VISIBLE LEARNING IN A REGGIO EMILIA INSPIRED KINDERGARTEN: PARENTS’ DESCRIPTIONS OF DOCUMENTATION

by

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reveal multiple perspectives and thoughts of seven parents and a family member in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States regarding pedagogical documentation, an essential tool for teaching practice and reflection. It served to make knowledge construction visible through children’s interpretive concrete work. Throughout the study, pedagogical documentation was defined as both a learning process as well as the products of early childhood content. The content were concrete materials in the form of notes, photographs, audio and video recordings, computer graphics, and examples of children’s work that were accomplished in the kindergarten context. The process referred to how these materials were implemented and utilized as a means of reflection for teachers, children, and parents regarding children’s learning processes and potentials while not explicitly meeting state expectations or standards (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007).

There is minimal research centered on documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms from parent(s)’ perspectives. Further study to address parents’ understandings of pedagogical documentation was needed to fill gaps in the early childhood literature. Participants were purposefully selected. A qualitative research approach using the case study tradition was employed to answer the central question: How do seven parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States?
Using an interpretive and inductive method, the data set was analyzed and coded, identifying themes. The data set included participant questionnaires, interview transcriptions, and observation notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Six themes that fit the robust data set were distinguished. Rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and direct quotes described the participants’ understandings and beliefs concerning teaching and learning documentation in the Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. From the analyzed raw data, the research questions that guided this study were thoroughly addressed while provoking further questions for thought and study.

Keywords: Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia inspired practice, pedagogical documentation, early childhood education, assessment
DEDICATION

For Morgan, Wesley, and Bates, my greatest blessings, who inspire my beliefs about young learners and cause me to critically reflect upon best practice for early childhood education.
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Moreover, I am forever grateful to my family for giving me the opportunity to pursue my dreams. To Greg, Morgan, Wesley, and Bates, this would never have been possible without your sacrifice, love, patience, and support. I would especially like to thank my parents, Anne and Grady Gibbons, for hosting numerous sessions of “Camp Gaga” so that I could study and write, but more importantly, for always loving and believing in me.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p.82)

The municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, have deep roots with the city (Barazzoni, 2005; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a). In order to fully appreciate the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, it is first necessary to understand its origins, because “a return to the past is not merely reviewing history. It is an indispensable point of reference in understanding the present and in finding new and appropriate answers to the many difficult questions facing today’s society” (Testi, 2005, p. 5). After being almost completely destroyed during World War II, the city’s first priority following the end of the war was to build schools for the children. Every villager envisioned a new educational experience for the children. Out of ruins, brick by brick, schools were established to promote the rights of children, prevent a recurrence of Fascism, and end the domination of the Catholic Church on the education of young children (Barazzoni, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a). The schools, under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, recognized the “the right of each child to be a protagonist and the need to sustain each child’s spontaneous curiosity at a high level. . . . [within] an amiable environment, where children, families, and teachers feel at ease” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p. 52-63). The philosophical principles of the
Reggio Emilia approach are steeped in culture and have been honed over several decades. Today the approach is world-renowned as an exemplary standard of high quality early childhood education (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991; Katz, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2008).

Although he declined to be united to any particular theory, Loris Malaguzzi, as founder of the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, was greatly influenced by the progressive ideals of many theorists, including Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Howard Gardner, and Jerome Bruner (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2003; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Rinaldi, 2006). Even today, the latest research on child development continues to add to the evolving ideologies and philosophies that underpin the Reggio Emilia approach (Gandini, 1993). Educators in Reggio Emilia continually reflect upon all of these ideas in order to generate their own evolving ideas and philosophy for pedagogical practice thereby strengthening the autonomy of the approach (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a). In Reggio Emilia, there is a beauty among relationships. Thus, the focus on the importance of socio-cultural context and interrelationships for children’s learning particularly links educators in Reggio Emilia to the socio-constructivist theorists. Consistent with the social constructivist viewpoint, children, teachers, and families are all viewed as competent co-constructors in the learning process (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006).

Grounded in its history, culture, and theoretical influences, the underlying principles of the Reggio Emilia approach include the image of the child, the hundred languages, participation, relationships, environment as third teacher, progettazione, listening, and
pedagogical documentation (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1994; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). Whereas each influences and is influenced by the others, these fundamental ideas are firmly interconnected to form one coherent philosophy (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006). In Reggio Emilia, the child is viewed as rich in capabilities and potential with rights to be valued and respected rather than needs (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1994; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). As such, the child constructs meaning out of life within the context of relationships using a hundred languages, or different ways to think and express oneself (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998b; Rinaldi, 2006). A metaphor for children’s remarkable abilities and creativeness, the hundred languages of children include multiple expressive languages such as art, music, architecture, design, photography, dance, and theater and are considered equally as important as academic disciplines (Gandini, 2005c; Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, 2005). The hundred languages are actively explored and carried out in spaces within the schools called ateliers under the guidance of an atelierista (Cadwell, 2005; Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998a).

Essential to the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach is participation by children, teachers, families, as well as the whole community (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Gandini, 2004b; Rinaldi, 1998). Children, teachers, and families are all considered to be protagonists, stakeholders, or co-authors in the learning process (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). Participation values and encompasses the hundred languages of children while also generating and promoting school culture (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). Thus, relationships are fundamental to the Reggio ap-
proach (Malaguzzi, 1993). Children actively co-construct their knowledge, identity, and culture and are viewed as rich and capable in relation to others and the world (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993). The schools in Reggio Emilia value individual children and groups of children with different interests and abilities while providing places for activities and relationships to occur (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993). Furthermore, active participation by families is essential to both the school and families. There are various opportunities for families to be involved in the life of the school either directly at the school or indirectly at the community level (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990; Spaggiari, 1998).

The space and environment of the schools in Reggio Emilia are designed to bring together children, teachers, and families. Not only does this strengthen the relationships between the protagonists but it also creates a third teacher for the children (Malaguzzi, 1993). The deliberate use of space and environment enables children and adults to exist and learn together as they interact within it and as the environment adjusts and changes according to the projects in which they engage (Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). Absent of a predefined curriculum, projects develop from interests that arise from needs or questions within the children’s environments. This is referred to as progettazione, the curriculum in Italian, and is a way of thinking and action that values and strengthens the learning processes of both children and adults (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). Reflective of children’s copious capabilities and resources, it accurately describes the concurrently definite and indefinite stages of knowledge construction produced by children and adults in discourse with each
other (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006). Additionally, substantial amounts of unhurried time are part of the organization of the day, projects, and work of the children and adults, allowing ideas to naturally unfold (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Hendrick, 2004; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 1998; Wurm, 2005).

The Reggio Emilia approach has been described as a pedagogy of listening. Active listening between children, adults, and the environment is essential for every relationship (Rinaldi, 1998, 2001, 2006). As a continuous practice, it fosters contemplation, acceptance, and sincerity to self and others while also augmenting the degree of attentiveness and sensitivity to the culture and values of the world. Schools in Reggio Emilia support active listening through pedagogical documentation (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006).

Pedagogical documentation is both the process of collecting evidence and artifacts of what occurs at school as well as the physical collection (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Reggio Children, 2010). However, it is more than a record of what has happened; it is a way to make learning visible. Pedagogical documentation includes photos, video recordings, audio recordings, transcribed conversations, and children’s artwork in addition to the interpretations, provocations, and hypotheses of adults. It is displayed, revisited, and reflected upon by all the protagonists on a continuing basis (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b, 2005c; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). In fact, a traveling exhibit of Reggio children’s documentation of progettazione has been around the world to allow audiences to see learning in action (Edwards et al., 1998).

Pedagogical documentation is a valuable means to show how children construct, process, and organize knowledge as well as carry out research (Kaminsky, Cooper, Gold-
It can be used to recall and evaluate children’s experiences in the classroom as well as to support new learning. It is also an influential way to look at children’s learning with parents while provoking parents to think about the learning process. Celebrating the power of thoughtful collaboration, pedagogical documentation promotes dialogues between children, teachers, and families to reflect and create meaning while thinking about their own questions, theories, and certainties (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fyfe, Hovey, & Strange, 2004; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Moreover, pedagogical documentation as an authentic form of assessment gives value to the processes and procedures of children (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004).

Cultural in nature, the Reggio philosophy is not a model to be copied (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Hendrick, 2004; New, 1998; Schwall, 2005). However, drawing inspiration from it, many early childhood educators globally have implemented a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to learning within their classrooms (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Hendrick, 2004; Lewin-Benham, 2006, 2008; New, 1997, 1998). Although all principles of the approach are interwoven, the power of pedagogical documentation as both a process and product is highly regarded within Reggio Emilia inspired practice.

Pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired practice has been widely researched. Previous studies have sought to understand documentation and the hundred languages. The visual arts and technology are among the hundred languages that were explored. Griebling (2011) described children’s purposes for creating artwork within the context of project work. A qualitative case study by Kim and Darling (2009) shared ways that six four-year-olds in a Reggio Emilia inspired Canadian childcare constructed
knowledge using art as a learning and knowledge representation instrument. Mitchell (2007) discussed the many potentials of technology for supporting the learning of young children in Reggio Emilia inspired programs. Similarly, Trepanier-Street, Hong, and Bauer (2001) illustrated ways that they used various types of technology to implement and document long term projects in a multi-aged preschool and kindergarten classroom. Another study by Boardman (2007) also investigated the use of technology in the form of digital cameras and voice recorders to understand the learning of young children in various kindergarten classes throughout Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

Several studies explored documentation in content areas within Reggio inspired practices. A qualitative study by Christensen, Faith, Stubblefield, and Watson (2006) examined how three early childhood teachers in Reggio inspired settings described their work and analyzed social studies using various principles of the approach, including documentation. An article by Stegelin (2003) suggested ways to plan, implement, document, and evaluate a developmentally appropriate science curriculum in a Reggio Emilia inspired setting. A related ethnographic study by Inan, Trundle, and Kantor (2010) explored the representation of the natural sciences in a Reggio Emilia inspired laboratory preschool.

Additional studies examined documentation as professional development within Reggio Emilia inspired practice. Haigh (2007) described a long-term action research project by seven staff members from a child development program of Chicago Commons and two Head Start classrooms to further their understandings about personal learning and teaching processes as well as what learning means to children. In a related study, Goldhaber (2007) discussed an action research collaborative of Reggio inspired educators
in Vermont that investigated the understandings and relationships of young learners with the community and natural world. Goldhaber and Smith (1997), using the voices of three teachers, depicted the efforts of a university campus childcare center to include documentation as part of their Reggio Emilia inspired practice in order to support teachers and university students as they observed, reflected, and interpreted the children’s thinking. Furthermore, a phenomenological study by Parnell (2011) explained the relationship between his collaborative work with teachers at his school in Portland, Oregon, the teacher’s documentation of the children’s learning, as well as his own professional development opportunities.

Other researchers addressed documentation as a formative assessment tool leading to accountability in early childhood classrooms. Wien, Guyevsky, and Berdoussis (2011) shared ways that early childhood educators learned to use documentation in Reggio inspired settings which included the following: acquiring practices of documentation; going public describing activities; studying the visual literacy of graphic displays; making children’s theories visible; and sharing visible theories with others in order to broaden interpretation and decisions about curriculum. A qualitative study by MacDonald (2007) investigated the use of pedagogical documentation in five Reggio inspired kindergarten classrooms in New Westminster, British Columbia, as a means of formative assessment in literacy instruction to communicate learning with children and families. In a similar study, Buldu (2010) explored pedagogical documentation within Reggio Emilia inspired practice as a formative assessment tool to understand the meanings of the experiences of children, teachers, and parents in the United Arab Emirates.
Researchers also strongly supported pedagogical documentation as a way to change school culture and communities of practice. A qualitative case study by Given, Kuh, LeeKeenan, Mardell, Redditt, and Twombly (2010) examined how documentation as a professional development technique can play the role of a change agent for teachers in addition to ways collaboration in the documentation process mediates the intrinsic stress of working and learning together. Moran, Desrochers, and Cavicchi (2007) also described ways that teachers’ participation in documentation and progettazione at a university-based child development center in New Hampshire changed over time resulting in the transformation of a community of practice. A similar article by Kroeger and Cardy (2006) discussed preservice teachers’ encounters with documentation at the beginning of student teaching and how their thinking changed as they came to see themselves as the tool to understand the children via documentation. Likewise, Krechevsky, Rivard, and Burton (2010) described the changing culture of Wickliffe Progressive Community School in Upper Arlington, Ohio, as administrators, teachers, students, and parents working together held the school accountable to its underlying principles of progressive education within an age of skills-based learning and standardized testing. Falk and Darling-Hammond (2010) further discussed ways that documentation supports the development of democratic education through an inquiry approach to teaching, informing teaching and enhancing professional development, extending learning, and offering alternatives in assessment thereby enabling children to become citizens who think critically, regard good teaching, and participate in meaningful discourses essential for democracy.
Statement of the Problem

Guidelines set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) call for developmentally appropriate materials, activities, and expectations for young children that are age appropriate, individually appropriate, and culturally appropriate. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) supports the whole child, individualized instruction, use of prior knowledge, active learning through hands-on materials and activities, and the in-depth study of topics from children’s natural curiosities and inquiries. Parental involvement is equally important. Additionally, DAP supports assessment as an ongoing, strategic, and purposeful procedure that includes observation, portfolios, and documentation of learning that takes place within children’s natural settings (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Unquestionably, DAP is a framework that coincides with Reggio Emilia inspired practice (Bredekamp, 1993).

Since the 1990s, the need for accountability has been the basis for the standards-driven reform movement in the United States (Seidel, 2001, 2008). Children’s ability is often measured with decontextualized evaluation tools in the form of high stakes testing. Children are assessed, put on a level, and left to proceed in lock-step fashion, which is certainly developmentally inappropriate for young children (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). In a quest for scientific validations for our educational practices, many educators have “forgotten there could be any other justification paradigm. . . . any other way to hold ourselves accountable” (Seidel, 2008, p. 14). In Reggio Emilia, educators support philosophical justification to explain the choices they make based on their image of the child in relation with others. Often this type of justification is viewed as lenient, unclear, or absent of rigor. Contrarily, every aspect of the Reggio schools is rigorously reflected up-
on, discussed, and honed (Seidel, 2008). Reggio Emilia inspired practice requires a serious commitment to the demanding reflection and dialogue that are a part of the fundamental principles of the Reggio approach, including documentation as assessment and an “inextricable element in the effective functioning of a learning group” (Seidel, 2001, p. 305).

Education in the United States has been inundated with a proliferation of decontextualized evaluation tools in the form of high stakes testing to measure children’s abilities (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Seidel, 2001, 2008). As such, many educators fail to recognize that documentation can be a powerful assessment of children’s learning (Rinaldi, 2006; Seidel, 2001, 2008). Based on a review of the literature available on the implementation of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach in early childhood settings around the world, it is clear that the focus of much research has been on pedagogical documentation, which is a crucial and defining principle of the approach and worthy of attention. However, minimal research has focused on pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom from parents’ perspectives.

Significance of the Study

A qualitative study was needed to address parents’ understandings of pedagogical documentation. As a result, teachers, parents, and children will all garner the positive rewards of being equal partners in the learning process. Teachers will be better prepared to make children’s learning visible to parents, which may lead to greater parental support and understanding. Furthermore, the children will benefit from the positive impacts of
documentation as an alternative way to represent and reflect upon their learning in an age of skills-based learning and standardized testing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reveal the perspectives of seven parents and a family member in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom regarding pedagogical documentation that served as making learning visible by children’s interpretive designs in a southeastern state of the United States. Throughout this study, pedagogical documentation was defined as both a process and an important content in that process. The content referred to concrete materials in the form of notes, photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, computer graphics, and examples of children’s work that make learning visible. The process referred to the use of these materials as a means of reflection for teachers, children, and parents regarding children’s learning processes and potentials void of set expectations or standards (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

Research Questions

The participants were purposefully chosen because they had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. A qualitative research approach using the case study tradition was employed to conduct this study. The central research problem used in this study is as follows: How do seven parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States? The following sub-questions were also asked: (a) how does pedagogical documentation help parents and a family member understand children’s
learning experiences in kindergarten; (b) how does pedagogical documentation support parental and familial participation in children’s learning experiences; and (c) how does pedagogical documentation promote the rights and potentials of children?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

There were several assumptions made during this study. First of all, it was assumed that the participants in the study would answer the questionnaire and interview questions truthfully and reflectively. It was further assumed that the participants in the study had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom.

Limitations that this study faced were also identified. Due to its qualitative design and small number of participants, the findings cannot be generalized to other settings but may rather be relevant and transferable to them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings could be interpreted differently in other situations. This study focused only on the understandings of seven parents and a family member in one kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state in the United States. A purposive sampling was used to select the participants. A different set of participants could reveal different findings. Even though maximal variation sampling was used based on gender, age, and diverse family situations, six of the seven participants were female. They were also all Caucasian of middle socioeconomic status. Another limitation to the study was the time constraint with which to conduct research for this project. Additional time for follow-up interviews and longer observation periods could have yielded different results. Furthermore, the fact that I conducted research in my own backyard was yet another limitation. Because I knew all of the participants, questionnaire and interview responses could have been affected.
Definition of Terms

This section defines key terms used throughout this study. Some terms may have differing meanings contingent upon the context. For this particular study, definitions that best explain the meaning of each term were chosen.

*Asili nido:* “Safe nests” is the translation in English for the infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia serving children aged four months to three years old (Edwards et al., 1998).

*Atelier:* A French term referring to a workspace an artist characteristically used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Malaguzzi chose this term to distinguish the space used in the Reggio schools from art rooms found in traditional schools. It is a peaceful place where the hundred languages can be explored and studied (Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998a).

*Atelierista:* The person with a visual arts background who runs the atelier. The atelierista works closely with the teachers to provide a large variety of materials and tools to provoke the creativity and learning of the children (Fraser, 2000; Gandini et al., 2005; Schwall, 2004; Vecchi, 1998).

*Collaboration:* The process that includes children working together in small groups, teachers working together to study the interests of children, and children and adults working together on projects (Lewin-Benham, 2008; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006).

*Pedagogista:* A pedagogical coordinator who supports the teachers, augments professional development, sustains relationships with families, and fosters connections between teachers and the superintendent of schools. There are eight
pedagogistas in Reggio Emilia that work together to support the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. There is no comparable position in the United States (Filippini, 1998; Gandini et al., 2005; Lewin-Benham, 2008).

**Pedagogical documentation:** It is both a process as well as an important content in the process that allows the children, teachers, parents, and others in the community to see what takes place in the schools as a way to prompt support and participation. As content, it is the physical collection of evidence and artifacts that leaves traces and makes learning visible. This includes note taking, audio recordings, video recordings, digital photography, slide shows, computer graphics, portfolios, daily journals, charts, books, wall panels, and artwork of the children. As a process, it includes the use of the physical traces for a depth of reflection and interpretation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; 2005c; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

**Progettazione:** The Italian noun that is used in direct opposition to programmazione or predetermined curriculum. The idea implies an overarching adaptable approach in which hypotheses are made yet are subject to adjustments and changes as work progresses. There is not an English term that adequately describes this idea (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006).

**Protagonist:** In Reggio, the term used to refer to the children, the teachers, and the families, whose destinies are thoroughly connected. Collectively, they are all considered to be stakeholders or co-authors in the educational process (Dahlberg & Moss, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010).
**Provocatizone:** The word used by educators in Reggio to push or stimulate children’s thinking. There is not a negative connotation to this word as there is with the English word, provocative. This term is akin to provoke thinking (Lewin-Benham, 2008; Malaguzzi, 1998: Wurm, 2005).

**Reggio Approach:** The name used to describe the philosophy that developed in Reggio Emilia and inspires early education around the world today (Edwards et al., 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2008; New, 1998).

**Reggio Children:** The organization designed by Loris Malaguzzi and incorporated in 1994 in response to the global requests for information about the Reggio approach. It promotes research and study of the Reggio philosophy through seminars, conferences, and study groups. It also documents and publishes books, videos, and other forms of media. (Gandini et al., 2005; Lanzi, 2011; Lewin-Benham, 2008).

**Scuole dell’infanzia:** “Schools of infancy” or preprimary schools in Reggio Emilia serving children three to six years old (Edwards et al., 1998).

**Organization of the Study**

The organization of this study includes five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, assumptions and limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that includes the history of the municipal schools in Reggio Emilia, the theoretical influences of the Reggio Emilia approach, the fundamental principles of the approach, and pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired practice. In Chapter 3, the procedures used
throughout the study are discussed. These include qualitative research approach, tradition of qualitative inquiry, philosophical assumptions, site/context, participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 details the analysis of data collected throughout the study from participant questionnaires, individual interviews, classroom observations, a focus group interview, and follow-up communication. Included in Chapter 5 is a discussion of the major findings, implications for practice, insights, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

This chapter consisted of an introduction with a brief history of the schools in Reggio Emilia, the theoretical influences of the Reggio Emilia approach, the fundamental principles of the approach, and documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired practices. Developmentally appropriate assessment and accountability within an age of decontextualized evaluation tools were also discussed. A statement of the problem, significance of the study, and purpose of the study were all presented. In addition, the research questions along with the three sub-questions that framed this study were provided. The assumptions and limitations of the study as well as definitions of terms were then included. At the conclusion, the organization of the study was outlined.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of the literature that explores the existing research related to the Reggio Emilia approach and the research questions that frame this study. It begins with a discussion about the history of the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, which is fundamental to understanding the approach to early childhood education. The theoretical influences of the approach are then presented, including the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Bronfenbrenner, Gardner, and Bruner. Next, the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach are discussed. These include the image of the child, the hundred languages, participation, relationships, environment as third teacher, progettazione, listening, and pedagogical documentation. At this point, the literature review turns to the large bodies of research about Reggio Emilia inspired practice and documentation with an emphasis on documentation and the hundred languages, documentation in content areas, documentation for professional development, documentation as assessment, and documentation for change. Overall, the review of the literature expresses that minimal research has focused on documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom from parents’ perspectives and that further study is needed to address parents’ understandings of pedagogical documentation.
History of the Reggio Emilia Approach

This is a remarkable story seeded in the hope, determination, and perseverance of the men and women of the small war-torn village of Villa Cella, Italy, located a few miles outside of Reggio Emilia. It began in 1945 just days after Liberation (Malaguzzi, 1998a). As “the center of fearless partisan action and the target of ferocious fascist repression,” Villa Cella and its people had experienced firsthand the devastating effects of war with all of its horrors (Barazzoni, 2005, p. 16). United in suffering and by solidarity, the villagers wished for their children to never again suffer from war or be subject to a fascist regime. The days following the war reflected an intense spirit of hope among the people. There was a sense of renewal that “infected just about everyone, in the conviction that from the ashes of war progress, justice and democracy would rise up” (Barazzoni, 2005, p. 17).

As plans for the future were discussed, the Committee of National Liberation (CLN) offered a sum of money to be used at the discretion of the people. This was supplemented by funds from a local cooperative so that reconstruction could begin immediately (Barazzoni, 2005). Some thought that perhaps a new theater would be nice. But, the women in the village had a more urgent request. Eager to join the workforce and rebuild the economy, they desired quality childcare and learning experiences for their children (Fraser, 2000). Therefore, proposals for a theater were quickly abandoned and replaced by the greater need of a nursery school for the children. The farmers, day workers, and factory workers of Villa Cella wanted a school that “immediately set out to free the children from an age-old subjection by the official schools, which had always awarded the privilege of birth and sooner or later expelled the students of humble origins” (Barazzoni,
They dreamed of a loving school where an education was a guaranteed right for all children.

And so, the money to begin construction came from the sale of a tank, a truck, and several horses abandoned by the hastily retreating Germans. A local farmer donated part of his land for the school while the building cooperative provided the services of its construction engineer and machinery. However, the entire population of Villa Cella contributed in some way to the construction of the school, aptly named the People’s Nursery School (Barazzoni, 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998a). As so eloquently expressed by one of the villagers in a May 1945 testimonial, “Men and women working together, we built the walls of this school because we wanted a new and different place for our children” (as cited in Barazzoni, 2005, p. 39).

In nearby Reggio Emilia, rumors of the movement in Villa Cella were circulating. A young teacher named Loris Malaguzzi heard the incredible news and wondered if it could possibly be true. As Malaguzzi (1998a) recalled, “destiny must have wanted me to be part of an extraordinary event” (p. 49). Unable to verify any information, he hopped on his bicycle and rode there to see it for himself. He was amazed to find women scavenging and cleaning bricks to build the school, literally “brick by brick” (Barazzoni, 2005, p. 19). After revealing that he was a teacher, Malaguzzi offered his help and the villagers graciously accepted. They worked together to build the school using ruins from the bombed buildings. Sadly, building supplies were plentiful (Malaguzzi, 1998a). Yet, “in every brick of ‘the people’s preschool’ there was trust, awareness, willingness, and hope” (Barazzoni, 2005, p. 29). As witness to such an incredible event, Malaguzzi (2005) reflected:
All my little models were laughingly overturned: that building a school would ever occur to the people, women, farm laborers, factory workers, farmers, was in itself traumatic. But that these same people, without a penny to their names, with no technical offices, building permits, site directors, inspectors from the Ministry of Education or the Party, could actually build a school with their own strength, brick by brick, was the second paradox. . . . I was excited by the way it overturned logic and prejudices, the old rules governing pedagogy, culture, how it forced everything back to the beginning. It opened up completely new horizons of thought. (p. 14)

After eight months of working nights and Sundays, the school finally opened and continued to be sustained through the steadfast support of the villagers for the sake of the children (Barazzoni, 2005). The entire experience had forged a deep friendship between Malaguzzi and the people of Villa Cella. However, this was just the beginning of something great. Other schools, all built and run by parents, continued to open throughout the area (Malaguzzi, 1998a). Working closely with the parents, Malaguzzi was instrumental in the development of the schools. As Malaguzzi (2005) explained, Villa Cella was a “formidable lesson of humanity and culture, which would generate other extraordinary events. All we needed to do was follow the same path” (p. 14).

During the 1950s, progressive educators, John Dewey and Celestin Freinet, sparked new ideas about early childhood education in Italy (Edwards et al., 1998). The Movement of Cooperative Education was formed in 1951 and led by the vivacious educator, Bruno Ciari. He believed that social justice could be achieved through an early childhood education that would “liberate childhood energy and capacities and promote the harmonious development of the whole child in all areas—communicative, social, affective, and with respect to critical and scientific thinking” (Edwards et al., 1998, p.21). Furthermore, Ciari (1961) encouraged educators to develop relationships with families and community, provide two teachers for each classroom, and work collaboratively with
other educators. As a close friend and colleague, Malaguzzi was greatly inspired and influenced by Ciari. Together, they ignited much interest in early childhood education throughout Italy, especially in the northern region where Reggio Emilia is located (Edwards et al., 1998).

