
<i>Inquiry</i>	Inquiry Exploration Investigation	Inquiry/Inquiry-based	5
		Explore and experiment	4
<i>Observation</i>	Observation Teacher-Researcher	Observation	6
		Teacher-researcher	3
<i>Collaboration</i>	Peer Collaboration Social Skills Communication	Learning with others	6
		Communication	2
<i>Community</i>	Community Collaboration with Families	Community involvement	3
		Cooperation among teacher, child, and family	3

Seven themes emerged from the participants' responses to this questionnaire item. After coding the responses, the code child interests was noted 12 times, respect for child was noted eight times, and support for child was noted six times. These codes were grouped together into code concepts, which were 'Child-centered', 'Respect', and 'Support'. The code child is competent/capable occurred 14 times in the coded data. The code concept identified based on these codes was 'Competent Child'. Due to the similarities found, these code concepts were combined to determine the overarching theme *Child-centered*.

The code environment as the third teacher was recorded nine times and the code natural environment occurred seven times in the coded data. The code concepts determined from these codes were ‘Natural’, ‘Environment’, and ‘Learning from the Environment’. These code concepts were generalized into the theme *Learning from the Environment*.

The third theme identified was *Documentation*. Seven instances of the code documentation were noted and three instances of the code reflection were noted. These codes also represent the code concepts determined.

Five instances of the code inquiry/inquiry-based and four instances of the code explore and experiment were identified. These codes were combined into the code concepts ‘Inquiry’, ‘Exploration’, and ‘Investigation’, which determined the greater theme *Inquiry*.

The code observation was noted six times and the code teacher-researcher was noted three times. The code concepts classified by these codes are ‘Observation’ and ‘Teacher-Researcher’, which led to the overarching theme *Observation*.

Six instances of the code learning with others was recorded, and two instances of the code communication was recorded. From these codes, the code concepts ‘Peer Collaboration’, ‘Social Skills’, and ‘Communication’ were identified. These concepts were condensed into the theme *Collaboration*.

The code community involvement was noted three times and the code cooperation among teacher, child, and family was noted three times. These codes were grouped into the code concepts ‘Community’ and ‘Collaboration with Families’, which determined the larger theme of *Community*.

Teacher Descriptions of the Eight Core Tenets

The second goal of this study was to illustrate teachers' understanding of the eight core tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach. The participants were asked, "Please take a look at the chart below and note which materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation supports each of the core tenets of the Reggio approach in your center (i.e., if someone came and observed in your classroom, what would they see that demonstrates your adherence to the Reggio-inspired approach?)." For each tenet, participants were also asked to submit and describe a photograph that they believe represents that tenet. The *a priori* coding method was used to analyze participant's responses. Separate tables were created to analyze the photographs submitted for each tenet following the same coding method. It is necessary to disclose that for each tenet, one participant did not provide a photograph, but responded "Na" to the photo description prompt. For this reason, there were more responses recorded as photo descriptions than there were photographs provided.

The Environment as the Third Teacher

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the first tenet – *The Environment as the Third Teacher*. Of the 75 consenting participants, 12 (16%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 3, the codes and code instances for tenet 1 are presented according to materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation.

Table 3. The Environment as the Third Teacher themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>The Environment as the Third Teacher</i>	Materials	Open-ended materials Exploration materials	3
		Science materials Natural materials	3

(table cont'd)

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>The Environment as the Third Teacher</i>	Materials	Literacy materials Reference materials	2
		Writing/drawing materials	1
	Artifacts	Documentation Story of learning Pictures Share experiences with children	3
	Teacher Facilitation	Provoking questions Feedback Supporting children in realizing potential	3
		Child involvement in project	1

Within the code concept ‘Materials’, three instances were noted for the codes open-ended materials and exploration materials, three instances were noted for the codes science materials and natural materials, two instances were noted for the codes literacy materials and reference materials, and one instance was noted for the code writing/drawing materials.

Within the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the codes documentation, story of learning, pictures, and share experiences with children were recorded three times.

Within the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, three instances of the codes provoking questions, feedback, and supporting children in realizing potential were identified and one instance of the code child involvement in project was identified.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *The Environment as the Third Teacher* (See Appendix A). Of the 75 consenting participants, eight

(10.7%) provided photographs and nine (12%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 4 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 1 based on these photographs and descriptions.

Table 4. Codes and code instances for tenet 1 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>The Environment as the Third Teacher</i>	Materials	Exploration materials Open-ended materials Loose parts Inquiry	4
		Organized environment Natural lighting Child-appropriate furniture	2
		Dramatic play materials	2
		Art materials Creativity	2
	Artifacts	Documentation of student work Projects	2
	Teacher Facilitation	Learning outdoors Outdoor play Explore within environment	4
		Planning with students Student choice	3
		Provoke questions Discussion with students	2

Under the code concept ‘Materials’, four instances of the codes exploration materials, open-ended materials, loose parts, and inquiry, two instances of the codes organized environment, natural lighting, and child-appropriate furniture, two instances of the codes dramatic play materials, and two instances of the codes art materials and creativity were recorded.

Under the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the codes documentation of student work and projects were identified two times.

Under the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, four instances of the codes learning outdoors, outdoor play, and explore within environment were noted, three instances of the codes planning with students and student choice were noted, and two instances of the codes provoke questions and discussion with students were noted.

100 Languages of Children

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the second tenet – *100 Languages of Children*. Of the 75 consenting participants, eight (10.7%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 5, the codes and code instances for tenet 2 are presented according to materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation.

Table 5. 100 Languages of Children themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>100 Languages of Children</i>	Materials	Investigation/discovery materials	1
		Crafting materials	1
	Artifacts	Photographs/photo-stories	1
		Expressive materials	1

(table cont'd)

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>100 Languages of Children</i>	Teacher Facilitation	Visual directions	1
		Variety of documentation	1

Within the code concept ‘Materials’, one instance was noted for the code investigation/discovery materials and one instance was noted for the code crafting materials.

Within the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the code photographs/photo-stories was recorded one time and the code expressive materials was recorded one time.

Within the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, one instance of the code visual directions and one instance of the code variety of documentation were identified.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *100 Languages of Children* (See Appendix B). Of the 75 consenting participants, four (5.3%) provided photographs and five (6.7%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 6 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 2 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for teacher facilitation under this tenet.

Table 6. Codes and code instances for tenet 2 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>100 Languages of Children</i>	Materials	Expressive materials	1
	Artifacts	Student-created materials	1

Under the code concept ‘Materials’, the code expressive materials was noted one time.

Under the code concept ‘Artifacts’, one instance of the code student-created materials was recorded.

Long-Term Projects

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the third tenet – *Long-Term Projects*. Of the 75 consenting participants, seven (9.3%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 7, the codes and code instances for tenet 3 are presented according to materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation.

Table 7. Long-Term Projects themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Long-Term Projects</i>	Materials	Recycled materials	1
		Natural materials	
		Variety of materials	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Crafting materials	1
		Artifacts	1
		Student-created artifacts	1
		Prepare student-led project	2
		Facilitate	
		Listen	1
		Document	1

Within the code concept ‘Materials’, the codes recycled materials and natural materials were found once, the code variety of materials was found once, and the code crafting materials was found once.

Within the code concept ‘Artifacts’, one instance of the code student-created artifacts was identified.

Within the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, two instances of the codes prepare student-led project and facilitate, one instance of the code listen, and one instance of the code document were recorded.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Long-Term Projects* (See Appendix C). Of the 75 consenting participants, three (4%) provided photographs and four (5.3%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 8 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 3 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for materials under this tenet.

Table 8. Codes and code instances for tenet 3 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Long-Term Projects</i>	Artifacts	Student-created work	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Plan project Gather materials Build upon project over time	2
		Student-led Student expression	2
		Display student work	1

Under the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the code student-created work was recorded once.

Under the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, two instances of the codes plan project, gather materials, and build upon project over time were identified, two instances of the codes student-led and student expression were identified, and one instance of the code display student work was identified.

Teacher-Researcher

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the fourth tenet – *Teacher-Researcher*. Of the 75 consenting participants, seven (9.3%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 9, the codes and code instances for tenet 4 are presented according to materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation.