Despite encountering many hardships along the way, the first city-run scuola dell’infanzia, preschool, in Reggio Emilia, Robinson School, was established in 1963 under the leadership of Malaguzzi. This event was significant because “for the first time in Italy, the people affirmed the right to establish a secular school for young children: a rightful and necessary break in the monopoly the Catholic church had hitherto exercised over children’s early education” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p.52). Teachers for Robinson School were recruited from the other parent-run schools. To win the trust and respect of the community, the school was transported to town once a week. Malaguzzi (1998a) vividly remembered the events:

"Literally, we would pack ourselves, the children, and our tools into a truck and we would teach school and show exhibits in the open air, in the square, in public parks, or under the colonnade of the municipal theater. The children were happy. The people saw; they were surprised and they asked questions. (p. 52)"

It was a successful way to show the city what was going on at school. While preserving the moral foundations of human warmth and reciprocal help learned from the past, Robinson School “wanted to recognize the right of each child to be a protagonist and the need to sustain each child’s curiosity at a high level” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p. 52).

In 1968, a national law was enacted giving every child aged three through six the right to attend a publicly supported early childhood program. Parents could choose between national, municipal, or private preschools. Leading the way, all the parent-run preschools in Reggio Emilia became part of the administration of the municipality that same
year (Barazzoni, 2005; Fraser, 2000; Malaguzzi, 1998a). For the next 10 years, many important pieces of legislation were passed as more and more women entering the workplace advocated their rights to quality childcare, paid maternity leave, and equal pay for equal work between men and women. Among these included the establishment of public asili nido, infant-toddler centers, to serve children aged four months to three years (Edwards et al., 1998).

Throughout the following years until his death in 1993, Malaguzzi sought to create and maintain high quality education for young children with the support of dedicated teachers, parents, and citizens who took strong ownership of schools (Gandini, 2004a). All of the schools in Reggio Emilia were established to give visibility to childhood, culture, and competencies, to promote the rights of the child from birth, as well as to support the strong relationships between the destiny of children and the destiny of the adults (Edwards et al., 1998). These are the foundations that have continued to characterize more than 40 years of dialogue, listening to each other, as well as cultural and political interweaving (Lanzi, 2011).

Reggio Emilia has changed a lot over the years. Currently, it has approximately 170,000 residents. More than 28,000 of the people are immigrants from more than a hundred different ethnic groups (Lanzi, 2011). Yet, in the midst of tremendous growth, the Municipality of Reggio Emilia remains committed to the children. Today there are 25 preschools and 26 infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia. Nearly 1,600 children in the city attend infant-toddler centers, representing 40% of children from birth to three years old. This is one of the highest percentages in all of Italy. Furthermore, roughly 3,500
children aged three to six, 90%, attend preschools (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2013).

Subject of worldwide interest, the philosophical assumptions, pedagogy, and environmental design of the schools are commonly referred to as the Reggio Emilia approach to learning (Edwards et al., 1998; New, 1998). This approach continues to be recognized as one of the finest examples of high quality early childhood education in the world (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991; Katz, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2008). In 1991, Diana School in Reggio Emilia was recognized as one of the top 10 schools in the world by *Newsweek* magazine (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991). Each year, thousands of people from all over the world visit Reggio Emilia to learn about its approach to early childhood education (New, 1990). However, as an intensely cultural experience, it is not a model or program to be copied (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Hendrick, 2004). Rather, it is an approach to teaching and learning that educators in Reggio Emilia hope will “stimulate reflections on teaching, helpful exchanges of ideas, and novel initiatives in other schools and in other countries, for the benefit of children, families, and teachers” (Gandini, 2004b, p.15).

In an extraordinary twist of fate more than 70 years ago, an abandoned army tank, six horses, three trucks, and a lot of rubble were transformed by visionary men and women into a preschool that continues to serve young children even today. Moreover, its rich history confirms that out of the most unexpected and humble origins new educational experiences can be conceived (Malaguzzi, 1998a). According to Malaguzzi (2005), what began in Villa Cella just days after Liberation has “remained an uninterrupted lesson given by men and women whose ideals were still intact, who had understood long before I
had that history can be changed, and is changed by taking possession of it, starting with the destiny of the children” (p.15).

Theoretical Influences

Under Fascist rule, the study of European and American theorists and social science was prohibited in Italy (Malaguzzi, 1998a). After Liberation, Loris Malaguzzi (1998a) and his colleagues began reading the writings of “John Dewey, Henri Wallon, Edward Chaparède, Ovide Decroly, Anton Makarenko, Lev Vygotsky, and later also Erik Erikson and Urie Bronfenbrenner” (p. 59). They further immersed themselves into “reading The New Education by Pierre Bovet and Adolfe Ferrière and learning about the teaching techniques of Celestine Freinet in France, the progressive educational experiment of the Dalton School in New York, and the research of Piaget . . . in Geneva” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p. 59). Additionally, in 1951, the Movement of Cooperative Education was formed in Italy under the leadership of the charismatic educator Bruno Ciari, whose writings remain classics in Italy. As close friends and contemporaries, Malaguzzi was certainly influenced by Ciari (Edwards et al., 1998). Collectively, all of these writings guided Malaguzzi and his colleagues early on as they made choices regarding the early childhood educational programs that they would provide for young children (Malaguzzi, 1998a).

Over the past 30 years, writers from various fields have added to the continually evolving ideas and philosophies that underpin the Reggio Emilia approach. Included among these are progressive educators and psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, David Hawkins, Humberto Maturana,
Fransisco Varela, Gregory Bateson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jerome Bruner, and Howard Gardner (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2003; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Rinaldi, 2006). Inspiration also came from other innovative thinkers in the fields of the arts, architecture, epistemology, and neurological sciences (Gandini et al., 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). All of these ideas have been reflected upon deeply by educators in Reggio Emilia in order to create “their own meanings and implications for pedagogical practice” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 4). Respect of these various ideas strengthened the autonomy of the Reggio Emilia approach as they expanded their own ideas and philosophy (Malaguzzi, 1998a). When speaking of theorists like Piaget or Vygotsky, Malaguzzi always referred to them as “our Piaget, our Vygotsky, our, our. . . . to avoid being prisoner of any definition—any pre-definition—that obliged you not to play the game of life with the children, with the teacher and with the school” (Rinaldi, 2006, p.181). In other words, he did not want the theory to determine the end result.

Piaget

In the 1960s and early 1970s, educators in Reggio Emilia got inspiration from the thinking of Jean Piaget, especially his idea that the purpose of teaching is to specify conditions for learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a). As a genetic epistemologist who held a constructivist theory of child development, he wanted to know how knowledge developed in humans or, more specifically, how the relationship between knower and known changed with the passing of time (Kamii, 2000; Piaget, 1972; Thomas, 2005). His theory of cognitive development still greatly influences teaching today and is essential to the National Association for the Education of Young Children position state-
ment on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Piaget (1963) believed that intellectual activity is a basic life function that helps children adapt to their environment. Children are active, inventive explorers that are constantly constructing schemes for what they know. They modify these cognitive structures through organization and adaptation (Shaffer, 2009). He also believed that children internally construct their own knowledge through interactions with the environment, focusing on the independent coordination of relationships. Furthermore, he believed that all children go through invariant, sequential stages of cognitive development that include the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations stages (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1930, 1950, 1953, 1969; Piaget & Inhelder, 1948/1956, 1969; Piaget & Szeminska, 1941/1952). As a universalist, he believed that the stages are the same for all members of a species with very specific criterion for each stage. He believed that development from one stage to the next occurs when there is an accumulation of errors in a child’s understanding of his or her environment, causing such cognitive disequilibrium that it requires reorganization (Nutbrown, Clough, & Selbie, 2008; Thomas, 2005).

Piaget (1967/1971, 1945/1951) identified three types of knowledge, including physical, social conventional, and logico-mathematical knowledge. Physical knowledge is knowledge of objects in external reality acquired through observation. Social conventional knowledge is conventions that people make that cannot be constructed and must be told to you. Logico-mathematical knowledge includes logico-arithmetical knowledge and spatio-temporal knowledge and cannot be taught through the social conventions of
words. It must be internally constructed by the child through interaction with the environment. However, it can be indirectly taught by giving children opportunities to think (Kamii, 2000).

Even though Piaget (1947/1963) believed young children would be happier given opportunities to construct their own knowledge, he also believed that social interaction is important for the development of logic in young children. He believed that exchanges are necessary, because as young children contradict themselves, other children always point it out. Social interaction keeps young children consistent in the stories they tell. In explaining the importance of social interaction, Piaget (1947/1963) stated, “Without interchange of thought and co-operation with others the individual would never come to group his [logical] operations into a coherent whole” (p.163). Thus, the exchange of viewpoints through social interaction is crucial to the development of logic (Kamii, 2000).

Piaget (1932/1965) also defined two types of moral development for children. The first type is heteronomy, which is being governed by others. Heteronomy uses positive and negative reinforcements and punishments to control behavior through an outside force like a teacher. The use of rewards and punishments only encourages heteronomy and makes children dependent on others. The second type of moral development is autonomy, which is being governed by one’s self. With autonomy, the focus is to think about the action and decide for one’s self how to act in a moral realm. According to Piaget (1932/1965), children’s moral development is dependent on the exchange of viewpoints (Kamii, 2000).

In addition, Piaget (1973) identified four factors that determine adaptation for social development. These include heredity, physical experience, education, and equilibri-
um. Piaget believed that knowledge is not absorbed passively, but is the interaction between cognitive structures and the environment. He believed that knowledge is active and to know something is to act on it. He thought that development was a continuous process, but one must act to proceed with development. Although Piaget (1937/1971) believed that knowledge was constructed by the child from the inside-out through interaction with the environment, his focus was more on independent coordination of relationships than socially constructed knowledge (Kamii, 1982, 2000).

Shortly after the opening of the first city-run preschool in Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi (1998a) studied at the Rousseau Institute and the Ecole des Petits, School for Young Children, of Piaget in Geneva, Switzerland. Inspired by Piaget, the Reggio preschools chose to work with numbers, mathematics, and perception. Malaguzzi (1998a) expressed his support for Piaget’s ideas:

We were then, and still are, convinced that it is not an imposition on children or an artificial exercise to work with numbers, quantify, classification, dimensions, forms, measurement, transformation, orientation, conservation and change, or speed and space, because these explorations belong spontaneously to the everyday experiences of living, playing, negotiating, thinking, and speaking by children. (p. 53)

However, Malaguzzi (1998a) recognized that Piaget’s theories were frequently misunderstood and that educators often tried to infer meaning from them that were never intended for education. Malaguzzi and his colleagues also began to acknowledge weaknesses in Piaget’s theories (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006). While maintaining gratitude toward Piaget, they could see how his ideas about constructivism clearly decontextualized and isolated the child. As Malaguzzi (1998a) noted, the following characteristics were looked at more critically:
The undervaluation of the adult’s role in promoting cognitive development; the marginal attention to social interaction and to memory (as opposed to inference); the distance interposed between thought and language . . . the lock-step linearity of development in constructivism; the way that cognitive, affective, and moral development are treated as separate, parallel tracks; the overemphasis on structured stages, egocentrism, and classificatory skills; the lack of recognition for partial competencies; the overwhelming importance to logicomathematical thought; and the overuse of paradigms from the biological and physical sciences. (p. 82)

Malaguzzi rejected the linear progression of Piaget’s formal stages as too restrictive for educators. Alternatively, in Reggio Emilia, it is believed that learning is “constructed through contemporaneous advances, standstills, and ‘retreats’ that take many directions” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 132). Malaguzzi (1998a) was grateful for the guidance of Piaget yet continued to struggle with his ideas. At this point, Malaguzzi (1998a) and his colleagues turned their attention to the role of social interaction in cognitive development, which is more reflective of a social constructivist view of learning (Edwards, 2003).

Vygotsky

Moving beyond the ideas of Piaget in the 1970s, Malaguzzi (1998a) began to focus on the importance of socio-cultural context and interrelationships for children’s learning. In keeping with the social constructivist viewpoint, educators in Reggio Emilia came to perceive knowledge “as constituted in context through a process of meaning making in continuous encounters with others in the world, and the child and the teacher are understood as co-constructers of knowledge and culture” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 6). Such ideas prompted Malaguzzi and his colleagues to study the work of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky.

Like Piaget, Lev Vygotsky was considered a constructivist, but his theory was sociocultural. Vygotsky (1978) believed that children are the products of their social and
cultural worlds. He thought that it was necessary to understand the context of children in order to understand how they grow and develop. In addition, he believed that minds, skills, and personalities develop as children expand tools of intellectual adaptation from their culture. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized socio-cultural context, language and literacy learning, and scaffolding of a tutor to master tasks within a child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is a framework that incorporates the difference between what a child can do alone and what he or she can achieve with the assistance of a more capable peer or adult. It is the zone between independent ability and ability with assistance.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that working within ZPD maximized learning and that working with a more capable peer or adult could lead to self-regulation and being able to work alone. He also believed one can acquire cultural beliefs, values, and problem solving skills through collaborative dialogue with more capable adults or peers. Additionally, collaborative learning is a framework in which children can profit from scaffolding information or skills and function more independently (Nutbrown et al., 2008; Thomas, 2005).

Through his 21 wooden blocks, Vygotsky (1962) determined three stages of conceptual thought. These include thinking in unorganized heaps, thinking in complexes, and thinking in true concepts. He also identified four stages of speech: primitive speech, naïve speech, egocentric speech, and inner speech. Vygotsky (1962) believed that a child’s thought and speech begins as two separate functions with no connection between them. They are like two circles that do not touch. One is non-conceptual speech and the other is non-verbal thought. As a child grows and develops, the two circles begin to come together and meet. The juncture of the two is verbal thought where one begins to
acquire concepts that bear word labels. The two circles continue to overlap but never completely overlap. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1962) emphasized that there would always be some non-verbal thought and some non-conceptual speech (Nutbrown et al., 2008; Spielrein, 1920; Thomas, 2005).

Vygotsky (1962) disagreed with theorists like Piaget who said that children, due to their genetic nature, could achieve advanced conceptual thought on their own. He believed that children’s formal and informal education through the use of language significantly influences the level of conceptual thought achieved. He believed that language is social and communicative, essential for cognitive development, and a tool for social interaction. Language leads to continuous step-by-step change in children’s thought and behavior that varies from culture to culture. Basically, he believed that language influences thought and action creates thought. Language is a major part of cognitive development. Furthermore, he thought that learning must take place in meaningful contexts and that it cannot be separated. Even though Piaget and Vygotsky are both considered constructivists, the main difference between the two is that Vygotsky (1962, 1978) brought children together to talk and learn with each other (Nutbrown et al., 2008; Thomas, 2005).

The influence of Vygotsky can be seen throughout the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach. His theories align with the ideas educators in Reggio Emilia have about teaching, learning, and the natural ways children construct knowledge. Furthermore, their approach echoes Vygotsky’s beliefs about the ways thought and language work together as well as the advantages of the zone of proximal development and collaborative
dialogue for learning (Malaguzzi, 1998a). In the following, Malaguzzi (1993) reflected this social constructivist view towards learning:

Our image of children no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not see them only engaged in action with objects, does not emphasize only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical, and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the affective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children. (p. 10)

Based on Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory, relationships are the foundation of the Reggio Emilia approach and the center of everything (Malaguzzi, 1993). Each child is seen in relation to other children, teachers, and parents as well as his or her history and culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 1998). Together, through this complex system of relations, they are all considered protagonists in the educational experience of the child (Lanzi, 2011). Educators in Reggio Emilia believe that learning is a process of both individual and social construction. Whereas learning is definitely individual, it is also influenced by the ideas and interpretations of others, making it a process of social construction as well. As Rinaldi (2006) asserted, “We thus consider knowledge to be a process of construction by the individual in relation with others, a true act of co-construction” (p. 125). The child in Reggio Emilia co-constructs knowledge with other children and adults who take his or her ideas seriously yet also challenge and confront them. This pedagogy of relationships characterized by action and group socialization is prevalent in the Reggio Emilia approach and leads to the development of the identity of each child (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 1998). In Reggio, “nothing and no-one exists outside of context and relationships” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 59).

Further influence of Vygotsky can be seen in the importance that the Reggio Emilia approach places on scaffolding, dialogue, and language development. Although
Vygotsky did not coin the term scaffolding, he placed importance on children being in the midst of others that would push their thinking boundaries. In Reggio, the idea of scaffolding through the zone of proximal development is the context of mutual expectations that supports both individual and group practices. Through this context, teachers in Reggio Emilia learn how to observe, document, and interpret each child’s individual construction of knowledge in order to reach their greatest teaching potentials (Rinaldi, 2006). Such co-construction leads to collaborative dialogue, which is at the heart of the Reggio Emilia approach. Different from discussion, dialogue involves people thinking together in relationship. It requires that one loosen his or her grasp on certainty and be open to the possibilities that come from relationships with others (Cadwell, 2003). Reggio educators believe that there is hope in dialogue. “It is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). As Vygotsky emphasized the connection between thought and language, educators in Reggio have expanded the idea of language from just one verbal language into what they call the hundred languages of children. They recognize and value that children have a variety of ways in which to express themselves (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a). Rinaldi (2006) portrayed the hundred languages with the image of a lake with “many, many sources flowing into it. . . . the number of a hundred was chosen to be very provocative, to claim for all these languages not only the same dignity, but the right to expression and to communicate with each other” (p. 193).
John Dewey, American philosopher and founder of the Dewey Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, was a leading advocate of progressive education. His thoughts about education based on ideas of democracy and child centeredness were vastly different than typical school practices of that time (Nutbrown et al., 2008; Wolfe, 2002). Dewey (1897) believed that education is a process of living rather than preparation for the future. Among his ideas, he saw learning as active rather than the transmission of prepackaged knowledge widely seen in traditional education practices at the time. Rather, he believed knowledge is constructed through activity, experimentation, and participation (Dewey, 1916/1966). For Dewey (1916/1966), education was a process of “continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming” (p. 50).

Dewey (1897) promoted a curriculum grounded in the social life of children beginning with their interests and activities. He believed that schools must help children make meaning from their life experiences and should never be separated from their ongoing lives (Dewey, 1899). Emphasizing individuality and choice in curriculum, he supported learning that was project-based and reflective of the interests of children (Dewey, 1931). He believed that children would be intrinsically motivated to learn if given opportunities to construct their own knowledge from their own inquiries (Dewey, 1897). Projects involved teachers and children working collaboratively on ideas and to find solutions to problems. Instead of isolating knowledge by subjects, projects encouraged a whole approach to learning within an integrated curriculum. The teacher was a guide to confirm that project ideas were attainable and to offer guidance and assistance throughout when needed (Dewey, 1931, 1938/1969; Nutbrown et al., 2008). In response to misinter-
pretations of his project-based curriculum, Dewey (1931) replied, “Many so-called projects are of such a short time-span and are entered upon for such casual reasons, that extension of acquaintance with facts and principals is at a minimum. In short, they are too trivial to be educative” (p. 31).

In addition, Dewey (1899) advocated for close relationships between school, home, and the community. Acknowledging a link between school and life outside of school, he believed that children should contribute to society and schools were instrumental to building a new social order. Furthermore, he believed that society would not survive unless all children had equal chances to maximize their potentials in cooperative situations (Wolfe, 2002).

Early in his teaching career, Malaguzzi visited the United States and was greatly inspired by the ideas of John Dewey that he saw implemented throughout many early childhood programs (Fraser, 2000). Educators in Reggio acknowledge that they have interpreted and applied many of the principles of Dewey into their own pedagogy. For example, his ideas about a project-based curriculum inspired one of the most impressive features of the Reggio Emilia approach. In Reggio, children participate in in-depth investigations based on their interests and questions without the strict pressure of a schedule or time restraints (Rankin, 2004; Wurm, 2005). Project work in Reggio Emilia is intended to aid young children in making “deeper and fuller sense of events and phenomena in their own environment and experiences that are worthy of their attention” (Katz, 1998, p. 28). While children are encouraged to make their own choices, the teacher is still an important part of the process. In Reggio, “the teacher is not removed from her role as an adult, but instead revises it in an attempt to become co-creator, rather than merely a
transmitter of knowledge and culture” (Rinaldi, 2006, p.125). Consistent with Dewey’s belief about active learning, educators in Reggio Emilia agree that learning results from construction rather than by transmission (Rinaldi, 2006).

As previously mentioned, Dewey promoted strong home, school, and community relationships. According to Dahlberg and Moss (2006), in Reggio Emilia, “participation, by children, parents, teachers, and the community, is a central value and integral to the educational experience” (p. 11). Educators in Reggio Emilia understand that relationships and learning overlap in the active progression of education. As soon as children are “helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p. 67).

School and democracy is another issue that was important to Dewey. Likewise, it is significant in Reggio Emilia where school is viewed as a place of democracy. Not only is school a place for the transmission and creation of culture and values but it also recognizes children as citizens. In Reggio, school is a place of endless possibilities “where knowledge and identity are co-constructed and learning process are investigated, always in relationship with others” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 12). Rinaldi (2006) also identified the theory of the hundred languages of children as something that is full of democracy. Subject of political and cultural debates, the power of the hundred languages for certain knowledge and particular classes is unimaginable. Moreover, through the social constructivist approach, the municipal schools in Reggio have become new places for democratic politics, provoking a politics of education and learning as well as a politics of childhood (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006).
Lastly, according to Dahlberg and Moss (2006), Dewey “border crossed the dualisms between content and method, process and product, mind and body, science and art, theory and practice” (p. 6). One success of Dewey was that he created his own school and put theory into practice. It was, however, only one school that only lasted four years (Rinaldi, 2006). Malaguzzi also devoted years developing his theory to improve practice in the infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia (Rankin, 2004). Educators in Reggio Emilia agree, “theory and practice should be in dialogue, two languages expressing our effort to understand the meaning of life” (Rinaldi, 2006). However, Rinaldi (2006) explained the difference between the Dewey Laboratory School and the municipal schools of Reggio:

We have thirty schools here and they’ve had the courage to keep going, from generation to generation of citizens of the same city, and also to generate dialogue and reciprocal exchanges with other municipal experiences not only in Italy but also abroad, and to be themselves generated by this dialogue, by having dialogue and exchange as an integral part of themselves. (p. 158)

The dualism of theory and practice that Dewey enacted remains an important aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach, separating it from other examples of early childhood education. The interdependent relationship between the progressive philosophy and practice of the schools in Reggio Emilia is like none other in the world (Gardner, 1998). Educators in Reggio argue that the two are inseparable and that one without the other is unimaginable. As Rinaldi (2006) asserted, “We cannot live without theory or practice. We need to be theoretical practitioners, and to be thinkers. And to give the children the value and the experience of being a thinker” (p. 191).
The ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which focuses on the importance of context in children’s development, has been used to guide education in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, including the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia schools. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory viewed development as the product of the interactions between ever-changing people and their ever-changing environment. He defined the interacting systems that influence development as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, concentric circles that begin with the child moving outward to the chronosystem of social and cultural history. His theory was based on the fact the child is affected and influenced by the number of systems in his or her environment, either directly or indirectly. He believed that the whole child develops in relationship with these systems in his or her environment (Thomas, 2005; Shaffer, 2009; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). In Reggio Emilia, the belief in the active engagement of young children with the world is documented as follows:

The young child is understood and recognized as being part of, a member of, society. He or she exists not only in the family home, but also in the wider world outside. This means being a citizen, with citizen’s rights and . . . citizen’s responsibilities. It also means that the young child is not only included, but in active relationship with that society and that world. He or she is not an innocent, apart from the world, to be sheltered in some nostalgic representation of the past reproduced by adults. Rather, the young child is in the world as it is today, embodies that world, is acted upon by that world—but also acts on it and makes meaning of it. (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 50-51)

As mentioned previously, there is significant value placed on relationships in Reggio Emilia. Drawing inspiration from Bronfenbrenner, each child is appreciated not only as an individual but also in relation to other children, the family, the teachers, the school environment, the community, and society as a whole. Similar to the ideas of
Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, “each school in Reggio is a system in which all of these relationships, which are all interconnected and reciprocal, are activated and supported” (Gandini, 1993, p. 5). The total support and involvement of the entire community of Reggio Emilia contributes to the pedagogical belief that children are fully human and worthy of respect (Fu, 2002).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory also supports the framework of teaching for transformation. Throughout life, people transform other people within the various systems. As children make connections within these systems, there are many opportunities that provoke thought and prompt them to act accordingly to make a difference in the world. This can certainly be seen in the rich history of the Reggio experience. After being almost completely destroyed during World War II, the people chose to build a school for the destiny of the children (Barazzoni, 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998a). Currently, with more than 28,000 immigrants representing over 100 ethnic groups, Reggio Emilia is definitely a world city. Therefore, the schools in Reggio Emilia constantly reflect upon ways in which to build a more democratic coexistence as well as a more global idea of citizenship (Lanzi, 2011). Furthermore, the importance Reggio educators place on dialogue through co-construction with others is a way to see things from a different perspective. Rinaldi (2006) explained the possibility of transformation through dialogue:

We talk about a different kind of community as a possible solution, we talk about ‘metropolis’ as a place where different cultures can live together—but only if we have the courage to open up to the concepts of hybridization and transformation. With real dialogue, I think, there are possibilities of this future. (pp. 184-185)
Gardner

Through his research in developmental psychology and neuropsychology, Howard Gardner (1983) developed his theory of multiple intelligences. In doing so, he acknowledged that there are many ways of learning, understanding, and knowing the world (Fraser, 2000). His theory maintains that all people have at least eight or nine different intelligences to which they must attend. These intelligences include linguistic intelligence, logico-mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and the intelligence of the naturalist. New intelligences continue to be added as they are identified. Gardner (1983) believed that deep understanding comes from the unique blend of all intelligences. Furthermore, Gardner (2001) claimed the following:

While we all share these intelligences as part of our human birthright, we differ from one another—for both genetic and environmental reasons—in our particular profile of intelligences at any historical moment. The fact that we have different spectra of intelligences can either be ignored or exploited in education. (p. 26)

Malaguzzi became aware of Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences through Lella Gandini, who was largely responsible for connecting educators in Reggio Emilia to the ideas of leading figures and prominent researchers in the United States (Rinaldi, 2006). Gardner (2001) first learned about the schools in Reggio Emilia in the early 1980s. Soon thereafter, he visited the municipal schools of Reggio and was given the opportunity to discuss his theory with Malaguzzi and several prominent pedagogical leaders, including Carla Rinaldi, Vea Vecchi, Amelia Gambetti, Tiziana Filippini, and Lella Gandini. Rich dialogues about the similarities and differences between Gardner’s multiple intelligences and Malaguzzi’s hundred languages ensued. Similar in thought, “in Reggio Emilia they always say that they have dared to take, as the starting point for their peda-
gogical practice, the idea of ‘the rich child’ and that ‘all children are intelligent’” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 50). From this meeting, a deep friendship based on mutual esteem and admiration was forged between Malaguzzi and Gardner (Rinaldi, 2006).

Since then, Gardner (2001) has made several trips back to Reggio Emilia, stayed in contact with the schools, and participated in museum exhibitions and writings to share the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach with others. In 1995, as director of Project Zero, a research team at Harvard Graduate School of Education interested in cognitive development and the process of learning, Gardner proposed doing a common research project together with the educators in Reggio. After many joint meetings between the Project Zero and Reggio research teams, the theme that provoked greatest interest for all protagonists was documentation (Rinaldi, 2006). The results of this collaborative project, including the value of documentation in process and as a tool for assessment, were published in a book titled, *Making Learning Visible* (Giudici, Krechevsky, & Rinaldi, 2001).

Gardner (2001) suggested that the work at Project Zero overlaps concerns in Reggio Emilia as noted:

> Our colleagues in Reggio are keenly aware of the many ways in which youngsters organize and make sense of experience—not restricted to eight or nine modes of representation, it is they who have celebrated “the hundred languages of children.” . . . Building confidently on the enormous perceptual and cognitive powers and motivations of children, they have helped young children probe deeply into areas that interest them. In the process, they have evoked remarkable performances of understanding—ones that have actually expanded the world’s appreciation of what young children can accomplish. Finally, the extensive documentation of student learning that is integral to the “Reggio project” constitutes an exciting form of assessment, whose potential needs to be demonstrated to the rest of the world. (p. 27)
As a socio-constructivist theorist, Jerome Bruner (1960) developed a theory of cognitive growth based on environmental factors. In his book *The Process of Learning*, Bruner (1960) addressed the importance of structure, readiness for learning, intuitive and analytic thinking, and motives for learning. He believed that all children are capable of learning if organized properly. According to Bruner (1960), “any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (p. 33). Additionally, his theory supported a spiral curriculum in which children are always revisiting their thinking while knowledge builds on what is already known. Bruner (1960), furthermore, believed that children are intrinsically motivated by their interests rather than extrinsically motivated by grades or other external factors.

For Bruner (1966), learning is a process rather than a product and children are active participants in that process. Bruner (1996) later acknowledged that children are in a constant state of disequilibrium requiring reorganization of their understanding of the environment. Bruner (1996) embraced the notion of an education based on culture and relationships with the following statement:

> We do not learn of a way of life and ways of deploying mind unassisted, unscafolded, naked before the world. . . . Rather it is the give and take of talk that makes collaboration possible. For the agentive mind is not only active in nature, but it seeks out dialogue and discourse with other active minds. And it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the Other and his points of view, his stories. We learn an enormous amount about ourselves by discourse with Others. (p. 93)

In addition, Bruner (2004) believed that there is no life unless it is told. As he argued, “A life as led is inseparable from a life as told . . . a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (p. 708). In other words, he per-
ceived narration as a way to construct meaning out of particular life events. This relationship between life and narration is particularly pertinent to the values of progettazione and documentation that are part of the fundamental principles of the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach (Filippini, 2013).

As a frequent visitor and admirer of the municipal schools, Bruner was good friends with Malaguzzi and remains close to many educators and community leaders in Reggio Emilia even today. In 1998, he was given a key to the city and granted honorary citizenship. Based on his own appreciation of culture related to his theory, it was Bruner who argued in order to understand the schools in Reggio one must first understand the city from which they originate. Supporting the co-construction of knowledge, Bruner (1998) described the Reggio schools as a special community to learn together about the real world and the possibilities of the imagination. He described the infant-toddler centers and preschools in Reggio as places of tremendous learning and utmost respect, equating an experience there to a university graduate seminar. For Bruner, the most notable aspect about the Reggio experience is that it has endured over time as a cultural expression of the city (Rinaldi, 2006).

When looking at the theoretical underpinnings of the Reggio Emilia approach, one can see how the educators in Reggio Emilia have drawn inspiration from many different theorists. However, it is important to remember that they are not bound to them. Instead, they constantly reflect on them to construct their own evolving philosophy. Their beliefs about the complementary relationship between teaching and learning make them feel especially connected to the socio-constructivist theorists (Rinaldi, 2006). To
encapsulate his feelings concerning relationships, Malaguzzi (1994) affirmed, “We don’t want to teach children something they can learn by themselves” (p. 54).

Principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach

In Reggio Emilia, education is viewed as a right of all children and is therefore the responsibility of the community. Education provides an opportunity to grow, gain knowledge, and learn to live with others through listening, dialogue, and participation. Moreover, as seen throughout its pedagogy, education is “a meeting place where freedom, democracy, and solidarity are practiced and where the value of peace is promoted” (Reggio Children, 2010, p.7). Based on its cultural, historical background and theoretical influences, the underlying principles of the Reggio Emilia approach are identified. These include the image of the child, the hundred languages, participation, relationships, environment as third teacher, progettazione, listening, and pedagogical documentation. While each of these fundamental ideas is discussed individually, they are in fact all deeply interconnected to form one coherent philosophy (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006).

Image of the Child

As Loris Malaguzzi (1994) stated, “There are hundreds of different images of the child” (p. 52). The image of the child, therefore, is a cultural convention of what one knows and accepts about children thereby determining how one relates with them (Rinaldi, 2006). The pedagogical practice in Reggio Emilia is founded on the idea of the rich and competent child with rights rather than needs (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi,
According to Malaguzzi (1993), “our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all connected to adults and other children” (p. 10).

In Reggio, the child is the pinnacle of learning and envisioned as a whole, intrinsically motivated to learn and discover life (Rinaldi, 2006). Within this image, the body cannot be separated from the mind, but instead “form a single unit with reciprocal qualifications” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 92). Capable of constructing his or her own knowledge, each child is perceived with tremendous potential and capabilities for learning and change (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). However, in this image of the rich child, the child is an active co-constructor with other adults and children to make meaning of the world (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b).

Right from the moment of birth, the child is perceived as “strong, powerful, and rich in potential and resources” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 123). This image embraces the belief that a child is born ready to learn and does not need to seek adult permission to begin learning. As such, the young child is actively engaged in the world right from the start and should be taken seriously. The ideas and thoughts of the child merit the attention of others but are also subject to inspection and questions (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

In addition, the young child is recognized as a member of society or citizen from birth. Representing all that is possible, the child is seen as the most important citizen (Rinaldi, 2006). This includes being a citizen with all the rights and privileges there to pertaining (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Above all, the child has the “right to be respected and valued in his or her own identity, uniqueness, difference, and in his of her own rhythms of growth and development” (Reggio Children, 2010, p. 10). Furthermore, as Malaguzzi
(1994) stressed, all children have the right to a good school that includes good facilities, good teachers, good activities, and the luxury of time. As a citizen in an active relationship with society and the world, the child has an ecological responsibility to others and the environment (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Reggio Children, 2010).

The Hundred Languages

As the main tenet of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the image of the child implies that all children are intelligent (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Creative and rich in potential, the child makes meaning out of life within the context of his or her relationships with others in many different ways using many different languages (Gandini et al., 2005). As Malaguzzi (1998b) so beautifully conveyed in his poem, No way. A hundred is there, “The child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts, a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, of speaking... and a hundred, hundred, hundred more” (p. 3). Malaguzzi’s theory of the hundred languages originated in the 1970s around a debate concerning the relationship between language and thought as well as from brain studies and research on learning processes such as learning by doing (Rinaldi, 2006).

Educators in Reggio Emilia acknowledge that children have a hundred languages or a hundred different ways with which to think and express themselves. These include multiple expressive languages such as art, music, architecture, design, photography, dance, and theater (Gandini, 2005c). The hundred languages is a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials and creativity that children possess (Reggio Children, 2010). It is, also, a way to form concepts and strengthen understanding. All of the languages, whether it is visual, musical, theatrical, or others, are “experiences and explorations of life, of
the senses, and of meanings” (Gandini, 2005a, p. 9). But most of all, educators in Reggio Emilia consider the expressive languages to be equally as important as academic disciplines (Vecchi, 2005). In the opinion of Rinaldi (2006), the hundred languages is “a declaration of the equal dignity and importance of all languages, not only writing, reading, and counting, which has become more and more obviously necessary for the construction of knowledge” (p. 175).

The hundred languages of children are “actively explored, organized, and represented” in spaces known in Reggio schools as ateliers (Cadwell, 2005, p. 182). A French term referring to a workspace an artist characteristically used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Malaguzzi chose this term to distinguish the space used in the Reggio schools from art rooms found in traditional schools (Gandini et al., 2005). For Malaguzzi, the genesis of the atelier was influential in the recovery of the image of child as competent and rich in potential (Gandini, 2004b, 2005a). The atelier values the relationship between the expressive languages of children, the use of multiple materials, and the co-construction of meaning between children and adults (Gandini, 2004b; Schwall, 2004). It is a “place where children’s different languages could be explored by them and studied by us in a favorable and peaceful atmosphere” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p. 74).

The merging of the languages that occurs in the atelier supports the expansion of the imagination and a deeper approach to reality while also contributing to a broader and more expressive perception of learning (Vecchi, 2005). The atelier is run by an atelierista who has a visual arts background. The atelierista, working closely with the teachers, provides a large variety of materials and tools that provoke the creativity and learning of the children (Fraser, 2000; Gandini et al., 2005; Schwall, 2004; Vecchi, 1998). As a
place of research, the main purpose of the atelier is to “modify the pedagogy through a new way of seeing and working; to modify the way of learning within the life stories of the children of the school” (Gandini, 2005b, p. 71). In doing so, “the atelier brings the strength and joy of the unexpected and the uncommon to the process of learning. . . . that comes from looking through a poetic lens at everyday reality” (Vecchi, 2005, p. x).

Participation

Although children represent the center of the educational system in Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi (1993) felt that this view of children was incomplete without attention to the important role of teachers and families. Participation by children, teachers, families, as well as the whole community is one of the main values essential to the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Gandini, 2004b; Rinaldi, 1998). In the words of Malaguzzi (1998a), “the stimulating atmosphere of the school provides a sense of positive receptiveness to all concerned. That happens because the school invites an exchange of ideas; it has an open and democratic style, and thereby it opens minds” (p. 66).

In Reggio, the children, the teachers, and the families, whose destinies are thoroughly connected, are all considered to be stakeholders or protagonists in the educational process (Dahlberg & Moss, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). The schools are places of close relationships where the value of the child, teacher, and parent is regarded within the context of the whole group (Dahlberg et al., 2007). According to Rinaldi (1998), “To feel a sense of belonging, to be part of a larger endeavor, to share meanings—these are the rights of everyone involved in the educational process, whether
teachers, children, or parents” (p.114). In fact, the three are so integrated and inseparable that “the well-being or malaise of one of the three protagonists is not only correlated but interdependent with that of the other two” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 27).

Furthermore, participation gives meaning to the hundred languages of children, representing diversity of viewpoints and culture while promoting dialogue and a sense of community. Through nurturing values of unity, accountability, and inclusion, participation can lead to transformation and new cultures (Reggio Children, 2010). In addition, participation allows the schools to offer new places for democratic politics (Rinaldi, 2006).

**Relationships**

Relationships matter. This is an essential belief that the educators in Reggio Emilia have embraced (Cadwell, Ryan, & Schwall, 2005; Gandini, 2004b). In the words of Malaguzzi (1993), “We consider relationships to be the fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system. We view relationships not simply as a warm, protective backdrop or blanket but as a coming together of elements interacting dynamically toward a common purpose” (p. 10). Children have an internal need for interaction and seek opportunities for positive interaction with other children and adults (Malaguzzi, 1993). Based on a socio-constructivist perspective, this pedagogy of relationships believes that knowledge develops in context through a process of meaning making by way of uninterrupted interactions with others and the world. As such, children are viewed to be actively co-construction knowledge, identity, and culture (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007). It is a way of working together, generated through play, curiosity, and internal
motivation, that propagates creative thinking throughout the entire school (Cadwell et al., 2005; Gandini, 2004b; Reggio Children, 2010).

Although education focuses on each child, the child is no longer seen as isolated and egocentric but rather as rich and capable in relation to other children, the teachers, the families, the school, the community, and society (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993). This approach based on relationships highlights a classroom made up of individual children and groups of children with different interests and abilities (Malaguzzi, 1993). Enabling the co-construction of knowledge and identity, the school provides places for activities and relationships to occur (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

The schools in Reggio Emilia build strong foundations for relationships by keeping the same group of children with the same teachers for three-year periods. In the infant-toddler centers, the children stay together from four months until age three. At that time, the children move up to the preschools where they remain with another group of children and new teachers for an additional three years (New, 1990, 1998). The presence of two coequal teachers in each class is very important (Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1998a). New teachers are paired with experienced teachers so that each can benefit from the strengths of the other and provide different perspectives. They work closely together with the same group of children and their families during the three years sharing experiences, discussing ideas, and debating interpretations (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Edwards, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990, 1998; Phillips & Bredekamp, 1998). In addition to fostering a safe and steady environment for the children, “the three-year grouping provides a degree of continuity and familiarity that enables more effective relationships among parents and teachers, and results in a large community of adults around a group of
children” (New, 1990, p. 5). Each school, lacking hierarchical status among staff, also has an atelierista, a cook, and a pedagogista that further deepen the pedagogy of relationships through collaboration with the teachers, the children, and the families (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Filipini, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990, 1998; Phillips & Bredekamp, 1998).

Although not the only way, Malaguzzi (1993) believed that small groups consisting of two, three, or four children are the best way to organize the classroom for an education based on relationships. Small groups are ideal because “complex interactions are more likely to occur, constructive conflicts take place, and self-regulatory accommodations emerge” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 11). Working together to investigate materials, follow interests, or test hypotheses, small group work enables new thoughts to be generated, expressed, compared, and negotiated. It also is a place where the hundred languages can emerge. Small group work grants children opportunities to exchange ideas with each other (Lewin-Benham, 2006; Rinaldi, 2006). As Rinaldi (2006) explained, in small groups “children experience the pleasure of being given back pieces of their own knowledge, enriched and elaborated on by the contribution of others through this system of communication and exchange. . . . both individual and group thought grows and advances” (p. 127). Furthermore, small group work between children enables teachers to more accurately observe children’s relationships, participation, and roles (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Active participation by families in various forms is also essential to the construction of the educational experience. From the moment a child is enrolled, there are many opportunities for families to be involved either directly at school or on the community level. The organization of space and environment in the school is such that families have
daily opportunities to interact with the children either before or after school. In all Reggio schools, families participate in various school projects by sharing their skills and ideas with the children and teachers. Furthermore, families advocate on behalf of the children, teachers, and schools at the community level whenever there is a need (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990; Spaggiari, 1998).

**Environment as Third Teacher**

According to Malaguzzi (1993), the goal for educators in Reggio Emilia is to create an “amiable school . . . that is active, inventive, livable, documentable, and communicative. . . . where children, teachers, and families feel a sense of well-being” (p. 9). They believe that everyone has the right to a quality environment and to beauty as well as the right to contribute to the creation of this environment and this notion of beauty (Rinaldi, 2006). The space and environment of the schools, therefore, are organized in such a way to bring together all three protagonists and strengthen the relationships among them thereby creating a third teacher for the children (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Accordingly, there is very intentional use of both the indoor and outdoor space and environment in Reggio schools. Malaguzzi (1998a) points out that the environment of the children “must be set up so as to interface the cognitive realm with the realms of relationship and affectivity” (p. 68). Schools are consequently designed and organized to foster autonomy, exploration, interaction, curiosity, and communication. The space and environment convey the image of a welcoming place where children and adults can live and research together to strengthen relationships between the school, home, and community (Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010).
As Cadwell (2003) elucidated, “Every corner of every space has an identity and a purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate, and is valued and cared for by children and adults” (p. 5).

Situated in neighborhoods as visible points of reference for the community, schools in Reggio Emilia are designed by both teachers and architects to support the philosophy of the approach. The physical space of each school incorporates numerous large windows, skylights, and atria that allow natural light to flood the building while literally creating a sense of being outside. With an absence of hallways, rooms are connected to others, generating a feeling of openness throughout the school. Every school has a piazza which functions as the heart of the school. Characteristic of the culture, the school piazza serves as a central meeting place where teachers, children, and families can interact with each other at various times throughout the day (Gandini, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Wurm, 2005).

In Reggio, “the environment is useful and plentiful and organized. . . . to attract more energy, ideas, connection, and possibility that propel us all in a positive direction” (Cadwell, 2003, p.117-118). The environment is both purely beautiful and exceedingly personal (Gandini, 2004b). Child-size furniture and fixtures add to the overall quality of the environment. Elements such as antiques and trinkets that are representative of home life and culture are interspersed throughout the school. In doing so, the environment links the familiar with the new as well as the home with the school. Every little detail from paint color to flooring has been thoroughly contemplated with the child in mind. Numerous materials that reflect the hundred languages of children are meticulously organized and displayed in such ways as to entice exploration. Physical artifacts such as wall
panels, murals, sculptures, and other forms of artwork cover the walls to document the process of learning and make learning visible (Cadwell, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990; Wurm, 2005). Through an ongoing dialogue between pedagogy and architecture, the overall space and environment of the Reggio schools interacts, adapts, and comes together in relation to the projects and learning experiences of the protagonists (Reggio Children, 2010).

_Progettazione_

Progettazione is an Italian noun that is used in direct opposition to programmazione or predetermined curriculum. It is not easy to find an English term that adequately describes this idea. While some may inappropriately refer to it as an emergent, projected, or integrated curriculum, educators in Reggio Emilia prefer to preserve the Italian word progettazione. It properly describes the many simultaneously definite and indefinite stages of action produced by children and adults in dialogue with each other (Rinaldi, 2006).

There is not a predefined curriculum with units in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Reflective of the Reggio philosophy, progettazione relies on the capabilities and resources of children (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1998a). Progettazione therefore implies a much broader concept in which curriculum develops from questions or hypotheses that emerge in the children’s environments. Yet, these are subject to adjustments and changes of direction as learning progresses (Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Rinaldi (1998) illustrated this concept:

A project, which we view as a sort of adventure and research, can start through a suggestion from an adult, a child’s idea, or from an event such as a snowfall or
something else unexpected. But every project is based on the attention of the educators to what the children say and do, as well as what they do not say and do not do. (p. 122-123)

Progettazione is a way of thinking and action that respects and supports the learning process of children and adults (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). As children negotiate their questions and hypotheses with others, knowledge is co-constructed by individuals in relation with others through observation, documentation, and interpretation (Malaguzzi, 1998a; Gandini, 2004b; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Educators in Reggio believe that learning does not proceed through linear stages but instead is constructed through advances, pauses, and withdrawals that take various courses (Rinaldi, 2006). According to Dahlberg and Moss (2006), “project work in Reggio Emilia grows in many different directions without an overall ordering principle, challenging the mainstream idea of knowledge acquisition as a form of linear progression, where the metaphor is a tree” (p. 7). While Malaguzzi characterized learning as a tangle of spaghetti, others more appropriately likened it to a rhizome, devoid of the hierarchy of root, trunk, or branch. Rather, sprouting in all directions with no beginning or end, learning is perceived in a constant state of in between (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006). Likewise, Rinaldi (1998) preferred “the metaphor of taking a journey, where one finds the way using a compass rather than taking a train with its fixed routes and schedules” (p. 119).

Fundamental to progettazione is “a school that gives time—time to children, time to teachers, time for their being together” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 207). Because there is not a predefined curriculum to follow, time in Reggio is consequently not regimented. This unhurried atmosphere is characteristic of the cultural value of time. As ideas are exchanged among the children and adults, the children are given sustained amounts of time
for progettazione to explore, reflect, and come to their own understandings (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 1998). Instead of pushing them to finish, teachers in Reggio Emilia provoke the thinking of children and help them to plan accordingly as a project develops. This allows things to naturally unfold (Hendrick, 2004; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Wurm, 2005). Furthermore, by remaining with the same group of children for three-year periods, the presence of two co-teachers per class allows them to become intimately familiar with each child’s own sense of time. Although environments change according to developmental needs over the three years, relationships between teachers and children remain constant (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993; New, 1990).

**Listening**

Malaguzzi (1998a) proclaimed, “Listening to children is both necessary and expedient” (p. 73). This pedagogy of listening is central to the schools in Reggio Emilia. As one of the principles of the pedagogical approach, listening is an important aspect in the search for meaning (Rinaldi, 2001). Listening involves being sensitive to the patterns that connect people with one another. It incorporates the ears with the other senses and recognizes the hundred languages that people use for expression and communication. Created by emotions, listening produces curiosity, want, doubt, and interest. Rather than giving answers, it generates questions. Moreover, listening is the origin for all learning relationships (Rinaldi, 2001, 2006).

Active listening between children, adults, and the environment provides the context for every relationship. It is a listening context in which all individuals feel worthy to
represent their thoughts and ideas through the hundred languages (Rinaldi, 2006). Necessary for dialogue and change, it is a continuous activity that cultivates reflection, acceptance, and honesty to self and others. Furthermore, through the suspension of judgment and prejudices, listening raises the level of attentiveness and sensitivity to the cultures, political situations, and values of the world (Reggio Children, 2010).

In particular, young children have an innate capacity for listening. They listen to the reality that encircles them and quickly notice that listening is necessary for communication. Children express early on that they have a voice, but more so that they know how to listen and want to be listened to as well (Rinaldi, 2006). In Reggio Emilia, listening is at the heart of the teacher’s role (Edwards et al., 1998). Rinaldi (1998) clarified:

Our duty as teachers is to listen to the children, just as we ask them to listen to one another. Listening means giving value to others, being open to them and what they have to say. Listening legitimizes the other person’s point of view, thereby enriching both listener and speaker. What teachers are asked to do is to create contexts where such listening can take place. (p. 120)

With an image of a rich, competent, and strong child, the teacher must act in ways that conveys this image to the child. Listening to children’s voices is a way to take them seriously and enter into active learning through democratic dialogues (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards, 1998). Schools support active listening through observation and documentation (Reggio Children, 2010). Employing techniques such as note taking, sketching, tape-recording, video-recording, and photography, teachers listen carefully to the conversations of children as they interact with others and their surroundings (Lewin-Benham, 2006; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). Therefore, listening becomes a metaphor for the process of observation and documentation, another fundamental principle of the Reggio Emilia approach (Rinaldi, 1998).


Pedagogical Documentation

Early in the history of the Reggio Emilia schools, Malaguzzi (1998a) challenged teachers to “leave behind an isolated, silent mode of working that leaves no traces. Instead . . . discover ways to communicate and document the children’s evolving experiences at school” (p. 69). Therefore, educators in Reggio Emilia began systematically documenting their work with children to serve several purposes. First of all, documentation makes it possible for teachers to support the learning of the children while also reflecting upon their own teaching. It additionally provides the children with a visual aid of what they did and prompts future learning opportunities. Documentation also allows the parents and others in the community to see what takes place in the schools as a means to elicit support and participation (Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini, 1993, 2004b, 2005b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Rinaldi, 1998; Reggio Children, 2010). It is “a point of strength that makes the interweaving of actions of the adults and the children timely and visible, and improves the quality of communication and interaction” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 57). Educators in Reggio Emilia consider pedagogical documentation to be integral to the daily life in schools and, moreover, an act of caring, love, and interaction (Rinaldi, 2004).

As part of progettazione, pedagogical documentation signifies another language, the language of meaning making. It is both a process as well as an important content in the process (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007). As content, pedagogical documentation is the physical collection of evidence and artifacts that leave traces of the interactions of the children, the work of the children, and the relationships of the teacher with the children and their work. By observing and listening to children in their envi-
ronment, these physical materials can be produced in multiple ways and take many different shapes. Among these representations of thinking and learning include note taking, audio recordings, video recordings, digital photography, slide shows, computer graphics, portfolios, daily journals, charts, books, wall panels, and artwork of the children. These materials make learning visible and are necessary for the process of pedagogical documentation (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; 2005c; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

The process of pedagogical documentation includes the use of the physical traces as a means of rigorous, systematic, and democratic reflection and interpretation (Dahlberg et al., 2007). As a process of reciprocal learning, pedagogical documentation is a social construction. The teachers in Reggio Emilia become participatory co-constructors through what they select as valuable to document. Meaning does not come from observation alone but through interpretations resulting from the relationships between the teachers, the children, the families, and the community (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). In doing so, pedagogical documentation becomes “real mirrors of our knowledge, in which we see our own ideas and images reflected, but in which we can also find other and different images with which to engage in dialogue” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 57-58).

For educators, pedagogical documentation provides an instrument for research in order to focus on the learning of the children as well as their part in it (Edwards et al., 1998; Katz, 1998). It gives educators a unique chance to “re-listen, re-see and re-visit . . . both individually and with others, the events and processes in which she was the co-protagonist, either directly or indirectly” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 58). As an important source for professional development, educators enhance their own learning by revisiting the
documentation or through the discussion and exchange of ideas with other colleagues. The collaboration of educators on documentation represents the amalgamation of individual strengths and competencies (Gandini, 2005b). According to Malaguzzi (1998a), pedagogical documentation allows educators to demonstrate patience, care, and kindness as “they hide their worries, join children’s play, and take responsibility” (p. 70). As such, teachers discover the child who is competent and rich in potential (Gandini, 2005c).

For children, pedagogical documentation is valuable to the construction of identity (Rinaldi, 2006). It enhances the vastness and richness of the learning accumulated by the children through progettazione (Katz, 1998). As Malaguzzi (1998a) stated, the children “become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (p. 70). The children, therefore, come to view themselves as real researchers (Rinaldi, 2004). Pedagogical documentation supports individual and group evaluation, the comparison and conflict of ideas, and discussions among the children. Additionally, it reinforces the memories of the children by providing opportunities to retrace, reflect, and interpret their learning (Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). As children encounter what they have accomplished through pedagogical documentation, they come to see the meanings that the teacher has interpreted from their learning experiences. The children come to know that they have value and meaning (Rinaldi, 2004, 2006). Above all, they “discover that they ‘exist’ and can emerge from anonymity and invisibility, seeing that what they say and do is important, is listened to and is appreciated: it is a value” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 72).