Table 9. Teacher-Researcher themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Teacher-Researcher</i>	Materials	Camera Various resources	2
		Creative materials	1
	Artifacts	Photographs of students Documentation of learning process	2
	Teacher Facilitation	Document student milestones	1
		Planning	1
		Collaboration	1

Following the code concept ‘Materials’, two instances of the codes camera and various resources were noted and one instance of the code creative materials was noted.

Following the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the codes photographs of students and documentation of learning process were recorded twice.

Following the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, one instance of the code document student milestones, one instance of the code planning, and one instance of the code collaboration were identified.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Teacher-Researcher* (See Appendix D). Of the 75 consenting participants, three (4%) provided photographs and four (5.3%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 10 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 4 based on these photographs and descriptions.

Table 10. Codes and code instances for tenet 4 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Teacher-Researcher</i>	Materials	Organizer	1
		Artistic/expressive materials	1
	Artifacts	Photographs/videos	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Document development	1
		Connect concepts Research	1
		Planning	1

Included in the code concept ‘Materials’, the code organizer and the code artistic/expressive materials were found once.

Included in the code concept ‘Artifacts’, one instance of the code photographs/videos was identified.

Included in the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, the code document development was recorded once, the codes connects concepts and research were recorded once, and the code planning was recorded once.

Image of the Child

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the fifth tenet – *Image of the Child*. Of the 75 consenting participants, six (8%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 11, the codes and code instances for tenet 5 are presented according to materials and teacher facilitation. Participants did not provide data for artifacts under this tenet.

Table 11. Image of the Child themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Image of the Child</i>	Materials	Photographs Documentation	2
	Teacher Facilitation	Listen Facilitate	1
		Document	1

Within the code concept ‘Materials’, two instances of the codes photographs and documentation were identified.

Within the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, the codes listen and facilitate were noted once and the code document was noted once.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Image of the Child* (See Appendix E). Of the 75 consenting participants, two (2.7%) provided photographs and three (4%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 12 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 5 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for materials or artifacts under this tenet.

Table 12. Codes and code instances for tenet 5 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Image of the Child</i>	Teacher Facilitation	Hands-on experiences Support curiosity	1
		Student-led Give students responsibilities	1

Under the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, the codes hands-on experiences and support curiosity were identified once and the codes student-led and give students responsibilities were identified once.

Negotiated Learning

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the sixth tenet – *Negotiated Learning*. Of the 75 consenting participants, six (8%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 13, the codes and code instances for tenet 6 are presented according to artifacts, materials, and teacher facilitation.

Table 13. Negotiated Learning themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Negotiated Learning</i>	Materials	Writing materials	1
		Building materials Open-ended materials	1
	Artifacts	Student work Documentation	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Interact with students during play Listener Co-planner	2

(table cont’d)

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Negotiated Learning</i>	Teacher Facilitation	Display student work	1

Included in the code concept ‘Materials’, one instance of the code writing materials and one instance of the codes building materials and open-ended materials were found.

Included in the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the codes student work and documentation were identified once.

Included in the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, two instances of the codes interact with students during play, listener, and co-planner were recorded and one instance of the code display student work was recorded.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Negotiated Learning* (See Appendix F). Of the 75 consenting participants, two (2.7%) provided photographs and three (4%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 14 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 6 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for materials under this tenet.

Table 14. Codes and code instances for tenet 6 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Negotiated Learning</i>	Artifacts	Child-created materials	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Student-led activity	2

Following the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the code child-created materials was identified once.

Following the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, two instances of the code student-led activity were noted.

Documentation

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the seventh tenet – *Documentation*. Of the 75 consenting participants, five (6.7%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 15, the codes and code instances for tenet 7 are presented according to artifacts, materials, and teacher facilitation.

Table 15. Documentation themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Documentation</i>	Materials	Written notes Graphic organizer Electronic documentation tools	1
	Artifacts	Written notes Graphic organizer	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Listen Document	1

Within the code concept ‘Materials’, the codes written notes, graphic organizer, and electronic documentation tools were found once.

Within the code concept ‘Artifacts’, one instance of the codes written notes and graphic organizer was recorded.

Within the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, the codes listen and document were noted once.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Documentation* (See Appendix G). Of the 75 consenting participants, one (1.3%) provided photographs and two

(2.7%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 16 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 7 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for artifacts under this tenet.

Table 16. Codes and code instances for tenet 7 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Documentation</i>	Materials	Written notes	1
	Teacher Facilitation	Involve students/families/community	1

Under the code concept ‘Materials’, one instance of the code written notes was recorded.

Under the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, the code involve students/families/community was noted once.

Social Relations

Participants were asked to describe materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices that represent the eighth tenet – *Social Relations*. Of the 75 consenting participants, five (6.7%) provided a response to this questionnaire item. In Table 17, the codes and code instances for tenet 8 are presented according to artifacts, materials, and teacher facilitation.

Table 17. Social Relations themes, code concepts, codes, and code instances.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Social Relations</i>	Materials	Open-ended materials	1
		Materials to promote social learning	1
	Artifacts	Documentation	1

(table cont’d)

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Social Relations</i>	Teacher Facilitation	Listen Facilitate	1

Included in the code concept ‘Materials’, one instance of the code open-ended materials and one instance of the code materials to promote social learning were noted.

Included in the code concept ‘Artifacts’, the code documentation was recorded once.

Included in the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, one instance of the codes listen and facilitate was identified.

Participants were asked to submit and describe a photograph representing *Social Relations* (See Appendix H). Of the 75 consenting participants, one (1.3%) provided photographs and two (2.7%) provided photograph descriptions. Table 18 presents the codes and code instances for tenet 8 based on these photographs and descriptions. Participants did not provide data for materials or artifacts under this tenet.

Table 18. Codes and code instances for tenet 8 photographs.

Theme	Code Concepts	Codes	Code Instances
<i>Social Relations</i>	Teacher Facilitation	Questioning Documenting	1
		Student collaboration	1
		Teacher supports students	1

Following the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’, one instance of the codes questioning and documenting was recorded, one instance of the code student collaboration was recorded, and one instance of the code teacher supports students was recorded.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to identify characteristics of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy in practice. Participating educators were asked to describe this philosophical approach in their own words. This study also aimed to classify materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices associated with each of the eight core tenets of the Reggio approach as identified by Santín and Torruella (2017).

Research Question 1

In order to answer the first research question, “How do Reggio practitioners define the Reggio-inspired approach?”, participants were asked to describe the Reggio-inspired approach. Overall, the themes determined from the participants’ responses largely mirrored the tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach as described by Santín and Torruella (2017). The most prevalent theme generated from the coded responses was *Child-centered*. A total of 40 instances of the codes contributing to this theme were recorded. The codes interpreted from the participants’ responses include child interests, respect for child, support for child, and child is competent/capable. The codes recorded under this theme reflect the fifth tenet of the Reggio philosophy, *Image of the Child*. According to Santín and Torruella’s (2017) definition, the child is thought to be a, “powerful, competent, creative, curious, full of potential and ambitious entity” (p. 53). This definition closely aligns with the codes determined by the participating educators. Furthermore, the construct that early childhood education should be child-centered rather than teacher-directed is instrumental to the Reggio philosophy. As Dodd-Nufrio (2011) indicates, the Reggio Emilia classroom is, “an environment that allows the child to be a producer of culture and knowledge – the child is a knowledge maker” (p. 236). Likewise, demonstrating respect and consideration

towards children's perceptions and contributions to the learning environment is considered a foundational component of the approach (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 50).

Another theme identified by the participants was *Learning from the Environment*, which was determined through a total of 16 code instances. Codes identified under this theme include natural environment and environment as the third teacher. This theme corresponds with the first tenet of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, *The Environment as the Third Teacher*. According to this tenet, "the teachers organise the space in a way that is inviting for students to explore, experiment and investigate" (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53). Additionally, the identification of *Learning from the Environment* as a characteristic of the Reggio-inspired classroom is supported by the socio-constructivist perspective of the philosophy. The socio-constructivist framework concludes that, "both children and adults co-construct their knowledge through interactions with people and the environment" (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 235-236). As socio-constructivism contributes to the theoretical foundation of the Reggio philosophy, *Learning from the Environment* proves to be a critical characteristic of the approach. Another element of *Learning from the Environment* that aligns with the first tenet of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is nature. Omidvar et al., (2019) state that, "Reggio-Emilia-inspired teachers believe that children's engagement in nature-related activities not only promotes preschoolers' feelings of being at home but also enhances their sense of belonging to local, national, and global communities" (p. 221). Reggio-inspired pedagogical practices are those that incorporate the use of natural materials as well as engagement with the outdoor environment.