For parents, pedagogical documentation promises extraordinary opportunities (Rinaldi, 2006). Malaguzzi (1998a) affirmed that it “introduces parents to a quality of
knowing that tangibly changes their expectation” (p. 70). Through visible traces such as photographs and transcriptions, children can readily share the learning that takes place at school with their parents. Pedagogical documentation strengthens parental involvement in the learning of the children, encourages dialogues between parents and children, and also intensifies parental understandings concerning the way young children construct knowledge (Gandini, 2004b; Katz, 1998). Not only can parents see what the children do, but also they come to understand the meanings that children give to what they do as well as the shared meanings between children (Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Moreover, pedagogical documentation is “an opportunity for parents to see unknown aspects of their child, to see, in a certain sense, the ‘invisible’ child that parents are rarely able to see” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 59).

In Reggio Emilia, as educators become aware of learning and its value through pedagogical documentation, they assess it. They also believe that assessment is an equally important aspect in the co-construction of knowledge. Thus, the relationship between pedagogical documentation and assessment is important to the Reggio Emilia approach (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004). This understanding challenges the way educators in Reggio Emilia approach pedagogical documentation as they come to further understand the relationship between documentation and testing. Educators in Reggio agree that testing only assesses the knowledge of children on the content of the test rather than the real learning of children (Rinaldi, 2004).

Alternately, pedagogical documentation gives values to the processes and procedures of children. For educators in Reggio Emilia, this is where true assessment starts, because each protagonist is able to visibly share what he or she interprets as valuable
through the documentation. Assessment, therefore, is inherent to pedagogical documentation as well as the whole idea of progettazione (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006; Seidel, 2001). With this in mind, educators in Reggio Emilia concur that “recognizing documentation as a possible tool for assessment/evaluation gives us an extremely strong ‘antibody’ to a proliferation of assessment/evaluation tools which are more and more anonymous, decontextualized and only apparently objective and democratic” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 62).

Reggio Emilia Inspired Practice and Documentation

Bound in culture, the schools in Reggio Emilia do not propose a replicative model (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Hendrick, 1997; New, 1998; Schwall, 2005). Malaguzzi (1998a), however, believed that all children regardless of culture share a common gift of potential and competency. Thus, the implications of the Reggio Emilia approach for early childhood education around the world are vast (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Lewin-Benham, 2006, 2008; New, 1997, 1998). Educators in Reggio Emilia challenge other educators to reflect on their own ideas about children in order to advocate for a new image of children who are rich in potential and competencies (Bredekamp, 1993; Gandini, 2004b; Lanzi, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1998a; New, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). Empowered by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, many early childhood educators around the world have embraced what is commonly referred to as a Reggio Emilia inspired practice (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Hendrick, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2006, 2008; New, 1997, 1998). They agree that knowledge is socially constructed through active participation of all citizens and seek to make their own meaning with chil-

Although the principles of the Reggio Emilia philosophy are inextricably linked (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006), the power of documentation as both a process as well as content in that process is valued in Reggio Emilia inspired practice. In order to understand parents’ perspectives of pedagogical documentation, it was necessary for me to examine existing themes associated with pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms. From the review of the literature, five general themes emerged. These include documentation and the hundred languages, documentation in content areas, documentation as professional development, documentation as assessment, and documentation for change.

Documentation and the Hundred Languages

Guided by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, educators that employ a Reggio inspired practice also acknowledge that children have a hundred different languages or ways to think and express themselves. The hundred languages of children are explored and represented through pedagogical documentation. The visual arts and technology are two examples of the hundred languages used for pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired settings.

Visual arts. A study by Griebling (2011) sought to understand children’s reasons for creating in the visual arts within the context of project work. In Reggio Emilia, visual arts is identified as one of the many languages children use to explore a topic and express
learning, especially during project work. For this study, the researcher engaged in a 10-week ethnographic study of 16 young children in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom in a metropolitan area of the Midwest. The children represented a diverse population in age, learning needs, nationality, and socio-economic population. Data analysis by the researcher determined that the children’s reasons for using the visual arts correlated to the four developmental needs found in Bendtro and Brokenleg’s framework, Circle of Courage. These are mastery, belonging, generosity, and independence. Children used the visual arts to record thoughts, feelings, and ideas thereby demonstrating their development of mastery. A sense of belonging was established through creating artwork to use during play. Contributions of artwork to the classroom such as a home for a caterpillar, a decorative vase, and paintings for the garden center led to generosity. Additionally, independence was created through the open access to materials that could be used to make and provide things the children needed without relying on others.

Findings from this study may be able to help art educators as well as general early childhood educators in several ways. First of all, teachers can give children free access to art materials to make their own choices about what to create. Not only does this support a child’s artistic ability, but it also lets them meet individual developmental needs. Secondly, the researchers suggested that art teachers can provide significant and suitable support to young children. They can show children how to use tools and develop specific art techniques while still giving children choices in art making. Lastly, the general early childhood educator can support the attainment and expression of children’s learning by making art materials available throughout the school day. Art teachers can also be invited in to help with special projects. Based on the previous findings, the researcher found
that the visual arts allowed young children the chance to realize their potential and worth while also supporting the hundred languages of children (Griebling, 2011).

Using a qualitative case study, Kim and Darling (2009) explored ways six four-year-olds in a Reggio Emilia inspired Canadian child care construct knowledge using art as a learning and knowledge representation instrument during a *Shades of Pink* project. The project began from the children’s interest in mixing paints. Through collaboration with the teacher, this later became a meaningful learning context. During the project, the children developed and tested hypotheses in collaboration with the teacher and other children. The project was divided into four episodes, but the researchers shared data from only one episode in this article.

As the *Shades of Pink* project unfolded, the children began to show interest in famous artists. The children took particular interest in Monet’s painting, *Poppyfield at Argenteuil*, after several weeks of looking at library collections of various artists. Conversations among the children resulted from questions and conflicts that they had about different interpretations of the painting. These were initiated by the teacher’s questions to the children about things they noticed in the picture. The teacher also suggested that they children do an experiment to test their ideas. All of this helped to create deeper relationships between the children, the teacher, and the painting. This also led to further discussions about different types of flowers and weather. The children collaborated to paint a large copy of Monet’s painting on butcher paper (Kim & Darling, 2009).

In addition, a local artist was invited to share his own work with the children. When the children shared documentation of their project work with the artist, he used what he learned from them to teach them something connected to their own inquires. The
documentation invited the artist to become a co-constructer in the children’s learning. In order to enrich the learning experiences of the children, he showed them how artists like Monet add the perspective of depth and distance in their artwork, which had been one of the children’s original questions. Following a three-week holiday, the teacher reexamined the documentation from the children’s prior work to provoke ideas for further investigation. As the children constructed their own knowledge within the context of the group, they came to see themselves as individual learners with unique points of view. Small groups were instrumental in creating relationships among the children and teacher (Kim & Darling, 2009).

Technology. Although Malaguzzi never specifically mentioned technology as one of the hundred languages of children, there is little doubt that it is, especially in this age of unlimited technological advances. Providing an interesting and new perspective, Mitchell (2007) discussed technology as a tool with many purposes for young children in Reggio Emilia inspired programs. These include the use of technology to further inquiry, help construct new knowledge, foster creativity, and bring inanimate things to life. For adults, technology is also especially useful to store and manipulate ongoing documentation of children’s work, communicate and share information among colleagues and family members, and train educators to work with young children. Technology in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom includes much more than a computer. It can also include things such as color printers, digital cameras, video recorders, scanners, personal digital assistants, overhead projectors, light tables, microscopes, and cybernetic objects.
Several examples of different uses of technology in Reggio inspired classrooms were given. In one instance, children viewed a videotape of themselves dancing with scarves and ribbons in order to plan for their next dance. In another class, a keyboard connected to a computer allowed children to compose music while simultaneously hearing it. Additionally, children’s interests in cybernetic objects such as robots and self-propelled vehicles sparked new learning for both children and adults in a different Reggio inspired setting. While personal encounters are still extremely important in Reggio inspired classrooms, technology can enhance the learning of young children in numerous ways (Mitchell, 2007).

In a similar article, Trepanier-Street et al. (2001) described ways that they incorporated various types of technology to implement and document long term projects in a multi-aged preschool and kindergarten classroom. In the Reggio inspired classroom, the children’s thinking was documented with digital photographs. Digital photographs were viewed on the computer or transferred onto documentation panels. The photos allowed children to revisit previous and present projects, compare and contrast ideas, review their progress, and come to an understanding. Transparencies were also made from the digital photos using a color printer to share on the overhead projector. In doing so, large groups of children were able to revisit projects together. A different form of documentation with digital photos included making a class book about the project. Children then used the computer to describe the photo or write a story about the events. Videotapes were also used in the classroom to capture many details of the children’s activities, including non-verbal behaviors. Furthermore, small segments of action from the videotapes were saved and printed for teacher analysis and to be included on documentation panels. A video
printer was used to capture small changes in action from the videotapes. For these teachers, the scanner was another important tool for documentation as it allowed them to scan and save children’s original artwork to the computer. The children later added their own comments or stories. Like the photographs, the scanned artwork was made into project books and overhead transparencies for large group discussions.

In addition, the classroom computer was valuable in the documentation of the children’s learning. The children used computer software to represent their thinking through computer graphics and word processing. Internet searches about various topics were conducted to enrich long-term projects. Also, the creation of a class web page by the children and teachers made it easy for parents, who had little time to view documentation panels in the classroom, to learn about classroom activities. The web page was a great way to communicate with parents and include them as partners in the learning processes of the children. Overall, the teachers noticed several major benefits of using technology to document the long-term projects in the classroom. These included improved cognitive and social development in the children, deeper teacher reflection, and greater parent involvement (Trepanier-Street et al., 2001).

A study by Boardman (2007) investigated the use of digital cameras and voice recorders to capture young learners’ achievements. The perspectives of 29 kindergarten teachers were explored regarding the use of digital technology for the documentation of children’s learning. During a 10-week period, teachers in various kindergarten settings throughout Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory recorded conversations between children as well as between children and adults. In addition, the teachers used digital cameras to photograph the children in learning environments. Afterwards, three
semi-structured, small group interviews with nine teachers per group were conducted to collect the participants’ perspectives of the effectiveness of the digital technology to document the children’s learning. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Data analysis included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Simple coding of the data resulted in the categorization of themes. The researcher indicated that digital technology including cameras and voice recorders could aid in the collection of evidence for assessment purposes. Study results showed that digital cameras promote children’s reflective thinking as well as facilitate reflective practices in the teachers. Challenges that teachers faced using the digital cameras such as identification of children, capturing action shots, quality of images, and access to computer software were also addressed.

Furthermore, results revealed that voice recorders assist in the attainment of accurate records of the children’s learning. In addition, the participants thought that digital technology has tremendous potential to document children’s learning with parents. Although parental feedback was not a part of this study, teachers indicated that parents were pleased with responses they received through the digitally recorded assessment. However, this information is valuable for future research. The overall findings of this study suggested that there is great potential for digital technology to augment documentation and assessment in early childhood education classrooms (Boardman, 2007).

Documentation in Content Areas

In Reggio Emilia, there is not a predefined curriculum with units. Instead, curriculum develops from questions or hypotheses that emerge in the children’s environments.
Teachers in Reggio inspired classrooms find ways to apply an emergent and integrated curriculum into the various content areas such as science and social studies while also meeting standards that are so often imposed upon them.

Christensen et al. (2006) implemented a qualitative study to explore how a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to early childhood education correlated with a sound, humanistic, democratic, diverse social studies curriculum. The purpose of the study was to examine how teachers who implemented a Reggio Emilia approach in their classrooms articulated their work and how they deconstructed social studies through enacting tenets of the approach. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

How do three elementary teachers communicate their work as they implement the tenets of a modified Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education in their setting, and how do they perceive the affect of progressive and innovative teaching practice on learners, parents, and themselves? (p.11)

A narrative, ethnographic design guided the study. The participants were chosen using a purposive sampling. These included a kindergarten teacher, a first grade teacher, and a second grade teacher who taught in a multiage, looped, early childhood setting in a suburban school system in the southeastern United States. Numerous pieces of data were gathered, including informational brochures, monthly newsletters, student work samples, and digital photos. All three teachers participated in a focus group interview and responded to a written prompt about the nature of social studies classroom practice following the study and implementation of the modified Reggio Emilia approach. Additionally, a parent information survey was collected (Christensen et al., 2006).

The researchers used the interpretive and inductive method to analyze the data set. Pre-codes and then permanent codes were developed to identify emerging themes. To promote trustworthiness, an outsider was enlisted to audit fieldwork notes and subsequent
analysis and interpretations. Triangulation and member checks were also conducted with participants and among data sources to ensure validity of data. Through processes of research, the teachers found that the primary students described themselves as self-directed learners. They represented thoughts, feelings, and observations through the graphic arts as a means to document what they and their young colleagues learned in social studies. Parental involvement was intensified and a group of parents served to assist the teachers throughout the academic years. Children noticed that the teachers took their social studies learning seriously. Furthermore, documentation provoked the next in-depth topic for the young social studies learners (Christensen et al., 2006).

The article by Stegelin (2003) explained the application of fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood science education for young children between the ages of three and eight years in the United States. Included among those concepts that are especially relevant to early childhood education in the United States were the view of the child as a learner, integrated curriculum and project work, teacher-child relationships, and documentation of student learning. A summary of science standards for grades K-3 in the United States was then presented. Also, an example of a rain forest project in a Reggio inspired second grade class was described. Throughout the project, the philosophy of the Reggio approach inspired and informed the teacher in planning, implementing, documenting, and assessing science education while also meeting state benchmark standards. The article presented to educators that state standards do not necessarily have to create an either-or scenario by integrating them into Reggio Emilia inspired practice.
In another related study, Inan et al. (2010) employed an ethnographic study to explore how the natural sciences were represented in a Reggio Emilia inspired laboratory preschool. The natural sciences as a discipline, which is a latecomer to preschool curricula, and the internationally known Reggio Emilia approach interested educators and researchers, but there was little research about science in a Reggio Emilia classroom. The current research aimed to gain insight into natural science experiences in a Reggio Emilia-inspired classroom. This interpretive study addressed the following research questions: “(1) How are natural sciences socially constructed and integrated into a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool classroom’s daily life curriculum? (2) How does the science education in this Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool classroom address the Ohio Early Learning Content Standards (ELCS)?” (p. 1189).

To gain in-depth information, this inquiry-based study adapted a research design with ethnographic data collection techniques, namely Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence Method, which was a well-known, pioneer ethnographic method. The data were analyzed from an interpretive perspective using multiple lenses. These lenses included Spradley's DRS for the classroom culture, Corsaro's peer culture theory, the Reggio Emilia approach, and Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards. The study involved 18 preschoolers, 10 teachers, and a program director (Inan et al., 2010).

The results indicated that the Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool offered a science-rich context that triggered and supported preschoolers' inquiries, and effectively engaged preschoolers' hands, heads, and hearts with science. The natural sciences learning in this Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool classroom met and exceeded some of Ohio's prekin-
The results suggested that the Reggio pedagogy, grounded in inquiry, is compatible with science education goals (Inan et al., 2010).

**Documentation for Professional Development**

In Reggio Emilia inspired settings, teacher professional development and the belief that teacher and children are co-constructors of learning are both fundamental elements. In a study by Haigh (2007), a long-term action research project was conducted over a 13-month period. The research involved seven staff members from a child development program of Chicago Commons and two Head Start classrooms. Among the staff members, there were two head teachers, two assistant teachers, one teacher’s aide, a studio coordinator, and a program director. The children were between the ages of three and five. All of their families were low income and lived in the inner city of Chicago’s south or west sides. One classroom consisted of approximately 95% African American children and families and the other classroom consisted of nearly 70% Latino children and families. There were consistent staff meetings throughout the research.

The purpose of the action research was twofold. First of all, the teachers used action research to further their understandings about their own learning and teaching processes. Secondly, the teachers sought an understanding of what learning means to children as well as what they want to learn. The initial investigations began by attempting to understand what children know about learning through their portfolios. They focused on the following question: “How will children’s viewing of and discussing their work in portfolios help us better understand their learning?” (p. 59). Individual children were asked questions about their work while small groups were asked about other children’s
work. Documentation that was collected included notes, photographs, children’s work samples, video recordings, and audio recordings. The teachers followed a list of five questions about the portfolios to provoke the children to think about their learning (Haigh, 2007).

At this point, a second investigation was conducted to broaden the teacher’s inquiry. They asked the children the following three questions: “What is learning? What is the difference between playing and learning? What do you want to learn?” (p. 59). The teachers found that the children were not used to answering these types of questions and that it was much harder for the three and four-year-olds to express their answers. The teachers documented the children’s thinking and ideas about the relationships between play and learning as well as what they wanted to learn. As research continued over the 13-month period, the children seemed more confident in answering these types of questions. The children’s answers became clearer, more coherent, and more complex over time. Stages that the teachers went through during this action research project were identified. These included severe uncertainty, getting a flow, eureka, now what do we do, intense involvement, and enjoy, experience, and learn (Haigh, 2007).

Professional development and administrative support was essential to this project. It provided all of the staff members time to think, exchange ideas, and plan together. It was valued as indispensable to the daily life of the teacher. Documentation was necessary for teachers to think, reflect, interpret, and further question both themselves as well as the children. Collaboration between the adults and children through this project led to the construction of new learning. Furthermore, it was transformative for everyone involved (Haigh, 2007).
Expanding on the importance of documentation for professional development, Goldhaber (2007) shared an early childhood action research collaborative in Vermont that was inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy. During a study tour to Reggio Emilia in 2001, a group of educators from Vermont organized meetings to discuss what they were seeing and hearing as well as ways to connect it all within their context in Vermont. The group was named RIVET, an acronym for Reggio Inspired Vermont (Early) Education Team.

Over the course of two years, the group met regularly on Saturday mornings every six to eight weeks to share documentation of children’s interactions with the natural world and their communities. Even though attendance ranged between 6 and 25 people, the conversations among the group were always deep and lively. The meetings provided opportunities for members to think out loud, reflect on the meanings of the children’s activities, and consider multiple viewpoints. It was a chance to collectively share challenges and celebrate achievements (Goldhaber, 2007).

In 2004, the group decided to organize and analyze all the artifacts and observations that had been collected throughout the project. The strategy chosen to organize the documentation reflected what the RIVET group members learned about children in relation to the meaning they give to place, the makeup of their experiences in the natural world, and the part that children play in their community. As a result, the group worked together to create a traveling showcase of what they as educators had learned about children. The exhibit opened in Burlington, Vermont, on May 2, 2004, and then traveled to conferences around the state and hung in several public sites over the next year. The purpose of the exhibit was to invite fellow Vermonters to reevaluate the way they look at
children. Moreover, it reflected the power and importance of collaboration among colleagues while also challenging others with their philosophy concerning the way children learn (Goldhaber, 2007).

Goldhaber and Smith (1997), in a similar study, described a university campus childcare center’s endeavors to include documentation as part of their Reggio Emilia inspired practice. The center provided care to children, aged six weeks to five years, of faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the center served as a laboratory school for the university’s early childhood education teacher training program. The center decided to incorporate documentation into their practice as a way to support teachers and students as they observe, reflect, and interpret the children’s thinking. It was also intended to inform parents, students, and visitors to the school about the children’s projects as well as aid them in understanding how the children construct knowledge. The story is told through the voices of three teachers at the center, whose reflections were common to the other teachers at the school.

Foremost, documentation promoted staff development. The teachers found that they were observing with a purpose and were surprised by how much they learned. Documentation also created a climate of inquiry in which teachers and children were co-constructors in the learning process. Additionally, documentation promoted collaboration among the teachers and was a way to communicate with the children, parents, and the university students. The teachers agreed that documentation invited meaningful dialogues, resulting in more reflective thinking and deeper understanding about the way children learn. As an advocate for the children, documentation validated play and portrayed the children as competent and hard working. Furthermore, the teachers all ex-
pressed that documentation was an emotionally, intellectually, and physically challenging experience. Even though it involved a serious commitment, they all agreed that the benefits of documentation are worth it, especially in promoting staff development (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997).

A phenomenological study by Parnell (2011), a co-director at a university early childhood lab school in Portland, Oregon, described the relationship between his collaborative work with teachers at his school, the teacher’s documentation of the children’s learning, and his own professional development opportunities. The research stemmed from concerns that a teacher expressed within her Reggio inspired kindergarten classroom. As researcher-participant, Parnell observed and took notes in order to capture the phenomena as they occurred. One teacher’s documentation panels provided an image of the children’s learning as well as teacher observations, notes, and photos of events. The data was revisited, reviewed, discussed, and analyzed by the research team, which included Parnell, the kindergarten teacher, the studio teacher, and another colleague. The major question that resulted was posed: “What meaning can we as educators find in an experience of classroom collaboration in which parents, children, and teachers intentionally remake classroom spaces into places for children?” (p. 4).

Three narrative episodes that took place during a year at the lab school were presented in chronological order. In the first narrative episode, Reggio inspired professional development provoked Parnell (2011) and another teacher to consider ways to connect and collaborate with the community. As a result, they planned an event to involve families in the reorganization of the classroom design, which noticeably enhanced the overall environment and curriculum. The second narrative episode described the teacher’s doc-
umentation of two children’s learning that occurred in the new space that resulted from the reorganization of the classroom in the previous episode. The work was documented so that the story could live on and be reexamined and interpreted in order to be a catalyst for future learning opportunities. In the third narrative episode, which took place a year later, Parnell and the kindergarten teacher shared their stories and the documentation from the first two episodes with the studio teacher and another colleague. It was not until they revisited the documentation and retold their stories that larger connections were made. They learned that collaboration and dialogues among colleagues through professional development opportunities are important to find shared meanings, new understandings, and new ideas. It was only through this collaboration that they recognized the children were making connections between the two places the parents, children, and teachers had created together. Furthermore, collaboration led to new insights about listening to each other and generated more excitement for documenting and retelling the experiences as educators of young children.

Documentation as Assessment

For educators in Reggio Emilia, documentation is assessment. It makes the real learning of children visible (Rinaldi, 2006). Assessment through documentation provides a real alternative for teachers in Reggio inspired classrooms in response to the abundance of standardized testing in schools today, especially in the United States. Wien et al. (2011) discussed ways that early childhood educators learn to use documentation in Reggio inspired settings. While it may be theoretically easy to understand, documentation is challenging, albeit exciting, to implement. Documentation is an important form of as-
essment because it highlights teacher theories concerning the understanding of the children. As documentation is analyzed, teacher theories change and additional teacher research shapes professional development. Five features were observed and identified in the progression of teacher understanding of pedagogical documentation. These included the following: developing documentation habits, becoming comfortable with the recounting of events, developing skills of visual literacy for graphic displays, making the learning of children visible, and sharing visible theories with others for additional interpretation and design of curriculum.

Several stories of teachers learning to document were also shared. In one case, a teacher moved beyond understanding the three beginning concepts of pedagogical documentation in order to make the children’s theories clear and visible. Through reflection with other teachers, she saw the inconsistencies between what she thought her documentation showed and what the readers of the documentation actually perceived. An additional story showed how a teacher developed documentation strips to revisit theories with children and to make learning visible. The strips were more manageable than larger formats and allowed the teacher to focus her ideas to create clearer documentation. The strips were used in various classroom activities to scaffold thinking between the teacher and the children (Wien et al., 2011).

In another study, MacDonald (2007) explored the use of pedagogical documentation as an alternative to summative evaluation to determine if a child has mastered requisite skills and/or met a particular learning outcome. The purpose of the study was to introduce a Reggio Emilia inspired style of pedagogical documentation to kindergarten classrooms and to investigate its potential as a means of formative assessment in literacy
instruction as well as to communicate learning to children and their families. The two research questions that were asked are as follows: “(1) Does pedagogical documentation help family members understand what their children are learning in kindergarten? and (2) Is pedagogical documentation useful to children and teachers as a method of formative assessment and planning?” (p. 234).

Observational case study method and procedures were used to develop a qualitative understanding of the classroom practice associated with the use of documentation and to compare similarities and differences across the five classrooms. The major data gathering technique was participant observation. Other data collected included face-to-face interviews, digital photos, follow-up meetings, emails, and phone conversations. The participants for this study were five kindergarten classrooms in the New Westminster school district in New Westminster, British Columbia, including teachers, teacher assistants, children, and parents. The classrooms were purposely selected based on the teachers’ interest in piloting initiatives and innovative practice (MacDonald, 2007).

Data was analyzed on an ongoing basis using the constant comparative method developed in grounded theory to determine common responses and patterns in the perspectives articulated. This led to the construction of two hypotheses based on dominant patterns of similar phrases and terms that were later verified to ensure trustworthiness by asking confirmation questions in follow-up interviews. Findings from this study showed that pedagogical documentation is useful to both teachers and parents as a way to document children’s interests when literary activities are presented. It also allowed parents and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of children’s strengths, interests, and curiosities. Furthermore, this study identified the strength of pedagogical documentation as
a valuable alternative to standardized assessments in kindergarten classrooms (MacDonald, 2007).

Buldu (2010) explored the problem that “all young children have the right to experience ongoing, effective assessment that supports their learning and development and they have the right to be assessed with high-quality assessments” under conditions receptive to their needs (p. 1439). However, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is lack of appropriate assessments to use with diverse groups of young learners. The purpose of this study was to investigate pedagogical documentation, framed within the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach, as a formative assessment technique to understand the meanings of the experiences of children, teachers, and parents in the UAE. The primary method of investigating the meaning of the participants’ perspectives was grounded theory. The study addressed the following three questions:

(1) To what degree is pedagogical documentation useful to kindergarten teachers as a method of formative assessment? (2) To what degree does pedagogical documentation as a formative assessment method contribute to kindergarten children’s learning? (3) How does pedagogical documentation help parents of kindergarten children understand their children’s learning experiences in kindergarten? (p. 1442)

A purposive sampling technique was used. The sample consisted of six teachers in six kindergarten classrooms, 141 kindergarten children, and 67 parents in an international private school in Al Ain, UAE. The major data gathering techniques were participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, and parent questionnaires. Using an inductive approach, the analysis of the data consisted of three phases of coding, including open, axial, and selective. Working hypotheses were generated from the data and analyzing narratives of participants’ experiences with pedagogical documentation process. To increase credibility and validity, the participants veri-
fied themes identified from the data. This allowed them to shape the themes as they occurred from the process. Findings from the study showed that pedagogical documentation has the potential to improve children’s learning, contribute to teachers’ awareness of learning processes, and help parents gain a better understanding of learning processes in their children’s education (Buldu, 2010).

*Documentation for Change*

Through documentation, educators in Reggio Emilia inspired settings come to view themselves not only as researchers and reflective thinkers but also as agents of change. A qualitative study by Given et al. (2010) explored the research problem of inherent tensions that exist in Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms concerning for whom documentation is intended, why teachers engage in this process, and how such a process may be relevant to both teacher and student learning. The purpose of the study was to examine how documentation as a tool for professional development can play the role of a change agent for teachers and how collective engagement in the documentation process mediates the intrinsic stress in working and learning in a group. The research questions that guided the study are as follows: “(a) How does documentation as a professional development tool act as a change agent for teachers? and (b) To what extent does collective engagement in the documentation process mediate the inherent tensions of working and learning in a group?” (p. 37).

Observational case study was used to understand how Reggio Emilia-inspired documentation was used by three groups of educators at three unique schools. Data was collected through observations, interviews, questionnaires, digital photos, videos, and
children’s artifacts. The data was analyzed using a collaborative interpretation and coded for common experiences and common problems arising from tensions. The groups constructed collective discourse, enhanced professional development, and cultivated collaborative inquiry (Given et al., 2010).

Findings from the study showed that alterations in culture and practices at every site was framed through the tensions and subsequent group shifts these educators went through as they structured their collaborative practices, cultivated intentional experiences, and developed collective ownership of the process. By managing the difficulties that surfaced, the community of learners was strengthened and the teachers' ability to observe, record, analyze, represent, and respond to the teaching and learning that happened in their classroom improved (Given et al., 2010).

Similarly, Moran et al. (2007) described the ways that teachers’ participation in the sociocultural activities of documentation and progettazione at a university-based child development center in New Hampshire changed during a 10-year period thereby transforming a community of practice. For the first six years, documentation at the center consisted of panels representing the outcomes of projects with neat rows of photographs and scarce transcriptions of children’s conversations. There were insufficient tools for documenting and no designated spaces for teachers and university students to discuss and analyze the documentation together. The documentation panels were created by individuals outside of school, shared with parents at special occasions, and then removed. There were no physical traces left in the school of the children’s learning.

Inspired by a trip to Reggio Emilia, a teacher educator who was also an administrator at the school began to expect students to teach together and collaborate in their
documentation of the children’s learning, moving away from general descriptions toward more analysis. The students were expected to discuss together the documentation as it was generated while also using it to provoke the children’s thinking. They realized that they were able to gain deeper insights into the children’s learning process by adding documentation tools such as video and audio recordings to their observation journals (Moran et al., 2007).

As students’ documentation changed, the teachers at the center noticed. They began asking questions and changing their own documentation. Teachers began to meet collaboratively to analyze the documentation and plan curriculum. They shared ideas with each other and offered help to colleagues who were struggling. Documentation was further enhanced by the creation of more time in the day for teachers to plan together as well as money budgeted for new documentation tools and travel to conferences. By the end of the 10-year period, documentation had totally transformed teacher participation, planning, collaboration, and the entire school environment. Two examples, including a first school mural by toddlers and a weaving project with three-year-olds and the parents, were presented to illustrate how the teachers and children used documentation to invite others into the learning by placing it in shared spaces at the school (Moran et al., 2007).

In their article, Kroeger and Cardy (2006) summarized and analyzed the conversations of preservice teachers as they discussed encountering documentation in the beginning weeks of student teaching. As part of a university teaching seminar conducted twice a year, 30-40 preservice teachers were placed in various preschool programs. Although the seminar was taught from a constructivist viewpoint with an emphasis on documentation inspired by the Reggio approach, the schools in which the students were placed var-
ied in purpose and philosophy. Only the university lab school was Reggio inspired. Kroeger, as researcher, conducted a set of focus group interviews with a small number of students throughout the seminar in order to evaluate their insights regarding the influence they had at their preschool sites. Based on the information collected from the focus groups, research concentrated on the advantages and struggles associated with learning to document.

Understanding documentation was a ‘hard to reach’ place for teachers, because schools did not necessarily share the same philosophy of education. Although the teachers saw a serious need to change to a constructivist model focused on observation and documentation, assessment in many schools continued to be standards-based, demanding that children show progress in order to guarantee sustained funding. Therefore, the application of documentation in some settings was often met with limited success (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006).

In the beginning, the preservice teachers struggled with ways to document and be with the children at the same time, resulting from a lack of deep philosophical understanding of documentation. The students eventually found that tenacity, attentive experimentation, and various types of documentation within different contexts delivered results in the ‘hard to reach’ places. Data exposed preservice teachers’ understandings concerning the purpose of how documentation developed over time. As their thinking changed, the teachers came to view themselves as the tool to understand the child through the documentation process (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006).

Krechevsky et al. (2010) described the changing culture of Wickliffe Progressive Community School, a public K-5 school in Upper Arlington, Ohio, as its administrators,
teachers, students, and parents searched for ways to be accountable to its founding principles of progressive education amongst a culture of skills-based learning and standardized testing. The administrators, teachers, and parents created eight inquiry groups to explore questions about the students’ learning linked to one or more of Wickliffe’s principles. They found that documentation introduced traces of learning into the school culture thus supporting three forms of accountability. These included accountability to self, accountability to each other, and accountability to the larger community. For accountability to self, the teachers at Wickliffe learned about their teaching and its impact on students through documentation. They found that documentation led to more deliberate and reflective teaching on their behalf.

For accountability to each other, everyone in the school, the administrators, teachers, students, and parents, assumed accountability for adding to the knowledge and development of each other. This included establishing a school identity of a community of learners. Documentation was pivotal to reinforce both individual and group learning and support the shared identity of the school. As a result, documentation that was displayed in the halls of Wickliffe was determined by what others could learn from it. With learning more visible through documentation, the parents at Wickliffe began to display their reflections as well on the wall panels. This enabled the teachers to see what parents valued most and know what their expectations were for their children (Krechevsky et al., 2010).

Accountability to the larger community included multiple ways of sharing student learning with the public. In Wickliffe, standardized tests were one way, but learning exhibits were another. Documentation panels were created to share what the eight Wick-
liffe inquiry groups had learned about student learning. These were publicly displayed during two exhibitions. Documentation provided evidence of children’s learning that is not reflected in standardized tests, such as listening and learning together, thinking critically, being creative, and understanding their role in a democratic society. Furthermore, it provoked conversations in the community about teaching and learning which expanded their image of children as capable and full of potential. The researchers concluded that documentation strengthens assessment procedures that depend on teacher observation and analysis of children’s learning thereby distorting the division of summative and formative assessment (Krechevsky et al., 2010).

In a similar article, Falk and Darling-Hammond (2010) discussed how documentation supports the development of democratic education. Documentation provides opportunities for teachers to understand and support all students. It also enables children to understand themselves and each other as a community of learners. Ways that documentation fosters a democratic education were highlighted. These included fostering an inquiry approach to teaching, informing teaching and enhancing professional development, extending learning, and offering alternatives in assessment. Documentation allows children to work individually or in groups on authentic learning projects. School is viewed as a system of relationships within the bigger system of a democracy in which participation is essential. Documentation also informs teachers what the children are learning. As teachers engage in dialogue, they improve their teaching and are more prepared to support the children’s learning. Documentation intensifies learning by making it visible to everyone, including children, teachers, parents, and others in the community. It sends a message of importance to the learner that what they say, think, and do is valuable and to be taken se-
riously. Moreover, documentation provides important information about children that cannot be measured by standardized tests to parents as well as the larger community. It allows the total school experience to be shared with everyone in order to increase understanding and appreciation for the intricacies involved in learning. Overall, documentation has the ability to enable children to develop into citizens who think critically, value good teaching, and engage in meaningful dialogues necessary for democracy.

Summary

This review of the literature set forth to examine the influence of pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired practice. Because Reggio practices are rooted in their culture, it was necessary to first understand the history of the municipal schools and the fundamental principles of the approach. Just days after Liberation from World War II, visionary men and women in a little village outside of Reggio Emilia, Italy, built a preschool out of ruins so that their children would never again have to suffer from Fascist regime or the terrors of war. From these unassuming origins, a new educational experience was conceived (Barazzoni, 2005; Edwards et al., 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a). This approach continues to thrive over 70 years later and is recognized around the world as a premium example of early childhood education (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991; Katz, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2008). Loris Malaguzzi, recognized as the founder of the approach, was influenced by theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Bronfenbrenner, Gardner, and Bruner, yet refused to be bound by them (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2003; Edwards et al., 1998; Lewin-Benham; 2008; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). Grounded in socio-constructivist theory, the indissolubly linked principles of the
approach embrace the image of the child, the hundred languages, participation, relationships, environment as third teacher, progettazione, listening, and pedagogical documentation (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Major themes found in the literature related to pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired practice included documentation and the hundred languages (Boardman, 2007; Griebling, 2011; Kim & Darling, 2009; Mitchell, 2007; Trepanier-Street et al., 2001), documentation in content areas (Christensen et al., 2006; Inan et al., 2010; Stegelin, 2003), documentation for professional development (Haigh, 2007; Goldhaber, 2007; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Parnell, 2011), documentation as assessment (Buldu, 2010; MacDonald, 2007; Wien et al., 2011), and documentation for change (Given et al., 2010; Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Krechevsky et al., 2010; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Moran et al., 2007). However, minimal research has focused on documentation in Reggio inspired practice from parents’ perspectives and a study is needed to address their understandings of pedagogical documentation. Table 1 outlines the research and literature reviewed in this chapter.

Table 1

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CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore seven parents’ and a family member’s perspectives of pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States. The participants were purposefully selected because they had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. A qualitative research approach using the case study (Lichtman, 2013) tradition was employed to conduct this study. This chapter presents the procedures used throughout the study. These include qualitative research approach, tradition of qualitative inquiry, philosophical assumptions, site/context, participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research provides a comprehensive description and understanding of the human experience. It is “a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 7). The multiple methods of qualitative research may be perceived as bricolage or “a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under
analysis” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.4). Thus, the qualitative researcher is often portrayed as a bricoleur or quilt maker, assembling these images and understandings into a montage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the perspectives of people within their natural settings through keen observing and listening (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013). It is a “systematic investigation of social phenomena and human behavior and interaction” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 4). Because what people say cannot be separated from its context, qualitative researchers strive to understand the settings of the participants in which the problem is addressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Therefore, one of the first steps in any research process is to identify a research problem. Qualitative research tackles problems that necessitate exploration in order to discern more about the problem and thoroughly develop an understanding of a central experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As the researcher for this project, I chose to use a qualitative study to explore and better understand pedagogical documentation occurrences within a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom from the perspectives of the parents and a family member.

There are several fundamental characteristics of qualitative research. Initially, the role of the researcher is pivotal as the key instrument of research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013). Qualitative researchers spend a considerable amount of time in the participants’ natural settings. Due to the in-depth, comprehensive, and personal nature of qualitative research, the sample size is usually very small. The design is emergent, because it is dependent on the researcher’s interactions with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Additionally, qualitative researchers ask open-ended questions that often change in order to listen to the participants and better understand their experiences (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Questions collect detailed views of the participants in the way of images and text through multiple forms of data. These may include interviews, observations, questionnaires, documents, and audiovisual materials that are personally collected by the researcher through interactions with the participants. Furthermore, meaning is interpreted from the data that is collected. Using inductive thinking and analysis, researchers start with the data and then sort and organize it into themes from the bottom up, thereby gaining an understanding of the phenomenon. A thick description is used to convey underlying meanings and understandings (Geertz, 1973; Lichtman, 2013). Representative of both the participants’ perspectives as well as the researcher’s interpretations, the data is subjective and biased (Denzin, 2001).

In qualitative research, the literature aids in the justification of the research problem by providing a framework for the current research. However, due to its purpose to understand and describe actual situations in context, the literature does not provide major direction for qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the literature for my research played a comparatively minor role and was informally presented. The literature was mentioned at the beginning and then again in the final chapter of the study. However, due to the qualitative design of this particular project, the viewpoints of the kindergarteners’ parents and a family member were more influential.

The purpose of this study was to reveal the perspectives of seven parents and a family member in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom regarding pedagogi-
cal documentation that served as making learning visible by children’s interpretive designs. The characteristics of the research process found throughout this project unmistakably distinguish it as a qualitative study. Face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, a focus group interview, emails, written responses, observations, children’s work, and other relevant documents were used to explore parents’ and a family member’s understandings. A deeper understanding was gained through listening to the participants’ viewpoints. Moreover, this allowed for a clearer representation of these seven parents’ and a family member’s understandings of documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom.

**Tradition of Qualitative Inquiry**

According to Lichtman (2013), “a case study approach is an in-depth examination of a particular case or several cases” (p. 90). The researcher is responsible for identifying the case and setting the boundaries. A case can be defined by a characteristic, trait, or behavior but is most commonly limited by a particular entity, such as a classroom (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Commonly used in educational settings, case studies contribute to our knowledge of an individual, a group, and other related phenomenon. A case study approach is a preferred method when how or why questions seek answers to contemporary issues, boundaries between context and the phenomenon are unclear, and multiple sources of data are collected (Yin, 2009). For this study, the case study design was a relevant choice because the research was bound by the setting and context of one distinct kindergarten classroom during a defined amount of time. I also thought that the research questions in this study would best be answered using the case study tradition.
Furthermore, I thought that this project could be distinguished as an instrumental case study because it focused on how parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom and used one bounded case to illustrate the issue.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

There are several philosophical assumptions that direct qualitative research. Researchers need to be aware of their own philosophical beliefs and assumptions in order to use this knowledge to help them as they collect and analyze data. In doing so, they are able to help “data cohere and enable research to go beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While pondering how I would describe my own philosophical beliefs and assumptions, I spent a great deal of time reflecting upon the three questions that help to define a paradigm. These included asking myself the following questions: the ontological question of what I believe to be the nature of reality; the epistemological question of what is the nature of knowledge and the link between the knower and the would-be known; and the methodological question of how the knower can obtain the desired knowledge and understandings (Mertens, 2005). This was somewhat difficult because there are characteristics of several paradigms with which I could identify. However, I agree with Hatch (2002) who stated that “struggling with paradigm issues, exploring assumptions, and coming to grips with differences in worldviews and what they mean for doing research are essential first steps” (p. 12). In the end, the worldview that I think best guides and directs my thinking and action is the transformative/advocacy paradigm and more specifically, critical theory.
As an educator, I believe in the power of transformational teaching, which positions itself within the transformative paradigm. Moreover, I think that teaching is a political act. Through inquiry-based education, I believe that children and teachers can work together to solve problems that arise naturally from their own experiences. This inquiry process encourages critical thinking. I encourage my students to think critically about the world, to look at likenesses before differences. If we teach children to be critical thinkers at a young age then perhaps they will grow into critically thinking adults. I choose to teach critically because I believe that young children are capable of doing incredible things.

In most public schools across America, children’s learning is measured by high stakes testing. However, in a Reggio Emilia inspired approach classroom, documentation is used to show how children construct knowledge, process and organize knowledge, and carry out their own research. Documentation of children’s work can be used to provoke families “to think about children in new ways and to see the complexities and abilities of children, especially low-income children” (Kaminsky et al., 2004, p. 263). Once aware of the powerful thoughts, ideas, and feelings of children through documentation, perhaps families will be inspired to advocate for change within the public schools. Therefore, I think that documentation plays a very important role. This is why I wanted to deeply inquire about how parents and a family member of kindergarteners characterize pedagogical documentation as defined by a Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum.
Site/Context

Qualitative research participants are purposefully selected and focus on “information-rich cases that elicit an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 65). The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore seven parents’ and a family member’s perspectives of documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten in a southeastern state in the United States. My research purpose was a deciding factor in the selection of participants (Jones et al., 2006). Additionally, context is a crucial element to understanding qualitative research. According to Bogdan and Bicklen (2007), qualitative researchers “assume that human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, and whenever possible, they go to that location” (p. 5). Therefore, in order to understand parents’ perceptions of pedagogical documentation, my first step was to identify a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received to recruit the parents of students in my own Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom as participants for this research (see Appendix A).

My kindergarten class was part of a faith-based early learning center located in a suburb of a large southeastern United States metropolitan area. The preschool had a long and reputable history throughout the area. In 1968, the church began a half-day preschool program as an outreach ministry for the children and families in the community. A full-day preschool program was added in 1993 to meet the increasing needs for quality full-time care for children of working families (J. Renta, personal communication, February 18, 2012).
At the time of research, both the full-day and half-day programs were under the
general leadership of an early learning center director who had held this position for the
past eleven years. There were also four coordinators for the center. Two coordinators
oversaw the full-day program while the other two are responsible for the half-day pro-
gram. Additionally, there were 41 teachers employed by the school: 10 infant teachers,
10 toddler teachers, 7 two-year-old teachers, 7 three-year-old teachers, 6 four-year-old
teachers, and 1 kindergarten teacher. Of the teachers, 34 had early childhood education
degrees. Furthermore, several teachers had earned either a Master’s degree or a higher
degree (J. Renta, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

During the project, there were 298 children enrolled in both the full-day and half-
day programs at the early learning center. This included a mixture of families from both
high and middle socioeconomic status. My own kindergarten classroom was utilized in
this study, representing diverse family demographics. These included married and di-
vorced parents, as well as grandparents as guardians. In 2009, the center director recruit-
ed me to plan and implement a 5K program for the early learning center to once again
meet the growing needs of the community. Using a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to
teaching, I was the only kindergarten teacher employed at the school during the time of
the research (J. Renta, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Before beginning research, it is important to identify the people who assist you to
gain access at the particular research sites to receive their permission to conduct the study.
They are individuals, either official or unofficial, with authority to permit site entrance
(Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). At the early learning center where I conducted my research,
the director of the early learning center was the person who gave me access. I ap-
proached the director to clarify the purpose of my study in order to acquire permission to contact the parents and family members for the interviews. Upon her approval, a permission letter from the director was included with the Human Subjects Protocol that was submitted to IRB for approval.

Participants

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I purposefully recruited participants for my study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), purposeful selection allows for one to choose participants that are best able to “facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 73). A recruitment letter was given to each potential participant (see Appendix B). Letters were sent home via email as well as in the children’s daily folders. Within the letter, the research purpose, time frame, confidentiality, and the methods of data collection were detailed. My contact information as the principal investigator was also included. Parents or family members indicated their desire to participate in the study by either email or written response.

The first seven parents that responded were selected for participation. The sample size was kept small, providing a thorough and comprehensive perspective (Stake, 2010). Even though convenience samples are “the most common and least desirable,” the parents of the children in my Reggio Emilia inspired classroom were selected to meet the purposes of this research (Hatch, 2002, p. 99). Coincidentally, the seven participants that were chosen differed in gender, age, and family status. For the purposes of this research, I recognized the differing characteristics as gender, age, and family structure. This helped to augment the explorations of multiple perspectives (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman,
2013; Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, each participant that agreed to participate was given the interview questions prior to their interview in order to coordinate their thoughts.

As the researcher, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to be used for reference throughout the study. No significant meanings were attached to the pseudonyms. Instead, the purpose was to connect quotes to the participants and keep information confidential. Table 2 outlines the demographics of the participants in this study.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship to Student</th>
<th>Gender of Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>male/female twins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant A - Cora*

At the time of the research, Cora was a Caucasian female in her early forties. She had been married to her husband, an architect, for fourteen years. She had three daughters, including a set of twins. The twins were born prematurely at 25 weeks and spent the following four months in the hospital’s neonatal intensive care unit. Following some early health issues, both girls had overcome a lot of hurdles. One of the twins was in my classroom last school year. After an unpleasant four-year-old preschool experience at another school, Cora desperately wanted her daughter to have a better kindergarten expe-
rience and “not be resistant to go to school.” She thought that the smaller student to teacher ratio of my class would help her child feel accepted as part of the group.

Cora grew up in a small town in a northeastern state of the United States. She had a Doctor of Philosophy degree in English and Comparative Literature from a northeastern Ivy League university. She moved to the area after completing her degree to teach English at a local university. Even though she was trying “to keep all the balls juggled as a working mom,” her interests included reading and nature as well as the local theater and art scene.

*Participant B- Anna*

Anna was a recently divorced 28-year-old Caucasian female. She moved back from another state two years earlier to be closer to her family. She was raising her six-year-old son on her own with occasional help from her parents and grandparents. She was thankful to be back in town so that she could have daily contact with her family. Her son was a student in my class last school year. After moving to the area two weeks before kindergarten started, she enrolled her son in my class to give him time to adjust to a new town, new friends, and a new situation.

A native of the area, Anna received a Bachelor’s degree in marketing from a state university. She worked for a local business in the area of communications. She especially enjoyed social media, marathon running, cooking, and spending time with friends.
**Participant C- Rose**

During this research, Rose was a 41-year-old Caucasian female. She was married with three children. Her youngest son was a student in my class last school year.

Rose was born and raised in the same area that the research took place. She had a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and a Master of Education degree in school counseling from a state university. She worked as a counselor at one of the public schools in the community. During her free time, she liked to spend time with her family golfing, going to the beach, and “hanging out together.”

**Participant D- Jane**

Jane was a 36-year-old Caucasian female. She was married and had three children. Her youngest son was a student in my class this year. Born and reared in the metropolitan area, she had a degree in Human Development and Family Studies from a state university.

Jane was employed at the early learning center where the research occurred. When not working, she enjoyed spending time with her family participating in baseball, softball, gymnastics, and “all the stuff that keeps you busy seven days of the week.”

**Participant E- Mary**

Mary was a 45-year-old Caucasian female and the grandmother of a six-year-old girl in my kindergarten classroom this year. Native to the area, she was married and worked as a legal assistant. At the time, she lived in a small town about an hour outside
of the metropolitan area and commuted to work each day. She enrolled her granddaughter in the early learning center for its proximity to her work.

Due to some “horrific situations that she had been placed in,” her granddaughter had been living with Mary for the past three years. She confessed that even though she and her husband were pretty young grandparents, they thought they were finally “empty nesters.” They lived in their dream home that they had built themselves for exactly one week when their granddaughter came to live with them. Since then, Mary had assumed all the responsibility for her granddaughter. She expressed frustrations with the little girl’s mother, her own daughter, and wanted to do all that she could for her granddaughter. Her love and concern for her granddaughter was very evident. At the time of the research, Mary was in the process of obtaining permanent legal custody of her granddaughter.

In her spare time, she loved to visit flea markets looking for old pieces of furniture to repurpose. She also enjoyed listening to books on CD’s.

*Participant F- Tom*

At the time of this research, Tom was a 38-year-old Caucasian male. He was married with three small children. His middle son was in my class during the research, but his oldest son had also been in my class two years prior.

Tom was born and reared in the mid-western region of the United States. He moved to the area to attend college and had been here ever since. He earned an undergraduate degree in physical education and a Master’s degree in kinesiology. He was a teacher and a coach at one of the public schools in the community.
As a self-described active family, Tom and his family enjoyed doing things outside such as basketball, hiking, and going to the lake. He further expressed that quality family time was of utmost importance.

**Participant G- Edith**

Edith was a 49-year-old Caucasian female. She was a native of the area and had an undergraduate degree from one of the state universities. She also had a Master of Business Administration degree and a law degree from two prestigious universities. Furthermore, she had recently completed a degree in early childhood education and was looking for a teaching position. Edith jokingly said that she was “still trying to find herself!”

Edith had a set of five-year-old twins that were enrolled in my classroom at the time of this research. One twin was a girl and the other was a boy. As a family, they liked to go on “adventures of the day” and spend time at their family farm. They also enjoyed quality time together feeding the geese, ducks, and turtles at a nearby neighborhood pond.

**Data Collection**

As the primary instrument of data collection, a qualitative researcher assumes a crucial role in the research process (Lichtman, 2013). Data denotes the “rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying” and should be carefully collected to provide both evidence and clues (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 117). Thus, multiple sources of information should be used in the data collection process. Case study research
specifically relies on multiple sources of evidence. This data may come from six sources, including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009).

For this particular study, data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, a focus group interview, direct observations, and physical artifacts including children’s work, photographs, and documentation pieces to explore parents’ perceptions. At the beginning of my research, a questionnaire was given to each participant (see Appendix C). Individual interviews, my primary source of data, were conducted midway through the collection process as a way to provide direct insight into the perspectives and lives of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2009). Four participants were also chosen to participate in a focus group interview at the conclusion of the research collection period. An interview protocol of open-ended questions was developed for the individual interviews (see Appendix D) as well as the focus group interview (see Appendix E). Furthermore, I observed the participants during a class museum in which the children showcased their understandings and learning about forest animals with their families. The classroom observation, questionnaires, individual interviews, focus group interview, and physical artifacts were altogether effective ways of collecting qualitative data while also triangulating the data (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2009).

The interview is one of the most important sources of case study data (Yin, 2009). Moreover, it is a way to “uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their words,” thereby generating significance (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Yin (2009) identified three types of interviews. These include the in-depth interview, the focused interview, as well as a more structured interview resembling a
formal survey. My interviews reflected the characteristics of the focused interview. In such cases, the participant is interviewed for a short amount of time, approximately an hour, following an open-ended and conversational process. However, the researcher usually follows a certain set of questions resulting from the case study protocol (Yin, 2009).

According to Hatch (2002), interviews are a way to “uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their words” (p. 91). Often the meanings are hidden. Therefore, interviewing provides a means to surface these meanings. During a two-month period, I conducted seven interviews. Each interview was scheduled at the participant’s convenience and personally conducted in a location of his/her choice. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face while the other two were conducted via telephone. The interviews were fairly standardized given that the questions were systematically asked each time. Standardized interviews permit researchers to methodically compare the information. Yet, the interviews allowed for unforeseen digressions with opportunities to probe for further information based upon received responses (Hatch, 2002). Given participant permission, each interview was audio recorded using the Evernote application on my iPhone, which was automatically downloaded onto my MacBook Pro and iPad. I later transcribed each interview verbatim.

As indicated in the participant recruitment letter, four of the seven participants were also chosen to participate in a focus group interview towards the end of the data collection period. In a focus group, participants are brought together at the same time to talk about a particular issue. The ensuing group interaction is an excellent way to provoke one another’s thinking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013). According to Lichtman (2013), one advantage to the focus group interview is that it “may trigger thoughts
and ideas among participants that do not emerge during an individual interview” (p. 207). Similar to the individual interview, the focus group interview followed a semi-structured approach. A list of questions was developed as a guide while allowing for divergence (Lichtman, 2013).

However, due to the unforeseen complexity of coordinating four participants’ schedules to meet face-to-face, the focus group interview was conducted online. According to Lichtman (2013), “conducting focus groups online offers a new alternative to the traditional type of focus group setting” (p. 214). Using the Internet, the participants in this research were able to connect through online dialogue to answer the questions on the focus group protocol. Each participant had ample opportunities to add his or her own thoughts, often expanding upon comments made by other participants. This proved to be an efficient and productive way to conduct the focus group interview.