Documentation was another theme established from the participants' responses, with a total of 10 code instances recorded. The codes interpreted under this theme were documentation and reflection. This theme clearly correlates with the seventh tenet of the Reggio philosophy –

Documentation, which is described as allowing teachers to, “present and represent the experiences, thoughts and ideas of the students and to showcase their learning processes” (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53). Research indicates *Documentation* to be a core characteristic of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. In the Reggio-inspired classroom, “teachers use documentation not only to record the history of a project, but even more importantly, to guide learning and educational practice” (Hart, 2006, p. 3). Under this approach, documentation is used to strengthen and communicate the learning process.

Another theme identified by the participants was *Inquiry*, which was determined through a total of nine code instances. Codes identified under this theme include inquiry/inquiry-based and explore and experiment. These codes correspond with the first tenet of the Reggio approach, *The Environment as the Third Teacher*. Previous studies confirm *Inquiry* as an established component of this first tenet of the Reggio philosophy. Inan, Trundle, and Kantor (2010) state that the, “Reggio Emilia approach is grounded in inquiry, values play, embraces a constructivist and social-constructivist approach to teaching and learning, and pays attention to relationships, society, micro and macro cultures” (p. 1187-1188). *Inquiry* in the Reggio-inspired classroom is encouraged through interactive learning experiences and investigation within one’s surrounding environment.

The last three themes were identified with less than 10 code instances each. The fifth theme identified by the Reggio-inspired practitioners was *Observation*. This theme was determined by the codes observation and teacher-researcher, which corresponds with the fourth tenet of the Reggio approach – *Teacher-Researcher*. This tenet indicates that, “the teachers’ role is not reduced only to provide information to students, but to listen, observe and to document the work of children” (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 53). *Observation* as an element of the Reggio

Emilia philosophy is ingrained in the approach's emphasis on documentation. Documentation in the Reggio-inspired classroom occurs through a process of "observation, dialogue, communication, and joint problem solving" (Hart, 2006, p. 4). It is through observation that Reggio-inspired educators come to understand children's ideas and perspectives. Furthermore, reflection is a key component of the research process in the Reggio-inspired classroom. Researchers contend that in order for the Reggio-inspired educator to excel in their practice, "it is important that he engage in continuous reflection during which he questions that which he and others have previously assumed to be unquestionable" (Hewett, 2001, p. 98; Lindsay, 2015). The Reggio-inspired teacher's students, families, and peers are all contributing members of this reflective practice.

The sixth theme of the Reggio-inspired approach as determined by the participants was *Collaboration*. Codes identified under this theme include learning with others and communication. These codes resemble the eighth tenet of the Reggio approach – *Social Relations*. According to Santín and Torruella (2017), "Reggio Emilia's philosophy is based on social-constructivist theories, which define children as social active actors in the construction and determination of their social lives" (p. 54). The identification of *Collaboration* as a characteristic of the Reggio Emilia philosophy ties back to the approach's foundation in socio-constructivism. As Hart (2006) states, "Reggio Emilia educators value the contributions of children in the development of their own knowledge, and they believe that knowledge is constructed with others" (p. 3). The Reggio-inspired approach supports meaningful collaboration in a variety of ways, including among children, with families, and with one's community. Furthermore, *Collaboration* as a primary component of the Reggio philosophy aligns with the work of the philosophy's founder, Loris Malaguzzi (1993), who promoted an "education based