Data was also collected through direct observation in the kindergarten classroom during a museum to showcase the students’ learning about forest animals with their families. The classroom museum was the culmination of a two-month-long project prompted by the children’s excitement over the seasonal changes occurring outside. It all started when a baby pinecone was spontaneously brought to school one morning by a student in the classroom. It was so interesting that it sparked intense observation and conversations among the children. In the following days, one by one, the others started bringing evidence of fall’s imminent arrival. Handfuls of acorns, colorful leaves, pinecones of all sizes, and other unusual treasures poured into school each day. Sorting the evidence by size, color, shape, and even smell was an endeavor that consumed the children’s interest for
weeks. As the children engaged in daily conversations with each other and me about their fall collections, I recognized that this was the beginning of a project.

As interest continued, a field trip to a nearby nature preserve was arranged. With clipboards, paper, and pencils in hand, the children and I embarked on a hike through the woods seeking, observing, and recording various signs of fall. Several highlights of our hike included spotting a deer in the distance, witnessing a hawk circling overhead, and noticing bat houses high in trees. In addition, our hike ended with a visit to a native animal exhibit that included owls, turtles, snakes, opossums, squirrels, and other interesting native wildlife.

The children’s encounter with native wildlife at the nature preserve ignited a huge curiosity that took their fall wonderings in a totally new direction. The children’s interest spurred deeper conversations about the animals living in the preserve that actually ate all the collections of acorns and built warm wintery homes in all those colorful piles of leaves. This became the impetus for the children’s forest animal research. To supplement the classroom library, I checked out numerous books from the public library about forest animals indigenous to our area. For days, the children and I were immersed in the books, reading whatever piqued their interests. We made a list of all the different kinds of forest animals of which we read. We then made a list of general questions that we were wondering about all forest animals. At this point, each child chose a specific forest animal to research. Using library books and various websites, the children and I worked together to find information that answered the questions that we had asked about the forest animals. Answers were recorded on chart paper. Afterwards, each child compiled his or her findings into a fact book that included both words and drawings.
During a routine classroom morning meeting, we read the children’s book, *Actual Size*, by Steve Jenkins (2011). This book became the inspiration for the way the children wanted to share what they had learned throughout their research. Thus, the idea of an *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum was conceived. We used the information from our research to find the actual size of the animals. After this was determined, the children chose a medium to best express their learning. They decided that drawing and painting would be the most appropriate way. Then, using a measuring tape and Unfix cubes, the actual size of each animal was measured and plotted onto large butcher paper. Working collaboratively, the children drew and painted chosen animals to bring their big ideas to fruition.

After the animal paintings were complete, the children first taught their classmates about the forest animals that they researched. This was done through one-on-one sharing and by making a video. The children then designed and wrote invitations to families as well as other classes and teachers at the school inviting them to come to our *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum. The museum presented documentation of the children’s learning throughout the whole project using three different types of media, including photos, words, and drawings.

The *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum provided an excellent opportunity for additional data collection through participant observation. The observation was video recorded using a Flip camera. Observation notes about the participants’ interactions with the children were taken during the actual class museum as well as while reviewing the video.
Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of methodically sifting and sorting through the multiple sources of information that are collected during the research in order to find meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013). It is a “systematic search for meaning. . . . so that what has been learned can be communicated with others” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), if data are the constructions of the sources then data analysis results in “a reconstruction of those constructions” (p. 332). Furthermore, “the process of data analysis, then, is essentially a synthetic one, in which the constructions that have emerged (been shaped by) inquirer-source interactions are reconstructed into meaningful wholes” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 333).

The entire process of data analysis is inductive, meaning that it requires the researcher to make interpretations (Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To do so, a researcher must wear his/her analytic lens. Yet, interpretations often depend “on what type of filter covers that lens” (Saldaña, 2009, p.6). According to Merriam (1998), “our analysis and interpretation—our study’s findings—will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place” (p. 48).

Data that is collected during the research is collected throughout the entire project. Likewise, data analysis begins as soon as data is first collected and spans the entire length of the project (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Even though it is easy to think of it in linear terms, the processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are interrelated and happen concurrently within a project. Using a constant comparison method, there is continuous and simulta-
neous collection and analysis of data throughout the life of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

It is generally agreed among the various qualitative approaches that the goal of data analysis is the ultimate arrival of common themes. This involves the preparation and organization of data, reduction of the data through coding (Denzin, 2001), and representation of the data through figures, tables, or discussion (Lichtman, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009; Yin, 2009). Whereas the goal of data analysis is to arrive at common themes, some form of data management is first necessary. Data can be organized in a variety of ways including file folders, index card, or computer files. After organizing the data, the process continues with the researcher reading entire transcripts to memo ideas or key concepts to thereby gain a better sense of the entire database (Lichtman, 2013).

The heart of qualitative data analysis involves describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. At this point, raw data becomes meaningful concepts or themes through code or category formation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Lichtman (2013) referred to this as the three Cs of analysis: coding, categorizing, and concepts. According to Krippendorff (2013), coding is a systematic way to arrange data and define units by separating them into individual pieces of information. Units are then arranged into categories, providing descriptive information about the context. From this, categories are structured into themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Guided by a search for symbolic meaning, content analysis is a way to systematically link ideas among the data (Krippendorff, 2013).
Saldaña (2009) stated that “coding is heuristic (from the Greek, meaning ‘to discover’) — an exploratory problem-solving techniques without specific formulas to follow” (p.8). Additionally, it is cyclical in that it often requires multiple attempts (Saldaña, 2009). While coding data is often a challenging task, Yin (2009) suggested playing with the data as a helpful beginning point. Lichtman (2013) recommended a six-step process to progress from raw data to themes and concepts including initial coding (going from responses to summary ideas of the responses), revisiting initial codes, developing an initial list of categories, modifying initial list based on additional rereading, revisiting categories and subcategories, and, finally, moving from categories to concepts. Miles and Huberman (1994) also offered their own suggestions for analysis. These are as follows: put information into various displays; make a matrix of categories and place data into the categories; create data displays such as flowcharts or other graphics in order to study the data; organize the frequency of different events; examine the complexity of the tabulations and their relationships; and put information in chronological order. Nevertheless, organization of data into codes and concepts or themes always involves interpretation on the part of the researcher to make sense of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For my research, I conducted seven individual interviews and a focus group interview. Following Hatch’s (2002) example, I took notes and bracketed impressions throughout the interview (Denzin, 2001). Follow-up questions and non-verbal indicators were also noted. These notes became a valuable part of the data analysis. Upon completion of the interview process, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim. Sev-
en participant questionnaires, observation notes from a classroom museum, as well as any emails and notes that I received from the participants were all included in the data set.

Using an interpretive and inductive method, I analyzed the data set (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping the questions that framed my research in mind, each piece of raw data was read and reread multiple times in order to become familiar with the data set. Recurring phrases that emerged were highlighted and copied on 4x6 index cards. Phrases were then sorted and coded (Denzin, 2001). The coded cards were analyzed and organized into themes and sub-themes. It was important to identify themes that most accurately described the family members’ perspectives of pedagogical documentation. This process was repeated until all the data was exhausted and no new codes or themes were found. The following themes were identified: perceptions of learning, expectations for kindergarten, understandings of documentation, environment, relationships, and images of children. Within each theme, sub-themes were also identified. Sub-themes for perceptions of learning included the following: descriptions of learning, what counts as learning, how children learn, learning styles, and what parents want to know. Sub-themes for expectations for kindergarten included academic expectations, social expectations, and emotional expectations. Sub-themes for understandings of documentation included products and process. Sub-themes for environment included encouraging, engaging, and informed. Sub-themes for relationships included communication and appreciation. And finally, subthemes for images of children included amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy. Using rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), themes and sub-themes are reported in the Findings section of this research study.
Trustworthiness

According to Stake (2010), an important aspect of qualitative research includes the validation of the study findings to build the user’s confidence. It is necessary for the findings to be characteristic of the “truth value” of the reality of the participants in order to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 294). There are multiple ways to increase validity including prolonged engagement in the field, member checks, triangulation, rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973), peer debriefing; audit trail; and positionality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Researchers are encouraged to use at least three of these strategies to facilitate credibility and trustworthiness.

The purpose of my qualitative case study was to credibly represent the perspectives of seven parents and a family member regarding pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Thus, I implemented the following strategies to protect the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data: triangulation; member checks; rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973); peer debriefing; audit trail; and positionality. Use of these multiple validation strategies helped to build confidence and enhance the overall credibility of my study about pedagogical documentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010).

One of the first sources I employed was triangulation among multiple sources of evidence to confirm data analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies” (p. 283). Primary data was collected through a questionnaire, individual interviews, a focus group interview, observation, and physical artifacts. Triangulation of the data with the literature was then completed “to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998). Unless it can be triangulated, no in-
formation should be seriously considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, serious measures were taken to validate one source with at least one or more of the other sources.

Member checks was another strategy used to validate the accuracy of my findings. Member checking is a fundamental and crucial way to establish credibility in research (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Thus, it was essential that I receive feedback from my participants to establish credibility in my research. Member checks involve taking the data and possible findings back to the participants to see if the results are possible and “adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This should be done continuously throughout the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I returned all interview transcripts, observation notes, and final themes to the participants in order for them to determine accuracy and react accordingly. Corrections, additions, and deletions were made as necessary. After conferring with the participants, I concluded that the themes articulated their authentic experiences.

Rich, thick descriptions were also used to aid in the visualization of the voices of the participants by painting a picture for the readers (Geertz, 1973). In doing so, the readers are better equipped to understand the phenomenon of documentation. Participant quotes from the interview transcriptions were used to support the presentation of the findings. Using a rich, thick narrative, I was able to develop the themes through the various perspectives of the participants. Inclusion of these details made the results more realistic while also strengthening the validity of the findings.

Peer debriefing was another strategy used to improve accuracy and establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is a process of exposing oneself to a peer debriefer
who can make comments on the findings as they develop (Merriam, 1998). Even as a noninvolved colleague, a peer debriefer nevertheless knows a “great deal about both the substantive area of the inquiry and the methodological issues” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308-309). I relied and welcomed feedback throughout the entire research from a colleague who had many years of experience teaching kindergarten and was familiar with an inspired Reggio Emilia approach. She was able to look at my project through a different lens to provide constructive criticism and direction. She was able to help me infer things that I might have missed otherwise.

Trustworthiness also was achieved by developing and maintaining an audit trail or chain of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “the audit trail may be the single most important trustworthiness technique available to the naturalist” (p. 283). It is necessary to keep records that outline the entire research process and the arrival of codes, categories, and themes so that an outside observer could trace the steps taken from either direction if necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). Similar to the same principles used for forensic investigations, “the process should be tight enough that evidence presented in ‘court’—the case study report—is assuredly the same evidence that was collected at the scene of the ‘crime’ during the data collection process” (p. 122). Therefore, a detailed audit trail of all data collected throughout my research was kept. This included entry into the field, participant consent, questionnaire responses, tape-recorded interviews, interview transcripts, emails, written correspondence, observation notes, video recordings, field notes, and all coding and categorization efforts. All records were kept for the dual purposes of reliability and replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
A final strategy for trustworthiness that I used was the clarification of researcher bias or positionality. This process gives researchers the opportunity to identify and set aside any personal beliefs, values, and biases that could possibly influence their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I bracketed (Denzin, 2001) my own experiences with the central phenomenon of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach and documentation in order to more clearly attend to the experiences of my participants.

Due to the key role of the researcher in the process of qualitative research, reality is constructed through his or her eyes and ears as the main instrument of data collection and analysis (Lichtman, 2013). The ultimate goal of the researcher is to add knowledge to a situation rather than to render judgment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Lichtman (2013), “a bias is a preference that inhibits impartial judgment” (p. 21). Therefore, it is necessary for a qualitative researcher to identify his or her own thoughts on the topic thereby acknowledging his or her own biases and assumptions about the central experience of the study. Once acknowledged, these biases can be partially set-aside without hindering the researcher’s understanding of the setting from the perspective of the participants (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2002). This deferral of judgment is commonly referred to as epoche (Husserl, 1913). Hatch (2002) describes epoche as a process that allows the researcher to hold the “phenomenon up for inspection while suspending presuppositions and avoiding interpretations” (p. 86). Moreover, this conscious suspension of judgment is extremely important to establish credibility (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013).

At the beginning of the project, I tried to be aware of my own preconceived knowledge, personal experiences, and assumptions concerning the central phenomenon of pedagogical documentation to be more open and receptive towards the perspectives of
the participants. I focused on my individual stance and assumptions about this particular phenomenon as well as ways it might affect my interpretation of the experiences and views of the study participants. Furthermore, I explored ways to advert my personal views from biasing my interpretations of their perceptions.

As a graduate student pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Early Childhood Education, I have over 20 years of experience teaching young children as well as some very definite opinions about the Reggio Emilia inspired approach to teaching and pedagogical document. I was first introduced to Reggio Emilia and its schools nearly six years ago when my own child’s kindergarten teacher went to Reggio Emilia as part of a study trip. I was immediately intrigued and have immersed myself in reading research to further understand this approach to teaching young learners. In addition, I strive to implement a Reggio inspired practice within my own kindergarten classroom. I have seen first-hand the impact such an approach can have on children. I believe that children’s natural inquiries about the world will guide their learning if only given the chance. Acknowledging that parents are valuable partners in this process, I have sought to develop positive relationships between children, parents, and school.

In October 2011, I had the great fortune to visit Reggio Emilia, Italy, for 10 days as part of the North American Reggio Emilia Association study group. While there, I was totally immersed in the theoretical underpinnings of the approach. Each morning, I attended seminars lead by the pedagogistas (teachers) and atelieristas (art teachers) of the Reggio schools. Every afternoon was filled with visits to the preschools. While visiting the preschools, I was immediately amazed by the respect that was given to the children. They were not belittled in anyway and their ideas were seriously valued. The quality of
learning and the interesting concepts that were being explored were truly astonishing. Everything being researched was due to the children’s interests. My experiences in Reggio taught me that even though I had been reading about Reggio for years, I really did not totally understand it until I went there.

In addition to being a teacher, I am also a mother to three children. Two of my children were in Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms in both kindergarten and first grade. In these classrooms, my children were given multiple opportunities to explore their wonderings in hands-on and minds-on environments. Documentation as assessment of the learning processes was a major aspect of these classrooms. Often, I was invited to a class museum that showcased the children’s learning about a particular subject. My experiences as a parent helped to shape my views about pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom. I always appreciated it when my children’s teachers made me feel like an important partner in the learning process.

Furthermore, being a parent has certainly influenced the way I approach pedagogical documentation from a teacher’s perspective and visa versa. My dual roles as both teacher and parent required me to confront my own viewpoints, biases, and assumptions concerning this phenomenon. However, I knew that I could set these aside in order to be open to the understandings of the participants in this project. I acknowledged that the participants have opinions and understandings that are individually unique and different. Believing that each participant had his or her own story to tell, I was eager to listen without judgment.
Ethical Considerations

As the principal investigator for my research, it was my obligation to protect the rights of my participants. Ethical behavior includes doing what is right, treating people fairly, and not hurting anyone (Lichtman, 2013). Because participants are not necessarily always able to protect themselves, researchers are ultimately responsible for providing maximum protection for the participants. Researchers can be prepared for any potential dangers to participants that might emerge by being aware of their own empathy, insights, and experiences. Thus, researchers must secure written permission from participants and follow additional steps in order to be respectful of their personal lives. Interviews and discussions should be conducted in ways that maintain boundaries while also answering the research questions (Stake, 2010).

Prior to beginning this research, I first sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. The purpose of the IRB is to review the proposed research procedures in order to protect the rights of the participants. After receiving IRB approval (Protocol Number X120725007), I purposefully recruited participants for my study (see Appendix A). I sent each potential participant a recruitment letter via email as well as in the children’s daily folders inviting him or her to participate (see Appendix B). The letter was carefully worded so that each participant would realize the value of his or her contributions to my project. Diversity of voices in understanding parents’ perceptions of pedagogical documentation was extremely important. Each participant was assured that participation in this research study was strictly voluntary and that his or her anonymity would be secured. Furthermore, I clearly stated
that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting their relationship with the early learning center, my institution, or me.

In addition, reciprocity was an ethical issue that was contemplated (Hatch, 2002). Any benefits that the participants might receive were carefully worded in the recruitment letter. Even though no fees or other incentives were provided, I believed that the participating parents would gain an increased awareness of pedagogical documentation that would in turn help them to be more connected to the children’s learning processes. Additionally, it was thought that what was learned through their participation might better prepare other parents as well as educators to understand the profound power of documentation of the learning process as assessment in the current trend of standards based assessment. Thus, the findings of my research were presented to the participants upon completion of the project.

Parents or family members indicated their desire to participate in the study by either email or written response. The first seven parents that responded were selected for participation. Additionally, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant that was used for reference throughout the study. No significant meanings were attached to the pseudonyms. Instead, the purpose was to connect quotes to the participants.

Individual interviews were audio recorded in its entirety. The audio recordings were played multiple times to ensure that the transcript was accurate. In addition, the names of the school and other identified school personnel were changed to provide greater anonymity. The audio recordings, transcripts, observation notes, photos, and physical artifacts were all kept either in a locked cabinet or on a password protected computer and later destroyed upon completion of this project.
Furthermore, following the guidelines set forth in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) (2010), the ideas and contributions of others to my area of research were properly recognized. Every attempt was taken to prevent plagiarism and to give credit to others when applicable. Throughout the project, I sought to protect the rights of my participants by complying with the APA ethical standards for research.

**Summary**

This chapter contained a thorough discussion of the qualitative research approach and the case study tradition used to explore seven parents’ and a family member’s perspectives of pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States. Procedures used throughout the study were discussed. The chapter began with an explanation of qualitative research approach, tradition of qualitative inquiry, and philosophical assumptions. Next, the site/context and participants were detailed. Data collection techniques followed by data analysis procedures were also discussed in depth. In addition, strategies that were implemented to protect the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data were delineated. This included a comprehensive explanation of triangulation, member checks, rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973), peer debriefing, audit trail, and positionality of the researcher. Finally, ethical considerations that were employed throughout the research were revealed.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter describes the themes and sub-themes identified during the analysis of the data collected in this case study. This study was designed to explore seven parents’ and a family member’s perspectives of pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States. The participants in this study were purposefully chosen because they had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. The central research problem that guided this study is as follows: How do seven parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States? The following sub-questions were also asked: (a) how does pedagogical documentation help parents and a family member understand children’s learning experiences in kindergarten; (b) how does pedagogical documentation support parental and familial participation in children’s learning experiences; and (c) how does pedagogical documentation promote the rights and potentials of children?

Themes and Sub-Themes

Using an interpretive and inductive method, the data set, including participant questionnaires, interview transcriptions, and observation notes, was analyzed and coded
in search of themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Mindful of the questions that framed the research, each piece of raw data was read and reread multiple times in order to become familiar with the data set. Recurring phrases that emerged were highlighted and copied on 4x6 index cards. Phrases were then sorted and coded. The coded cards were analyzed and organized into themes and sub-themes that accurately described the perspectives of parents and a family member regarding pedagogical documentation. This process was repeated until all the data was exhausted and no new codes or themes were found. Six themes that fit the robust data set were identified. In addition, sub-themes were acknowledged within each theme. These are shown in Table 3. Each theme and sub-theme is individually explored.

Table 3

*Themes and Sub-Themes*

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Perceptions of Learning</td>
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<td>What counts as learning</td>
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Perceptions of Learning

The first theme that was identified from the data set was parents’ perceptions of kindergarten learning. In my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom, children, teacher, and parents are all viewed as protagonists in the children’s learning. As the children’s first teachers, participants expressed their initial thoughts and ideas concerning the learning that takes place in kindergarten. Five sub-themes were acknowledged within this theme. These comprised the following: descriptions of kindergarten learners, what counts as learning, how children learn, learning styles, and what parents want to know about learning.

Descriptions of kindergarten learners. Coherent with the Reggio Emilia image of children, participants described their children as capable and full of potential, identifying their many strengths. According to Rose, her son is “a pretty happy little child” who “likes to kind of do things his own way, though.” Independent in nature, he “loves, loves, loves, to read books and play Legos.” She also said that he “likes to do anything and show his [older] brother and sister that he can do anything that they can do.” As far as school is concerned, Rose stated, “I think that H. is probably very interested in, like intrinsically interested in, how he’s doing in school. . . . He wants you to see it, and he wants to share it. So, he’s just already intrinsically motivated to do his best.”

Cora similarly described her daughter as “a very bright child who has always been mesmerized by books.” In fact, “books have always been her favorite toy.” She added that her daughter especially enjoys “drawing, creating her own books, cartoons, animals
and music.” She also shared that her daughter is “very verbal, very imaginative.” Furthermore, she “gets easily and completely immersed in learning something she’s interested in, while at the same time, she is too intolerant of subjects and activities that are not her personal favorite.” Cora concluded, “She is a true eccentric—very funny! She blazes her own trail, free spiritedly, and hardly cares about peer pressure. She is the consummate non-conformist.”

Tom described his son as someone who is “interested in sports, art, and reading.” He also said that his son “loves to play with friends, go on hikes, play videogames, and sing.” According to Tom, his son is eager to learn. He stated, “T. has become a pretty good reader from sitting in my lap and listening to [older brother] read to me. T. really loves to learn new things.” Additionally, he thought it was important to share that his son “has a lot of love in his heart.”

Jane’s image of her son focused on his potentiality. She emphasized, “I believe he is truly capable of anything. I think he lacks some focus and it will eventually come.” She continued, “He is smart and I have seen him blossom this year already. He thinks deeply about matters of the heart and wants to please others.” When asked about his interests, she shared that her son “is simply all boy! He loves to make a mess. . . . he likes to play with play-dough, Legos, paint, play on the computer, and play outside.” Jane also told me that her son “loves to come to school.” Furthermore, she contributed, “He is my world and his happiness is most important to me.”

Other participants held the same positive beliefs about their children’s potentials and capabilities. According to Mary, her granddaughter “has great ability.” She reflected, “M. loves to draw and paint and has always loved to read. She’s also real funny and an-
imated. She loves to make faces and . . . to sing in this little operetta voice, and it’s so surprisingly good and on pitch.” Mary worried about sounding like a typical doting grandmother, but she believed that her granddaughter “is really smart when it comes to logic and figuring things out really quick,” adding that she “loves to learn and learning new things are exciting to her.” She maintained, “I am surprised at how fast she catches on to things and figures things out. . . . and how she can remember things.” In addition, Mary disclosed the following thoughts:

She has been through a lot that a 5-½ year old little girl should not have had to go through, and yet, she has a true heart of kindness and compassion toward her family and friends and even those that she doesn’t know personally. She continually wants to be helpful (even when you’d rather her not!) and she shows sincere thankfulness and remorse when its appropriate—which is very important to me for anybody.

Like other participants, Anna described her son as “very smart. . . . a very good and eager reader and learner” who also “enjoys learning to write and drawing pictures.” She believed that “he has a healthy competition for life and wants to do the best most of the time.” She also depicted her son as “very athletic and energetic—loves to ride his bike and play soccer.” Even though he is a “full-steam ahead, not-look-back kind of kid,” Anna continued, “He also has a very tender side to him. . . . a compassionate spirit that makes him a good friend.” Recently divorced and new to the area, she thought it was necessary to share that “he has some challenges at home regarding transitioning between occasional weekends with his dad and the ‘real world’ that has to happen at home.”

Likewise, Edith described her twins by capitalizing on their strengths. According to her, her daughter “loves to read and really wants to learn. She is very focused and will be a hard worker in school.” She also said that her daughter spends “a lot of her time just coloring and drawing.” Edith shared that her daughter is a bit of a perfectionist, and “she
wants things done the right way and she will take the time to make sure it looks the way
she wants it to look.” She continued, “She’s a sweet, sweet girl. She loves dolls, princesses, books, dressing up, and coloring. She loves all animals. She also loves her
friends.”

Edith described her son as “all boy” whose “mind’s always going.” As she stated,
“He can express himself beautifully orally . . . he’s got a great vocabulary and really has
a good imagination.” Like her daughter, her son also loved books. She shared that he
“loves having books read to him at home, but thinks reading by himself is punishment.”
When asked about his interests, she said, “He loves anything involving balls, anything
involving cars, motorcycles, trucks. He loves animals . . . and going to the farm.” Even
though she believed her son was “smart and funny,” she also thought he was “easily dis-
tracted.” Furthermore, she added, “He also is very honest so, in most situations, if you
ask J. if he did something, he will admit it, even if it means getting in trouble.”

What counts as learning. Participants expressed various thoughts about what
constituted learning for children in kindergarten. Some thought that being able to see
growth was an indicator of learning. As Anna stated, “I think that what counts as chil-
dren’s learning is watching them grow in a certain area. Not necessarily that they’ve
mastered it or that it’s like perfect but as long as they’re growing through it.” Edith ex-
pressed comparable beliefs:

If I could say M.’s learning, I can see her growing . . . intellectually obviously, but
also starting to want to learn more, the curiosity. I think once the child gets that
curiosity they’re going to want to actually start delving deeper into a topic, maybe
on their own.
Edith also attributed her children talking to her about different things to learning. She said, “I know that they are learning, because they will out of the blue start talking about ‘4+4 is 8, Mom. Did you know that?’ Wanting to show me that they learned something new.” In addition, Jane thought that talking and questioning counted as learning. According to her, “It’s him coming home and telling me what he’s done that day. Or it’s him asking me, ‘Mom, is this how you spell red, r-e-d?’ Verifying what he already knows.”

For other participants, the children’s excitement was indicative of learning. Rose shared, “I think for H. it was in his excitement for school. He would come home . . . and want to read and would be excited about that.” She continued, “And some of the excitement he would want to do at home or the work that he would bring home and show.” Increased interest in various activities also signified learning for some. For instance, Tom knew his son was learning because he became more interested in “the fine motor and the art” than he had been previously.

On the other hand, imaginative play was equally as important to learning as Cora implied:

I think another thing that’s really important for children’s learning is playing imaginatively in the backyard with no stimulus. . . . I think just having unstructured playtime for them to imagine and be outside and to be in nature is huge for kids. . . . I really think that’s a big problem that [kids] are so plugged in.

Similarly, Mary underscored the importance of play and interaction for learning. She noted, “They learn by playing and interacting with each other. Probably more that 50% is interacting with one another.” Moreover, she shared that children learning to be respectful of others and things mattered. She recounted, “I think that when it comes to
learning to have respect for others and how to treat others and how to respect the things they have in the classroom to use for learning . . . all of that is the way they learn.”

*How children learn.* Participants shared different understandings of how children learn. As Edith emphatically suggested, “Well, I think they all learn differently, first of all.” Rose agreed. She said, “I think that children learn in so many different ways—by play, by direct instruction, by practice. . . . even just modeling how to read a book.” She continued, “I think at this age it’s just any way you that you can make it fun. . . . There are so many things to teach them and so many different ways.”

Many participants mentioned the importance of hands-on learning. According to Mary, “I think they learn hands-on a whole lot easier having a physical class . . . the more visual they see it the better they learn.” As a teacher, Tom also believed in the benefits of hands-on learning in small groups for engaging children. He stated:

I just feel like they always need to be engaged. Being in a small environment where they don’t have a large class size, they are able to get hands-on learning at all times during the day. I think you hit on a lot of the concepts of visually, hearing different things, or seeing different things and then the sensory of actually going and doing hands-on work is always a good thing.

Other participants talked about hands-on learning for children’s inquiry and problem solving. Edith explained, “I think they need to do hands-on type things where they are actually driving learning to some extent. I think you can give them something and just try to let them try to figure it out on their own.” She continued, “It gets them thinking more about what they need to do to solve the problem instead of being told how to solve the problem.” Additionally, others believed hands-on learning through play was a
process benefiting the whole child. Jane reflected her thoughts about this in the following statement:

Learning by doing, I think, is the main thing. They don’t learn by just sitting and staring at the teacher. I think they have to get their hands on it and experience what they’re doing. And, it’s not the product, but it’s the process and how they get there. So, I think that’s the main thing. I think they have to be in an environment where it’s honestly learning through play. They have to have different experiences throughout the day, and they have to be exposed to those and with different people. And I do think you have to teach the whole child—the emotional, the cognitive, the spiritual—all that goes together to make a successful child.

Some expressed similar sentiments about the role of play and collaboration through social interactions with others for learning. Peer relations were mentioned by a few. Cora stated, “I think they definitely learn by social interaction and playing with friends.” Edith affirmed this same belief that children learn from each other. According to her, “Collaboration is the key, even if it’s just with a partner discussing a book or what they’re drawing or what they’re writing about.” The role of social interactions with adults was also discussed. While Mary concurred that children learn from each other, she also believed that “a strong bond between the parents and the child regardless of how much time they have outside the home has got to play a huge role.” Other participants reiterated the importance of adult interactions in children’s learning. As Cora expressed, “I think you need to speak to children like they’re real people and include them in the conversations. . . . [they] learn by making connections that you’re not even aware of.”

Children’s interactions with teachers were also viewed as necessary for learning. Edith discussed the importance of teacher guidance. According to her, there is a need for more teacher involvement “to kind of direct them, maybe not tell them what to do but to give them ideas. To just [ask], ‘Well you’ve done this. What would happen if you did this?’” Anna expressed similar opinions. She believed that children learn best when the
teacher “gently guides them as opposed to hound them.” Furthermore, she added that teachers must provide children with an open and accepting environment that encourages children to think and express their ideas. She shared her thoughts:

I think children learn best when they feel comfortable and when they feel loved and encouraged, because I think if they’re scared of what the reaction is going to be then they don’t want to try anything new. So, I believe that giving them just an environment that is like welcoming to kind of every answer and “we’re going to try this and it might not work and that’s okay and we’re going to keep on doing it” and all of that is a good kind of place to start.

On a related note, Mary and Edith both spoke of how the elements of interest and choice encouraged a welcoming learning environment for children. As Edith stated, “They learn best when they are doing things that they enjoy or have an interest in.” She continued, “I think it’s always good for kids to have some choice in what they’re doing because it’s what they are interested in and it’s going to make them want to learn.” Speaking of her granddaughter, Mary agreed, “Having choices definitely motivates her to learn.” Edith firmly believed that an environment that offered choice was necessary in order for her son to focus at school:

To get him focused, it’s going to have to be something that he wants to do; something he’s interested in. If he’s picking out something, he is going to take more pride in it. He is going to want to learn more about it, and he’s going to learn more.

She further expressed how choice creates feelings of ownership within young children. She posited, “If he could have that choice, it’s his idea. And I think kids this young do take it as their own. . . . They see it as I got to choose and I want to do a squir-
Learning styles. Participants discussed the various learning styles of the children. Some of these ways included hands-on, visual, independent, and collaborative learning. For example, Jane described her son as a hands-on learner. She said, “I think he’s a doer. He likes to have his hands on what he’s doing.” Several others described their children as visual learners. Concerning her son, Anna noted, “I would say he’s very visual, like he needs to see it.” Tom also believed that his son was a visual learner. He stated, “I think that he’s got a photographic type of mind where like if he sees things he can usually bring them back out again.”

Participants also described the learning styles of their children by whether they preferred to work independently, collaboratively, or a combination of the two. Edith believed that her daughter would benefit from working together with a partner or a group of peers. “I think she would enjoy that kind of collaboration. . . . I think that would help her gain some confidence,” she shared. However, many participants thought that their children worked well both individually and collaboratively. Although they work well alone, some believed that their children preferred working in groups. Jane said, “I think he works well with others, too. I think he works good alone. He tends to do both well but he does prefer to be with someone when playing.”

Alternatively, others thought that even though their children worked well in groups they favored working independently. Rose suggested that her son “probably works great in both situations but might prefer alone so he can really concentrate on doing great work.” Likewise, Cora shared that her daughter would prefer to work alone but also “has fun and perhaps retains more when working collectively in a group.” Anna expressed comparable thoughts, attributing it to the fact that her son was an only child:
I think because he is a single child and has learned how to work well and entertain himself alone at home, he carries that with him to school and works best completing an assignment on his own. That said, I think he is also good at working with a partner occasionally if they can manage not to distract each other from the project.

As did Anna, Edith worried that collaborative work might be too much of a distraction for her son. She said, “I think just depending on the day, he might do well in a group, but other times I think the group might be a little bit distracting.” She continued as she referred to him working alone, “I think he’s got that ability to kind of think on his own and kind of expand on his own much more so at this stage anyway.” Mary was unsure which style was preferable for her granddaughter but considered aspects of both. “I’m not sure,” said Mary. “M. does really well at home playing alone because we don’t have any neighbors with young children. I know she loves her friends at school and she plays really well with [them].” She added, “I have to assume she is doing well in groups at school because I haven’t heard anything negative so far.”

What parents want to know. Participants shared what that they wanted to know about their children’s learning in kindergarten. Mostly, being informed was a priority. According to Jane, she just wanted to know what her son did on a daily basis so she didn’t “have to ask a lot of questions.” She said, “I just want to know what the general task and assignments are and the expectations that they’re working on. What he’s supposed to gain more than working on.” Knowing what happened at school each day helped Tom to feel positive about his son’s education while also enabling him to be supportive:

I like to know about the different areas or whatever he’s doing. That makes us feel like he’s well rounded and getting a good education. But we also want to be
there for support toward the school if there’s something we can do to help him. We want to always know that stuff.

Like Tom, Cora wanted to know what the children were doing in school, but she also wanted to know how her daughter did each day such as “if she had a good day, if she was happy, if something happened, [or] if she did something wrong.” Other participants were equally concerned about their children socially. For Rose, being a teacher herself, it was important to know that her son was “behaving for the teacher and then being sweet.” Some wanted to know about their children’s interactions. Edith said about both her twins, “I would love to know how they are interacting with other children.” In addition, Mary wanted to know how her granddaughter interacted with other children, but especially wanted “to know if she tends to lean toward being a leader or a follower.” Tom shared similar concerns, “I’m just curious as to socially if he is a natural leader [or] if he is a follower.”

Academically, several participants wanted to know how their children performed at school compared to other kindergartners. Rose wondered, “Where they are, is that appropriate for their age or grade level or where do we sit on that slope?” Edith also wanted to know how her children were “doing academically kind of compared not to their class but to other 5K’s that you have known, not specifically other children.” As others, Anna also wanted to know whether or not her son was paying attention and “getting it” in addition to the “hiccups” that caused him to stumble along the way. While all those things were important to know, she more so wanted to know about “the things he just loves to do and loves to kind of excel at and does excel at and so it makes learning fun.”
Summary. Participants described their perceptions of learning in kindergarten. The following five sub-themes were identified: descriptions of kindergarten learners, what counts as learning, how children learn, learning styles, and what parents want to know about learning. Participants described their kindergarten children as capable and full of potentiality by highlighting the children’s various interests and abilities. Participants also delineated what they believed counted as children’s learning. These included growth in school, excitement for school, and interactions with others through various mediums such as play. Participants agreed that all children learn differently. Many discussed hands-on learning for inquiry and problem solving as well as social interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. Others believed that an environment that encouraged risk taking and provided choice to meet the children’s interests was necessary for learning. Additionally, participants described the various learning styles of the children, including hands-on, visual, independent, and collaborative learning. Concerning what they wanted to know about kindergarten learning, participants shared that they wanted to be informed as to how their children were doing both academically and socially in order to be supportive of the learning that took place each day in the kindergarten classroom.

Expectations for Kindergarten

Another theme that emerged was parents’ expectations for kindergarten. Early in the research, participants identified expectations that they wanted for their children to meet during their time in kindergarten. It is necessary to remember that my kindergarten class was part of a faith-based early learning center. Many parents, although not all, enrolled their children in my kindergarten class to give them extra time before starting pub-
lic kindergarten. Generally speaking, Tom stated, “My expectations for T. will be for him to be developmentally ready in all aspects of a normal kid in kindergarten.” Jane reiterated that she just wanted her son “to meet his potential and be prepared for the next step.” She further added, “To gain maturity, to use his mind to find a solution to any problem small or big.” Overall success in kindergarten was also important and influenced decisions others made concerning their children. Speaking of her twins, Edith said, “I just wanted them to be set up to succeed in kindergarten. I mean that’s one reason I wanted them to do 5K . . . to put them in a better position when they do get to kindergarten.” However, most participants had very definite expectations. Therefore, subthemes that were recognized include academic, social, and emotional expectations.

**Academic expectations.** Inherent of a culture that values academic achievements, there were lofty academic expectations that were placed upon children by parents. Reading, writing, and math skills were especially important. As Mary expressed, “My expectation for M. this year is that she will build on what has previously been taught in reading and math skills. . . . and that she would be above average and ahead of the regular public school kindergarten class.” Some viewed this as a pivotal year in their children’s learning. Anna wanted more “structured learning” rather than merely entertainment that had occurred in earlier preschool settings. She elaborated further, “I hope he is able to read at an appropriate level (K/1st), write sentences using small common words . . . and develop a love for learning and reading.” She also wanted him to learn some sight words, color words, and number words. Anna, who had enrolled her child in my kindergarten class to give him more time, continued:
I knew that he was going to have a great year in 5K and then another year of kindergarten to refresh a little bit. So, I wanted him to have that really great base and not have to learn how to read ‘purple’ the first week of real kindergarten but more learn those basic words, I guess, throughout the year. And then count to 100!

Like Anna, Tom decided to place his child in my kindergarten class because he “wanted him to be ahead to start kindergarten instead of behind and always struggling to catch up.” Two years prior, his oldest son had been in my kindergarten class, and he believed that he was “overly prepared and ready,” creating “an easy transition” to start public kindergarten. According to Tom, “We were just so happy with how we did [older brother] and 5K with you.” Therefore, he wanted the same experience for his middle son. Most importantly, as Tom stated, “We’d just like for him from day one to feel like he can be successful and flourish.” Academically, he wanted his son to “understand all the letters and sounds, being able to read and then continue to get better at that.” In addition, “art, math, all those different types of things” were significant as well.

Jane had similar academic expectations for her son. She said, “Basically, just to meet guidelines. I just want him to succeed and not struggle with the task he is given.” She went on to say, “I think any parent’s dream is for them to just not be behind, but if he wants to be ahead, that’s great.” Meeting or even exceeding state standards was also important to Edith. As she stated, “Well, obviously, I want them to meet whatever standards that are going to be there for kindergarten. . . . I’d love for them to exceed what the state requires.” Edith wanted both of her children “to be able to read just right books independently” by the end of kindergarten. Above all, she especially wished for them to “develop a love for books,” because they had previously “looked at reading time as punishment.”
Social expectations. Many participants identified social expectations for their kindergarteners such as adjustments, friendships, and peer interactions. Following a divorce, Anna and her son moved to the area two weeks before school started. Thus, her primary goals for him socially were “to meet new friends, to get into a routine, to like [the new city], to like these people and the new situation.” She continued, “That is really what I wanted for him is to kind of adjust to a million things but also have some good friends.” Friends and peer interactions were central to other participants as well. Cora wanted her daughter “to make friends and interact socially more with her peers.” It was also important to Tom for his son to “be socially interactive with other students.” Moreover, Mary wanted her granddaughter to learn the value of working together for learning and helping others to achieve. As she stated, “I want her to feel like she is part of a group. . . . I’d like for her to learn to encourage others and be as excited for their achievements as she is her own.”

Feelings of belonging, happiness, and security were equally as important to other participants. Cora expressed very strong opinions about social development due to her daughter’s previous experiences at another preschool:

Social development is really what I think is key. For most children this age, I think school must be about 90% social-emotional. I think they’ll all figure out the letters and how to read. But, I think feeling good about learning and feeling secure and like they belong . . . that’s really crucial and that’s what she needs to focus on. She did have one kind of bad year in preschool at age four where she just didn’t want to go to school and was very unhappy and kind of acting out. So, I want her to have a better experience than that . . . to not be resistant to go to school . . . to want to and to feel like she belongs there . . . part of a group . . . and in your class, that definitely happened.

Social interactions were also important to Edith. As did Cora, she had specific, heart-felt reasons for wanting both of her twins to be able “to socially interact with other
children.” For her daughter, who had some speech issues and was sometimes difficult to understand, social interaction was necessary “to work on her language.” She also shared that her son “does not believe that he is accepted by friends. He believes he has no friends and has issues in the past maintaining friendships.” Although she believed that this was due in part to his lack of focus and self-control, Edith, as would any mother, very much wanted her son “to feel accepted and believe that his opinions and thoughts are valued.”

Emotional expectations. Other participants mentioned emotional expectations that they had concerning their children. Rose had recently accepted a new job and had to enroll her son in a full-day program for the first time in his life. He had just missed the cut-off date to begin public kindergarten by four days. She knew that academically he would be fine, but her biggest concern was the change he had to overcome. According to her, “I was worried about him being frustrated and a little mad, because he had his little world and he likes it his way. He likes consistency.” Anna conveyed similar expectations. She said, “Emotionally, I was really looking for him to kind of grow up. 5K was kind of that stutter step year so I felt like that year would give him time to grow but you know, to stop whining about everything and to be really able to handle disappointments or things getting taken away or the class moving.”

Emotional maturity and independence were also important to other participants. Jane wanted her son to “be emotionally mature enough for him to handle instruction and to deal with having to move transitions and stop what he’s doing and move to the next task at hand.” Furthermore, she desired for him “to be able to manage the work that’s
there without having to have a lot of support. . . . to be very independent.” Likewise, Cora wanted her daughter to become “more independent and responsible for herself and her actions. . . . and function in that environment.” Additional participants voiced emotional expectations of confidence. According to Edith, she was an insecure child and desperately wanted “her children to go to school feeling good about themselves and confident in their ability.” She continued, “I just want them to be confident in what they are doing and feel like they can succeed.”

Learning to be compassionate was more important than being the best student to some. Mary, as guardian of her granddaughter, confided that her granddaughter had endured many emotional horrors during her short life. She especially wanted her granddaughter to learn to “balance her emotions and feelings.” Mary expressed her concerns with the following statement:

I want her to be compassionate and think about others when she’s learning. If somebody is having a difficult time in math or reading or whatever, I want her to be caring and compassionate. . . . I want her to feel like she can be a help to them and encourage them.

She later added, “If you are a good person, if you are kind and you are kindhearted and you are a giving person and you are compassionate, I want you to be more of that than anything.”

Summary. Participants identified expectations that they had for their children while they were in kindergarten. While a few had general expectations like being developmentally ready, prepared, and successful in all realms, others had very specific expectations, including academic, social, and emotional. Academic expectations included proficiency in reading, writing, and math as well as meeting state standards. Many partici-
pants placed their children in my faith-based kindergarten class in order to give them extra time before starting public kindergarten. Therefore, they wanted their children to have a head start and be prepared to start public kindergarten, making for an easy transition. Participants also expressed social expectations for their children. These included making friends, interacting with peers, and adjusting to change. They further indicated that they wanted their children to be happy, secure, and feel like they belonged in my kindergarten classroom. In addition, emotional expectations were shared. Participants discussed how they wanted their children to gain emotional maturity by learning how to balance emotions and feelings. Other emotional expectations included developing independence, confidence, and compassion.

Understandings of Documentation

The theme of parents’ understandings of documentation as part of a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom also emerged. Participants shared how documentation informed them about their children’s learning. Overall, as Rose believed documentation helped to “know what’s going on at school.” Tom consented that it showed him “what is being worked on and taught in class.” He added, “I feel like we’re always informed very well.” For Edith, documentation was “evidence of their work” and was necessary “to keep us prepared.” Jane shared similar beliefs about documentation. She declared, “I think documentation is huge because I have something concrete to go on. . . . It’s milestones. It’s a big deal. It shows how he’s growing up and what he’s successful in.” All participants emphasized that documentation included both the physical collection of evidence from the children’s learning as well as the process involved in the gath-
ering. Participants agreed that the combination of both aspects made the children’s learning visible to the parents as well as the children, the teachers, and other people in the preschool. Two sub-themes were identified within this theme, including products and process.

*Products.* Each participant discussed the physical collection of artifacts and evidence that documented the children’s learning in the classroom. Many of these could be visibly seen around the classroom. According to Jane, “I think you have everything really well documented in the room and have it displayed as such.” For example, one of the first things that could be seen upon entering the classroom was the collection of the children’s self-portraits. She commented, “Well, my most favorite thing is where he draws his self-portrait every month from the time he started school up until now. When you first walk into the room, they are right there on the wall.” Cora also enjoyed seeing the self-portraits every month and “how those would change with her drawings and her perceptions of herself.”

Other types of documentation could be found throughout the classroom. Some mentioned centers that were set up around the room that related to the children’s learning. Tom shared that when he came to pick up his son each day he could “see the different centers that are going,” providing a window into the learning that occurred each day. In addition, charts that hung around the room were used to document learning. Jane noted, “There are charts everywhere. Charts from beginning of projects to end of projects. Like for their recent forest animal project, they have a chart of ‘What animals live in the forest?’ and then they have examples. Then they have a chart of ‘What questions do we
wonder about forest animals?” Tom also talked about the charts and the information they provided. He recalled how he walked around the room that very day reading the different charts. He said, “I could tell like you guys had gone over the stuff at Thanksgiving and what they were thankful for and they individually all had something to say that made them unique, but it also made them have to think.”

Additionally, several participants mentioned the graphs that could be found hanging among the charts. Edith shared, “I love, love the voting on different things . . . and I know they’re learning about categorizing and counting and that sort of thing. They like to see their name on a chart to show that they wanted something.” Tom imparted similar thoughts about the graphing. “I like how you graph your work. You always are graphing, and I think that is important to begin the concept of numbers and comparisons,” he commented. Jane liked the graphs as well. She remarked, “I like the question that you ask everyday on the board where he has to respond to that. It really shows his thinking.”

Participants mentioned documentation in the form of the children’s finished artwork. Rose described documentation as “the artwork that they brought home talking about the farm animals and all the little paintings that he did that tells me what’s going on in the classroom and the fact that he loves every single thing.” She especially appreciated “all of the creative activities, like all the precious paintings.” Furthermore, samples of the children’s artwork that had been saved throughout the year were compiled into individual portfolios that served as documentation of the children’s learning in kindergarten. For some, the portfolios were treasured artifacts. Rose continued, “In fact, last night he had out one of those binders. We’ll probably have those 20 years from now!”
Other participants also discussed artwork as products of documentation. Tom shared that in the room “usually there’s a poster that one child has made about themselves.” Like others, Anna valued her son’s artwork as a means of purposeful learning documentation. She expressed, “I am certain that he also greatly benefited from the art activities that were very intentional, applicable, and appropriate.” Artwork was important to Cora as she recounted a time when it provided insight into her daughter’s interests:

We would have drawings that would be on the bulletin board and then come home. I remember at New Year’s, she did one that said, “This year I want to learn to play the piano.” She had a pretty detailed picture and I had no idea that she was even interested in that.

Additional forms of documentation that were discussed included learning logs, math binders, writing journals, and books made by the children. In one instance, the children planted seeds and recorded the growth in learning logs. Rose recalled, “I think it could be seeing their plants that they grew at the end of the year. Them talking about the seed and the plant coming up out of the dirt and the water and all that.” She continued, “He did not ever want that plant to die!” Likewise, Anna mentioned the learning logs that the children used to record the growth of their seeds. “He loved being able to watch it grow and to have it right there in the window sill and to be able to plant it outside and kind of nurture that,” she shared.

Cora pointed out documentation in the form of math binders. She said, “You did the calendars. Each month you’d do a calendar where she’d fill in all the information for that month.” Furthermore, several participants discussed the use of writing journals for documentation. The writing journals were sent home once a month for the children and parents to share and reflect together. According to Jane, “I love the journal. You can tell his thought process has come a long way. It’s interesting to see what’s going on in his
mind, his thoughts.” Edith agreed, “I love it when you sent the journal home and we sat down and read the journal. That was exciting to see that they were actually writing.”

The children also made several class books to document their learning throughout the year. Like the writing journals, books were sent home with the children to share with their parents and families. These became quite popular with the parents. Participants conveyed their thoughts about the books. Tom reflected, “Wow! What a talented, amazing group of 5-year-old authors and illustrators you are! Thank you for sharing the beautiful book with us. I enjoyed it so much!” On another occasion, he said, “Wow, 5K! Very nice observations as you went on your walk to look for signs. I’m very impressed with the artwork in this book.” Jane also expressed her thoughts. “Smart class! Thank you for teaching me about all the signs,” she said. Others voiced similar opinions about the books. As Mary stated, “Great pictures and story line! Loved it! We want more!” Edith also liked the books. She shared, “Great book and such talented kids. Loved it! Keep up the great work.”

Participants discussed documentation in the form of progettazione or the many projects that the children were involved in at school. Tom really liked the projects because his son learned so much through them. He said, “The group projects that they do I think is great.” He later elaborated with a specific example:

They do lots of projects. T. did this project on a deer, and it was so fun. I guess it was the forest animal project so he truly believed he was a deer expert and that was a huge confidence builder as well as informational and informative for him. He knew way more about a deer than I do.

Other participants talked about the different museums or share days in which the children showcased learning from the various projects. During an observation of one of these museums, the children chose to represent what they had learned about forest ani-
mals with an *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum. Working together, the children explored ways to represent a life-size version of their animal as well as a way to share what they had learned with others. Hanging around the room were the actual size animals that had been accurately measured and depicted according to their research. To share what they had learned about their animal of choice, the children also made fact books. According to Edith, “I loved seeing the pictures of the big animals where they had to learn about a specific animal and then presenting it to the parents what they learned.” Similarly, Jane shared her thoughts from the event:

The Animal Museum was huge. That was a neat little thing. I was very surprised by all that and all the work that D. put into that. He’s never done anything like that before. He was so proud of it. And I thought he did an excellent job doing all that research. So, I was very pleasantly surprised by all that.

Additionally, participants discussed the use of daily notes and weekly newsletters to document the children’s learning and keep them informed. Each week, parents were given a weekly newsletter that detailed the learning that had taken place the previous week in addition to things to look forward to in the upcoming week. The newsletter was sent home via the children’s folders as well as email. Furthermore, parents were given a daily note with specific information pertaining to that day and their child. Daily notes usually included a question for the parents to ask their children. As Tom stated, “We know pretty much everything that goes on in the day because you send home daily reports, and you write down specific questions like, ‘Ask your child what they learned about so and so today.’” He continued, “Then you send home weekly newsletters that are extremely thorough and detailed. I don’t feel like we miss a beat as far as what goes on on a day-to-day basis.” Cora agreed that the newsletters were “pretty detailed.” Anna also thought that the newsletters helped her to be “very informed.” She said, “I could just
refer to that each week and it was very helpful.” Likewise, Edith said the newsletters were “helpful,” while Mary felt informed about “what they are going to be covering and what information they are going to be going over.” Others mentioned that the newsletter enabled them to be supportive at home while fostering conversations with their children. Rose expressed the following thoughts about the newsletters:

I think it’s nice to know in a newsletter what they are studying so that we can be doing stuff at home. What activities are going on? They bring home work all the time and that’s fun to be able to sit down and look at what they are doing and if they want to talk to you about their day. But, sometimes you’ve got to prompt them to talk to you about their day. So, it’s kind of nice to have that newsletter.

Moreover, all participants communicated that the use of technology was an important way to document the children’s learning in the classroom. Mary shared that “especially in today’s society” technology was a useful tool to share children’s learning with parents because they are “too busy.” Technology was particularly helpful to Edith who was student teaching at the time and unable to come to the classroom a lot. She stated, “For parents who have access to the Internet, and I think that probably all your parents do, but that’s a real good way to stay informed.” Jane disclosed her fervent thoughts about the use of technology for documentation:

I think that it is key. I think it is a big, huge part of it. I think a lot of parents are tuned into it . . . because it’s always hands-on and ready because most people have the phones that can get it immediately. It gives immediate gratification to so many things, and they know they can have it for later to refer to whereas having to keep up with a piece of paper or things like that. So I think technology is a big deal. For me, if I have it electronically, it is going straight on a disc and being saved.

One type of technology used for documentation included emails. Several participants mentioned emails as a convenient way to stay informed. Tom said, “I like your emails at the beginning of the week with an introduction of this is what we’re going to be
going over I think helps us a parent.” Jane also appreciated the “emails letting us know what’s going on.” Likewise, Mary thrived off of the emails, because she could “always go back and refer to it and save it for later.”

Another form of technological documentation included the use of digital pictures. Both the children and I took digital pictures frequently of them involved in various learning activities. Often, these pictures along with the children’s detailed narrations and transcriptions of their conversations were included in the emails sent to parents. Most participants like Edith “absolutely” enjoyed receiving emails with pictures attached to them.

More specifically, the pictures brought learning to life for others. Mary shared that her favorite type of documentation was “the emails with the picture attachments of who said what and what they learned and the things that y’all did because that’s just interesting to me.” Tom further explained, “We can hear you tell us about what he’s doing in class, but actually seeing those pictures I think kind of brings it to life and makes it real.”

Additionally, the digital pictures were used to create digital photo albums or slideshows that were emailed to the families on a regular basis. These were usually created using a photo sharing application called Smilebox. Transcripts of the children’s dialogues were included with the pictures as well. The photos and dialogues showed the children engaged in various learning activities. Tom recalled, “The Smileboxes were so fun. I love getting those.” Jane also mentioned the Smileboxes. She said, “All the Smileboxes that you send with the pictures that you take, I love that.” In addition, the Smileboxes provided assurance for some. Anna shared her thoughts about the Smileboxes:

My favorite thing would be the photo albums of the field trips or the activities. . . . Kind of photo shots of the crafts and the activity and him with his friends playing
and got to see him in action in the classroom, which is intangible. I can’t get that without those photos and they were very regular.