on relationships”. This concept “focuses on each child in relation to others and seeks to activate and support children’s reciprocal relationships with other children, family, teachers, society, and the environment” (Edwards, 2002, p. 82; Kirkham & Kidd, 2017). The idea that knowledge is socially constructed is a foundational understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The final theme of the Reggio-inspired approach generated from the participants’ responses was *Community*. This theme was determined by the codes community involvement and cooperation among teacher, child, and family. Similar to *Collaboration*, this theme most closely aligns with the eighth tenet of the Reggio philosophy – *Social Relations*. The characterization of *Community* as a component of the Reggio Emilia approach is supported through previous research, which defines the approach as a “community-based educational philosophy” (Hart, 2006, p. 3). The Reggio-inspired educator instills a sense of community within the classroom environment as well as incorporates members of the community in the learning process. The Reggio Emilia philosophy especially emphasizes the importance of the community beyond the classroom. Yıldız and Durmuşoğlu (2018; Altan, 2019) reiterate that, “coordination between teachers, parents, and children are highly valued and the concept of ‘learning group’ is considered as a very important aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach” (p. 26). Reggio-inspired educators respect the role that parents and families play in the child’s learning and development, and intentionally create opportunities for family involvement in the classroom.

The first research question addressed by this study was, “How do Reggio practitioners define the Reggio-inspired approach?”. An analysis of the participants’ descriptions of the Reggio Emilia approach revealed seven distinct themes. These themes are *Child-centered*, *Learning from the environment*, *Documentation*, *Inquiry*, *Observation*, *Collaboration*, and *Community*. While each of these themes relates to one of the eight core tenets of the Reggio

approach (Santín & Torruella, 2017), three of the tenets of the philosophy were not represented in the participants' responses. The tenets of the Reggio Emilia philosophy that were not expressed by these final themes are *100 Languages of Children*, *Long-Term Projects*, and *Negotiated Learning*. Future studies could examine why these tenets were not represented in the practices of Reggio-inspired educators.

Research Question 2

The second research question this study aimed to answer was, “What does the Reggio Emilia approach look like in practice?”. To address this question, the participants were asked to provide personal photographs and descriptions depicting the materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices they believed to represent each tenet of the Reggio approach.

The Environment as the Third Teacher

The most common codes recorded as ‘Materials’ relating to *The Environment as the Third Teacher* were exploration materials, open-ended materials, natural materials, and loose parts. The use of such materials in the early childhood classroom is supported through the Reggio Emilia approach. It is recommended that classroom spaces and materials promote, “observation, exploration and adventure areas which will contribute to their cognitive development” (Acar, 2014, p. 849; Sobchuk et al., 2019). The primary codes interpreted as ‘Artifacts’ were documentation of student work, story of learning, and projects. Extended projects and “displays of ongoing student work” are key components of this tenet in practice (Berezki & Kárpáti, 2018; Davies et al., 2012, p. 84). However, one type of artifact found in the literature that was not mentioned by the participating teachers was student-created props and play materials (Berezki & Kárpáti, 2018; Davies et al., 2012, p. 84). Major codes that were noted under the code concept ‘Teacher Facilitation’ include provoking questions, feedback,

learning outdoors, and planning with students. Learning from and within the environment, both indoors and outdoors, is a foundational concept of this first tenet. Acar (2014; Sobchuk et al., 2019) elaborates that, “in order to learn about the environment children need actively use and explore the environment” (p. 848). Furthermore, the pedagogical environment following the Reggio philosophy is one that incorporates dialogue, student-led activities, and that allows “adults and children to think together” (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018; Davies et al., 2012, p. 85).

100 Languages of Children

With only eight participants responding to the question relating to the *100 Languages of Children*, the data provided for this tenet is less extensive. The codes noted for ‘Materials’ under this tenet were investigation/discovery materials, crafting materials, and expressive materials. In relation to the *100 Languages of Children*, the literature supports the use of natural, recycled, and diverse materials, which may fall under the category of crafting materials (Kang, 2007; Slipp, 2017). The codes recorded as ‘Artifacts’ related to this tenet were photographs/photo-stories and student-created materials. These artifacts, especially student-created materials, allow children to express their thoughts and understandings through their own perspectives. The codes interpreted as ‘Teacher Facilitation’ for this tenet were visual directions and variety of documentation. These teacher facilitation practices do not align with what was found in the literature. In order to support children’s language development and self-expression, teachers should promote peer collaboration and demonstrate “respect for children’s abilities” (Kang, 2007, p. 47; Slipp, 2017).

Long-Term Projects

The codes generated from the participants’ descriptions of ‘Materials’ related to *Long-Term Projects* include recycled materials, natural materials, and variety of materials. These codes align closely with the project materials described by Kang (2007; Slipp, 2017), which also

promotes natural, recycled, and diverse materials. The terms participants associated with ‘Artifacts’ were student-created artifacts and student-created work. Not only do these codes represent the foundation of this tenet, students’ creations, but they also fulfill the selected definition of *artifacts*. The codes identified under ‘Teacher Facilitation’ were facilitate, build upon project over time, and student-led. Rather than control the direction of the project, teachers in a Reggio-inspired classroom allow the students to lead and develop the project. Rahman et al. (2011; Leung, 2020) explain that, “the task of teachers is not to give answers but to facilitate the process of learning, listening, researching and learning together with the children” (p. 476).

Teacher-Researcher

The primary codes identified as ‘Materials’ related to the fourth tenet were camera, various resources, and organizer. As one of the responsibilities of the *Teacher-Researcher* is to document, a camera is a necessary tool for fulfilling this responsibility. However, various resources as a material under this tenet could be considered too vague. Additional specific materials associated with the *Teacher-Researcher* could include a tape recorder, video camera, or pencil and paper (Eckhoff, 2019; Wien et al., 2011, p. 9). The codes recorded as ‘Artifacts’ under this tenet were photographs/videos and documentation of learning process. These codes clearly reflect what is found in the literature on documentation as teacher research. The Reggio approach supports the use of photographs and videos that are candid and intentionally captured, as well as documentation that represents the learning process rather than product. According to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, documentation as a component of teacher research should illustrate “the teacher’s story of the movement of children’s understanding” (Eckhoff, 2019; Wien et al., 2011, p. 2). The codes noted in relation to ‘Teacher Facilitation’ were document development, planning, and collaboration. Similar to the artifacts described under this tenet, the *Teacher-*

Researcher documents student development in order to gain perspective on the students' learning and understanding. Planning and collaboration were also key components of the *Teacher-Researcher's* role. Following the Reggio-inspired approach, teachers must engage in "cooperative work with other teachers to share information" (Santín & Torruella, 2017, p. 55).

Image of the Child

The codes interpreted as 'Materials' under this tenet were photographs and documentation. These codes more closely fulfill the definition of *artifacts*, as they are items generated within the classroom. Materials that represented the *Image of the Child* are those that encourage the child's curiosity and creativity, such as arts, music, and dramatic play materials (Gencer & Gonen, 2015, p. 457; Omidvar et al., 2019). The codes recorded under 'Teacher Facilitation' were facilitate, support curiosity, and give students responsibilities. These teacher facilitation practices align with the Reggio philosophy's understanding of children as curious and competent. This *Image of the Child* is honored in the Reggio Emilia classroom as children are "involved not only in discovery and invention but in a social discourse involving explanation, negotiation, sharing, and evaluation" (Clements & Battista, 1990, p. 35; Fang, 2017).

Negotiated Learning

The codes representing 'Materials' of *Negotiated Learning* were open-ended materials, building materials, and writing materials. These materials support the concept of *Negotiated Learning* in that they allow the students to determine how they are used and manipulated. The codes defined as 'Artifacts' under this tenet were child-created materials and student work. These codes meet the definition of *artifacts* as items created in the classroom. As with previous tenets of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, documentation of children's learning is a foundational component of *Negotiated Learning*. The codes recorded under the code concept 'Teacher

Facilitation’ include co-planner, listener, and student-led activity. The Reggio-inspired approach encourages teachers to engage with students at their level, listen intentionally, and give children a meaningful role in their learning (Efrat, 2015).

Documentation

For the seventh tenet, *Documentation*, the codes interpreted as ‘Materials’ were similar to those interpreted under ‘Artifacts’. The codes for ‘Materials’ and ‘Artifacts’ under this tenet were written notes, graphic organizer, and electronic documentation tools. These materials and artifacts support *Documentation* for the purpose of examining and understanding student learning (Hostyn et al., 2020; Katz & Chard, 1996). Additional materials and artifacts that could have been included are photographs, videos, audio recordings, and student-created projects. These items contribute to the process of *Documentation* for the purpose of making children’s learning visible (Hostyn et al., 2020; Katz & Chard, 1996, p. 108). The codes recorded as ‘Teacher Facilitation’ were listen, document, and involve students/families/community. Listening and documenting as teacher practices are ingrained in the definition of *Documentation* as a tenet of the Reggio philosophy. *Documentation* in the Reggio-inspired classroom serves to create interest and increase involvement in the learning process from families and the surrounding community (Hostyn et al., 2020; Katz & Chard, 1996, p. 108).

Social Relations

The codes recorded as ‘Materials’ associated with the eighth tenet were open-ended materials and materials to promote social learning. Although materials to promote social learning is broad, these materials support the idea that learning is socially constructed. Specific materials that promote this concept include open-ended art materials, writing materials, and dramatic play materials (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 11). The only code noted under ‘Artifacts’ relating to *Social*

Relations was documentation. Observing and documenting children's social interactions in the classroom allows teachers to gain a deeper understanding of children's relationships and cognitive abilities and design play opportunities to nourish these skills (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 11). Codes identified under 'Teacher Facilitation' include listen, student collaboration, and teacher supports students. In order for students to successfully participate and learn in the social environment, teachers must create engaging, hands-on opportunities and experiences for them. As Malaguzzi (1993) points out, "interaction among children affects social, emotional, communicative, and cognitive behavior and development" (p. 12). As such, teachers in the Reggio-inspired classroom cultivate an environment that encourages collaboration and cooperation among students.

Limitations

While completing the questionnaire, the participants apparently experienced respondent fatigue. This is an occurrence in which questionnaire participants grow increasingly less involved as they matriculate through the questionnaire items. This phenomenon becomes obvious when comparing the number of participant responses for the questionnaire items in chronological order. A total of 75 participants consented to participating in this study. The first set of questions, which collected demographic data, received 51 responses, which accounts for 68% of the total participants. The following questionnaire item, which asked the participants to describe the Reggio approach, received 33 responses, equating to 44% of the total participants. On the final question of the questionnaire, which asked about classroom practices associated with *social relations*, only five responses were recorded, which accounts for 6.7% of the total participants. Possibly, this contrast in respondent participation affected the outcome of this study. The conclusions drawn from the questionnaire items with fewer responses may offer a weaker

representation of the participating teachers' perspectives when compared to the items with a greater number of responses.

Another limitation of this study is that the locations of the participating teachers was not included in the demographic data collected. Although the questionnaire was designed in English, this does not indicate that the participants teach in English-speaking schools. As it was disseminated through an online format, the questionnaire was potentially accessible to an international audience. Additionally, the ages of the participating teachers were not recorded in the demographic data. The collection of this demographic information could have illustrated the prevalence of the Reggio-inspired approach across age groups, education level, years of experience, and regions.

Clinical Implications

This study aimed to identify teachers' perspectives on the Reggio Emilia philosophy as well as examine what this approach looks like in practice. This study determined seven characteristics of the approach as well as specific materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices associated with each tenet. The results of this study could be used to inform teacher trainings or professional development resources on understanding the Reggio approach. Teachers and researchers can refer to the characteristics described in this study as a practical guide to the Reggio approach, or to identify commonly held misconceptions. Furthermore, the information gathered on the materials, artifacts, and teacher facilitation practices found in the Reggio-inspired classroom can contribute to the future development of a reference tool for teachers hoping to adopt the Reggio Emilia approach in their own practice.

Appendix A. Tenet 1 Photographs













Appendix B. Tenet 2 Photographs







Appendix C. Tenet 3 Photographs







Appendix D. Tenet 4 Photographs





Appendix E. Tenet 5 Photographs





Appendix F. Tenet 6 Photographs





Appendix G. Tenet 7 Photographs



Appendix H. Tenet 8 Photographs



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Vita

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