Other forms of technology mentioned by the participants included video recordings. A Flip camera was used to record the children in action at school. Like the digital photos, the children and I both contributed to the videography of different learning activities, providing very different perspectives. Video clips were then emailed to the parents. Several participants mentioned the use of the videos for documentation of the children’s learning. According to Tom, “Like you do the Flip video and you send home video clips of things they are doing each day.” He added, “It’s always fun to see them interacting as a class and how your child fits into the dynamics of the class with the video clips.” Jane shared similar thoughts about the videos. “I like how you record them as they talk together about projects and the actual working on projects and even playing together,” she recalled, continuing, “My favorite video by far was the pumpkin experiments. They were making all kinds of hypotheses and testing them out. It was really funny to watch but also very informative.” Through digital photos, Smilebox presentations, and video recordings, participants overall appreciated the use of technology to document the children’s learning in kindergarten. Mary summarized it best as she stated, “The pictures, the videos, all those Smileboxes . . . that tells us where they’ve been, what they’ve been learning, and what they’ve seen.”

Process. In addition to the physical products of documentation, each participant recognized that the process involved in the children’s learning was an equally valuable component of documentation. Furthermore, all agreed that the process of learning was equally important as the final product and provided authentic assessment of children’s
learning. As Edith commented, documentation enables parents to see progress and have a “full picture that you wouldn’t get with just a periodic checklist.” She continued, “If a teacher has documented what has been going on, then it lets a parent see it in its entirety, not just piecemeal . . . just not here’s something good that they did, shows the progress that is being made.” Other participants concurred. According to Rose, documentation is authentic and the “only way you can measure your child’s learning and progress.” Jane also disclosed that documentation was “necessary to accurately obtain info on children.”

Other participants expressed how much their children had grown and learned being in the Reggio-inspired classroom. Mary stated, “The documentation shows you where you started and what you’ve accomplished to here and what you’ve accomplished here, and by the end of the school year, you look back and you realize, gosh, look how much they’ve learned.” In addition, Tom discussed the process of documentation for assessment in order to truly understand his son’s learning in kindergarten:

> We’re not just talking about like “check,” he’s able to do these things, but it’s actually seeing the school work and those kinds of things. See, I like to see the documentation and that because to me if I just see a check mark that says “satisfactory,” well, I mean, that could mean an assortment of things, you know. When I actually see his work visually, as a parent then that lets me know that they are following the curriculum but I can also see the type of work that he’s doing that’s showing me why it is satisfactory.

Furthermore, participants revealed specific contributions of documentation towards the assessment of children’s learning. Discussing her son, Edith expressed that she could “see his progress through documentation.” She said, “I can see it more through the documentation at school than I do at home. I can also see when he is more focused and how much better his work looks.” Edith also shared the contributions of documentation to the assessment of her daughter’s learning. “I’ve truly seen her progress in reading and
writing, and her pride in what she is learning in school.” Through the process of documentation, Jane could tell that her son had “improved overtime.” She said, “Growth is evident looking back.” Likewise, Anna contributed her thoughts to the benefits of the process of documentation concerning her son:

He wants me to say, “Okay, let’s talk about this activity and how was this activity?” as opposed to, “What in the world are you doing?” And so, I think it really just excels the whole learning process and benefits the child in the classroom and outside the classroom so that they grow both places and just really improve.

Additional participants discussed how the process of documentation provided opportunities for reflection and interaction with others. Cora shared, “I think it’s terrific for the children to have something tangible that they’ve created, or a record of what they did—photos, written stories, artwork—so that they can reflect proudly about what they’ve learned or even express frustrations.” She added, “All the kinds of documentation were a great window into that classroom. . . . I think it was an important part of her learning and socialization to be part of that group with her teacher and friends.” Jane believed that documentation fostered conversations with her son about his learning. “I like the documentation and all that, but even more so, I like what he shows me and what he says to me in our daily experiences. That’s been huge,” she said.

Participants also thought that documentation of the process led to a more refined understanding of the children’s learning. As Tom stated, “When I look at a picture or something that he has worked on in class, it shows me what he is studying and learning.” Cultivating collaboration in his son’s learning, he continued, “It also allows him to explain what he is learning in class which shows me he understands what he is working on.” Others shared that being able to discuss the documentation with the children allowed them to support learning at home. According to Mary, “Because of the documentation
that you send home and the pictures and stuff that we can discuss, it helps to reinforce what she’s done.” She added, “It helps her to remember it and retain that information in different and creative ways so that what they have learned will stick.”

Through the process of documentation, participants learned about the children’s learning styles and expressed appreciation for the hundred languages of children. Some discussed how the teacher’s understanding of learning styles benefited the children. As Cora noted, “I think the documentation must show teachers how the students in the class compliment one another and how they have different learning style—visual, kinetic, verbal, etc.” She continued, “I would think this might be useful in seeing how to group them together so that they might learn best from each other.”

According to Edith, the process of documentation allowed parents “to figure out the best way” that children learn.” She said, “You have to know what they’re doing in school to figure that out.” Additionally, Edith shared how documentation helped her to appreciate her daughter’s interest in writing. “That kind of documentation,” she commented, “makes me realize with her I think she will love to write because I know she loves to draw and she loves to color and she will just sit there for hours doing that sort of thing.”

Since documentation made his son’s learning visible, Tom shared, “I have learned that T. has started to get a love for art and reading.” This extended beyond the classroom. “At home, he will ask to have paper and crayons so he can draw pictures,” he added. Others also commented on their children’s increased interest in various modes of expression. After looking at one of the many books made by her granddaughter, Mary proclaimed, “I think she shows great artistic ability!” Similarly, Jane expressed that her son
had become interested in “writing, sounding out words, writing what he hears, and art.”

She said, “He has really become interested in drawing and painting.” Cora also believed
that her daughter’s artwork particularly showcased “her creative expression.” Moreover,
Edith discussed how the process of documentation revealed her children’s deep interests
while at the same time helping her to be confident in their learning:

You’re focusing on your child. . . . If you know that your child is progressing and
learning, first of all, you feel good that they are actually learning. Second, you
know that there may be areas that he or she can improve upon but you know
where at this stage, you’re really trying to find their learning style, what they’re
interested in, what’s going to be their favorite subject. And if you don’t have
documentation to see like with writing that the stories are about things they like to
do instead of just prompts.

Additionally, the process of documentation further supported the participant’s im-
ages of children as rich, capable, and full of potential. For her son who had issues focusing
for extended periods of time, Edith could tell that he was more focused and wanted to
do better work through the documentation. She said, “He’s wanting probably you and me
to be proud that he’s not just scribbling but he’s taking his time to try to do his best work
and that to me is huge.” She continued, “Because I think that if he would slow down and
focus, he could just do phenomenal things. I really do.” Tom also noticed his son taking
more of an interest to produce his best work. “He will actually try to do things to where
he’s a perfectionist, not going out of the lines and making sure that it looks really good.
And if he messes up, it kind of upsets him,” he stated.

Cora conveyed how documentation influenced her image of her daughter. She
voiced, “I have learned that my daughter seems happy and well-adjusted at school, that
she’s really enjoying all the classroom activities and that the lessons are planned deliber-
ately as units, not day-to-day, to really build on the skills she’s learning.” Furthermore,
documentation helped others to appreciate the vast capabilities of their children. Jane beautifully expressed her thoughts concerning the correlation between documentation and her image of her son:

It’s helped me realize to look for, maybe not baby him so much, but realize that he can do more. To allow him to do more on his own that I would let him because he’s my little boy. He’s my baby. It has allowed him to grow up a little bit more and not be so right underneath me. . . . So, because it’s right there in front of me, he’s able to. Had it not been for that, I might have not seen that he can so what he can on his own. I needed to read it. I needed to see that and experience it that way.

Documentation allowed parents to see the important steps involved in the various projects and activities as well as the children’s progression throughout. This helped paint a complete picture for the participants. Participants talked about specific instances that showed process through documentation. For some, the documentation of the children’s self-portraits was insightful. Anna illustrated this best with the following statement:

They drew themselves every month, and they learned to include more details and understand more about the human body and that arms don’t come out of your neck and all that kind of stuff as the year goes on. And it’s not like an amazing portrait at the end, but it’s definitely progressed because you’ve discussed and talked and done it and tried different things throughout the year. That counts!

According to Jane, the self-portraits were her favorite type of documentation. Since the self-portraits were conveniently located on the wall next to the children’s book bag hooks, she looked at them frequently as she dropped off or picked up her son from school. She shared, “I’ve looked through those often and you can tell such a huge difference from where he was and where he came.” Tom also mentioned the growth that was evident through the self-portraits. According to him, the children’s monthly self-portraits enabled parents to “see progress in their artwork and how they see themselves and how they see that they’ve changed.” Speaking of his son, Tom stated, “One thing for me,
through the self portraits, I have noticed a pretty big difference in his artistic ability.”

The documentation of the self-portraits also helped Cora view her daughter with a developmentally appropriate lens. “I could see the progression . . . sometimes they were very similar and then all of a sudden from November to December she’d have a kind of developmental breakthrough,” she said, adding, “You could see it in the drawing . . . the person had hands that were more detailed or the logo on her shirt was there. So, those things were really helpful.”

Other forms of documentation that showed progress and process mentioned by the participants included the children’s writing journals and books, supporting understandings of developmental writing stages. As Tom recalled, “He’s hearing more letter sounds through the journal and then through your class books. As he’s illustrating and narrating his books, I can really tell a difference.” He went on to say, “I mean, his writing has improved. I’m like, ‘Oh!’ I can totally understand everything that he is trying to describe to me in the book, through words and through his pictures. I think that he’s gotten a lot better.” Jane also thought that her son’s writing journal told her a lot about his writing development over a period of time. When talking about the writing journal, she shared the following thoughts:

He has a big imagination. His journal has been fun because I can see what he is thinking about. They all have dates on them. I think it is so neat to see what they were writing in August and compare to what they are writing now. You can see the growth and the change, especially in the spelling of the words and the way they are writing their letters and the sounds that go with it.

Like Jane, Anna discussed the importance of the writing journals to document the process of growth. Over time, her son began to write “more complete thoughts as opposed to like three or four word sentences.” She attributed this to the amount of reading
that took place throughout the day in the classroom, because “he could think through what happened to the people in the stories and was more in tune to hearing and listening to other characters make long sentence kind of adventures.” Mary also commented on the documentation of granddaughter’s writing development. She said, “That she can remember the sounds of letters and put them together to form words is like 100% better from the beginning of the year to right now. Just since August, she is putting words together like crazy.”

Similarly, for both of her children, Edith could “see true progress in writing through the documentation.” Opportunities to share and reflect with her children about their writing not only showed her “what they were doing but the fact that they enjoyed it” as well. The writing journal and books were especially meaningful because they showed her that her son was becoming more interested in learning. She elaborated, “The documentation lets me see J. progressing as a student. I can see him moving from simply ‘scribble scrabble’ to actual writing.” She continued, “When we review his work, he will tell me, ‘Mom, here I was just scribble scrabbling. This is where I’m really drawing.’ The fact that he knows the difference is huge!” Additionally, the writing showed her daughter’s eagerness to express her thoughts and ideas with others. Edith emotionally shared her feelings about her daughter’s writing:

Her imagination is really going. She wants to write and when I read her journal, that’s another one of those moments when you just almost tear up because you could read it and I could read what she was writing. I mean it wasn’t spelled anywhere close, but I could read it! And she could read it, too! She could tell me what she meant to say. So having those types of things sent home, and not just one piece of paper. I think it was a great idea to have the whole journal sent home because you could see their progress because it was dated.
In addition, participants discussed various forms of technology used in the process of documentation. These included digital photos, video clips, and the Smilebox photo presentations. Participants agreed that these different forms of technology provided insight into the children’s learning and growth. As Cora stated, “You could almost see it in time-lapse photography that she was growing everyday.” Rose also thought the Smileboxes were important “just to know that they were having a good time and were enjoying themselves.”

For Edith, the Smileboxes and photos showed the children involved in different activities. “It’s not just, ‘Here’s a picture of the child,’ but they look like they are engaged and active in the learning process, which is what I would want for my children,” she said. Edith was especially fond of the video clips, because she could see her children enjoying school. She remembered a time when she received a video clip of the children doing pumpkin experiments together. The children were making predictions concerning various scenarios and then testing them out. She recalled, “Like the pumpkin, that was an actual video with them talking to each other. You did see how they are actually engaged and having a good time.” She added, “And I think it’s important that kids have a good time while they are learning, otherwise they are not going to want to come to school.”

Additionally, the photos and videos enabled parents to see their children interacting with one another. This was especially heartening to several participants for personal reasons. At the beginning of the school year, Edith shared that she was concerned about her son having friends at school, as it had been a problem the year before. She also expressed that she believed that children learn best when they learn from each other. Through the pictures and videos, she was reassured seeing her son “sitting next to people
and playing nicely or doing an activity.” She explained, “Listening to them talk to each other and interact with each other . . . that was encouraging to me to see that interaction.”

Likewise, Cora’s daughter had experienced a bad year in preschool before coming to my kindergarten class. She desperately wanted her daughter to have a better year in kindergarten and love coming to school. Photos and videos documenting her daughter interacting with peers at school provided Cora with a great source of comfort. She reflected:

The Smilebox photo-shows that you would send when you’d go on a special field trip or do something special, those were . . . I’ll never forget the first day of school one when I watched her on that and just how happy she was and how that said it all. Just being able to watch that and I knew she was going to be okay and have a great year. I could see it on her face and all those kids together. You know, without, like I said, having to be intrusive and be a parent who’s a helicopter mom who’s in the classroom a lot. Having those kinds of photos were just worth a thousand words. . . . It was nice having a little window of her having a happy time.

Summary. Participants discussed their understandings of documentation in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Documentation was understood to be both products and process. Products were representative of the physical collections of evidence from the children’s learning. These included self-portraits, charts, graphs, portfolios, learning logs, writing journals, class books, and artwork. In addition, the children’s projects and museum share days were important artifacts that made learning visible. Participants also recognized several different forms of technology to document the children’s learning. These included emails, digital photos, videos, and the Smilebox photo sharing application. Written communication in the form of daily or personal notes and weekly newsletters was also greatly appreciated by participants.
In addition, the process involved in the children’s learning was an equally valuable component of documentation. Participants thought that there was more to learning than just a progress report at the end of the semester that only showed bits and pieces. As authentic assessment, documentation of process showed participants the steps in between and led to greater understanding of the children’s learning. This could be seen in the children’s self-portraits, writing journals, and class books. Documentation enabled participants to acknowledge the diverse learning styles and hundred languages of children. The various forms of technology used within the classroom also provided a window into the process involved in the children’s learning as well as their interactions with others. Overall, the combination of both products and process was essential to understanding the importance of documentation in my Reggio Emilia inspired classroom.

Environment

Through the process of analyzing multiple sources of data, the theme of environment was identified. All participants recognized the relation between documentation in the classroom and the overall environment. The classroom environment was directly related to the projects and learning experiences of the children. The three sub-themes identified within this theme include the following: encouraging, engaging, and informed.

Encouraging. Participants characterized the classroom environment as an encouraging place. It was important to parents for children to be able to learn in a safe, nurturing, and encouraging environment. The Reggio Emilia inspired classroom as well as the visible documentation of children’s learning allowed this to happen. As Anna noted,
“I think the approach to learning was outstanding and a true ‘perfect fit’ for M.’s learning style and maturity level.” For some, the classroom was like another home. “It feels like home;” commented Rose, adding, “A home that is safe, nurturing, loving, caring, dedicated, positive, and happy. The class is like family.” Others shared that the encouraging environment provided a much-needed sense of security. Cora expressed, “I feel so secure knowing she’s there with you. The way you strike a balance between structure, challenges, and nurturing positive reinforcement is such a gift.” Jane further supported this thought when she referred to the classroom as “a reprieve from the real world—a happy place filled with laughter, love, and the delightful sounds of children learning and having fun.”

The children’s growth, evident through the various types of documentation, was also directly linked to the encouraging environment of the kindergarten classroom. Participants addressed the ways in which the specific individual learning styles and needs of the children were met. Cora emotionally shared her thoughts about her daughter who had previously experienced a bad environment in another preschool:

I just think that your classroom was the ideal kind of environment for a child like mine who was very hands-on and creative and imaginative. You really just put such an emphasis on creativity and independent thinking and imagination. I like that I never really knew what her reading level was or any of those kind of quantitative measures, but she grew so much as a person, socially and emotionally and in terms of her intellectual confidence. But, I think it was because of the loving, positive reinforcement environment that she had there from everyone, from the friends to the teacher. And, I think it was just an incredible experience for her. I am so grateful. It really got her over a big hurdle.

Some, such as Anna, discussed an encouraging environment in which “everything is welcomed.” She elaborated, “You’re loved no matter what you say and no matter what you do, but we want you to do your best and all that.” She believed that created a “suc-
successful environment . . . so that all of that could happen in a successful way.” Rose agreed that the environment presented children with ample “opportunities to be creative,” while also challenging them to reach their full potential. Referring to her son, she said, “I think he was challenged enough. He was still very confident in what he did.” She added, “He was never pushed to go above and beyond what he could handle and still had a great time. He loved all the projects and the painting and playing with friends and all that kind of stuff.” As a result, she believed that her son was “more than prepared for [public] kindergarten and might could have even started first grade.” Additionally, Cora, who described her child as the “consummate non-conformist,” shared how this type of environment helped her daughter become “a lot more flexible as the year went on” as she participated in the co-construction of learning with others where her thoughts and ideas were genuinely valued and accepted. “She played with children in ways that she never had before. . . . She really interacted more with her peers throughout the year,” she explained, adding, “Those kind of group experiences and just learning that she can’t always have it her way. That was really good for her,”

Similarly, other participants acknowledged the contributions of children working together in small groups to the encouraging environment. Edith believed that the collaborative work in small groups greatly benefited her children as it “helped them gain some confidence.” As work in small groups was documented, they could “look at what they’ve done and see how they’ve progressed.” Tom also shared how documentation permitted his son to see himself as a valuable contributing member of a group. This was a huge confidence builder for him as noted in the following statement:

I think the documentation has helped him have a lot more confidence in himself . . . like to see his role in a group. And we can visually see it through the vid-
eo clips and the Smileboxes, but like for him to see, “I could do that,” or “I con-
tributed in this way,” has been such a huge confidence builder for him, because I
don’t know that he was as confident before this year. And socially, I think, just to
see his place in the classroom and to feel like he has a group . . . but just the
friendships that he’s been able to build through their group projects.

Several participants shared ways that the encouraging environment created
through documentation of learning empowered children who were facing change and
stress in their personal lives. At the time of this research, Mary was in the process of ob-
taining permanent legal custody of her granddaughter. She shared that her granddaughter
had “been through a lot that a five and a half year old should not have had to so through.”

With heart-felt gratitude, Mary expressed, “I can’t thank you enough for all the kindness,
love, and support you’ve shown M. It’s teachers like you that make the difference be-
tween liking school and loving school in young kids.” Likewise, Anna commented on
the ways the overall classroom environment encouraged both her and her son as they
dealt with the pressures of a divorce and moving to a new city. She explained:

The year completely exceeded all of my expectations. Like, it was such a trans-
itional and such a pivotal and really important year, and I really just sort of wanted
myself and M. to make it out alive this last year. And I felt like this 5K class and
the way that the whole year was conducted really encouraged him and really
helped him to learn way more than I expected him to learn and helped me to have
those conversations and be able to be with him more as far as I knew that I could
come to his classroom . . . it’s because of all this documentation and the photos
and all that.

Engaging. According to the participants, the use of documentation in my Reggio
Emilia inspired kindergarten helped create an engaging environment for children and
their parents. Participants revealed that openness was an important aspect of creating an
engaging atmosphere. Because there was an open door policy, parents felt welcomed to
drop into the classroom at anytime, scheduled or not. Anna emphasized this when she
stated, “I felt like I could come at any time and stay as long as I wanted and come back whenever and . . . interact or just watch. I felt like there were a lot of opportunities provided to come to the classroom.” She continued, “But even just showing up unannounced or staying a little longer . . . was always very welcoming and inviting.” Furthermore, others thought that the openness made the learning and documentation more authentic. For example, Jane, who worked at the preschool, liked “being able to stop in and see anything at any point without giving any notice.” She said, “You know you’re not getting a dog and pony show, because they don’t know you’re coming and you just walk in. It’s authentic. You get a lot of authenticity.” She further believed that the engaging environment of the classroom was purposeful. She commented, “Your class always felt welcoming and pleasant. It wasn’t overly loud or too quiet and the children were always engaged in activity. It felt organized and structured but not rigid.”

Additionally, participants believed that this sense of openness fostered communication. Cora thought that the overall environment of the room was sincerely welcoming “without trying to be.” She shared, “I was always welcomed, coming and going and following-up. I had open channels of communication.” Others expressed similar ideas. According to Mary, “I think it makes you approachable, because I think a lot of times parents don’t know if they should talk or can talk to the teacher.” Likewise, Jane explained how documentation connected her to her son’s learning experiences:

It opens doors for communication because I feel a part of the class—completely part of the class. I’m not just bringing him to you, picking him up, and leaving. I’m fully involved and engaged because you allow it to be because of all the [documentation], the notes and the letters and the Smileboxes, and we can get a sense of exactly what he’s doing in school even though we’re not there with him. As long as I read it, I don’t ever wonder. If I ever wonder what you’re doing, it’s because I didn’t read it fully. It’s not because of a lack of communication. Everything I need to know is right there.
The participants reported that documentation in the kindergarten classroom had allowed them to become more involved and interested in their child’s learning. In particular, they were directly involved in the classroom museums that showcased the children’s learning during a project. One such museum was the *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum. Over a period of weeks, the children had investigated a forest animal of their choice and chosen to create actual size paintings of the animals in order to represent their learning. They also made fact books about their animal of choice. After several class meetings, they decided to create a museum to display their paintings and teach others about their learning. Invitations were sent to parents and family members as well as other children and teachers in the school to share in the children’s learning experiences, extending the engaging environment of the classroom.

Parental participation in the museums was evident during the observation of the *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum. Every child had at least one parent or family member there to share in the experience. Participants were given the opportunity to be actively engaged with the children as they toured the museum to discover attributes of the different forest animals. Overall, participants shared their excitement and amazement about the children’s projects. Tom was overheard saying, “This is so cool! What can you tell me about deer?” Mary asked her granddaughter, “What do foxes eat? Who are their enemies?” While thoroughly involved in her son’s explanation, Jane expressed, “Wow! I didn’t know that.” Likewise, Edith articulated her astonishment. “My goodness!” she exclaimed, “Did you do all this?” Opportunities such as these allowed parents and families to share learning experiences with the children and be enthusiastically involved in that process.
In addition, participants thought that documentation provided engaging environments for the children. This in turn encouraged meaningful learning experiences. For some, it complemented the children’s learning styles. Referring to her granddaughter, Mary stated, “I do think it helps her be more engaged. I think it helps her to learn better because that’s just the kind of kid she is.” Through documentation, Jane learned that her son was “actually paying attention.” She attributed this to the fact that he was actually “engaged and interested” in learning. Similarly, Edith agreed that “interactive nature of the activities” allowed the children to take “ownership” of their work.

Others shared how the engaging environment helped children uncover some of their hundred languages. For example, Tom explained how his son became more interested in art. “Before we started your class, he did not care for drawing, coloring, cutting on a straight line, none of that. And now he wants to do it all the time. He’s very interested in it,” he said. Participants also expressed ways that the engaging environment met some of their expectations for kindergarten. For her son who was adjusting to several life changes, Anna observed social and emotional improvements. She believed that the documentation and engaging environment allowed her son “to be able to express his thoughts . . . about different things more thoroughly.” She said, “It helped him emotionally and with his friends. I feel like he just really grew up in that case, and I think it really has to do a lot with that expression of himself.”

Documentation made learning in context possible, which further supported engaging environments for children. This was best seen through the various projects in which the children undertook. As an example, Jane spoke of the forest animal projects. She said, “They’re having to use reading and writing. They’re using science and math.
They’re even thinking about social studies and all that cross-curricular stuff tying together.” She further stated, “It’s neat to see how it all plays together and it’s not isolated.”

Participants also discussed ways that the children involved them in the classroom environment. The children’s eagerness to share their learning with the parents was apparent. Anna mentioned, “I can remember several days when he would say, ‘Let’s run back to my classroom. I want to show you this,’ and it would be something on the wall.” Rose recalled similar experiences as well. “I’d come to pick him up and he would want to walk around the classroom before we left,” she said, continuing, “He’d want to show me what they were doing for the week and what words y’all had written on the board and that he’d signed in that morning . . . ‘This is what I wrote and look at what everybody else wrote.’” Likewise, Edith shared how her daughter showed her things that they had done at school when she picked her up each day. “She always wants to show me, ‘Momma, this is something. Look at it. Look at what we did,’” she said.

Participants discussed other ways that children demonstrated their learning. Frequently, children were intrinsically motivated. As Mary explained, “Sometimes M. will demonstrate what she’s learned by writing it down on paper or will show me something in a magazine or paper and explain that they learned this in school.” Often her granddaughter would pretend to be the teacher and teach her “something that has been covered in class.” Additionally, participants thought that the engaging environment spurred meaningful conversations with children about their learning. According to Tom, his son was so excited about school that he would tell him about things without having to be asked. He explained:

Even on the daily reports [the teacher] will put, “Ask your child what nocturnal means.” I mean, honestly, he’ll tell me what nocturnal means before I get the key
questions. He’ll have already discussed what has gone on in his day, because he’s just very interested and it’s obvious.

Moreover, Tom thought that the engaging environment supported his son’s confidence, which extended beyond the classroom. He believed that his son’s involvement in the class enabled him “to play his role and his part” within a group. He especially noticed this in his “demeanor at home.” In one instance, his son chose to learn about deer for his forest animal project. Tom shared the following story:

He was telling us a bunch of characteristics of a deer one night like how tall they were when they were born, what female deer were called, and what they like to eat. And I was like, “T., how do you know so much about deer?” And he was like, “Well, that’s because I’m a deer expert, Dad!” He was very confident about it. So then he was like adding other things to it. You know what is funny about that as well, I was taking him and A. to school one day and a deer ran across the road. And right when the deer ran across the road he started flying off the bat with a bunch of characteristics of them, deer facts.

Similarly, Mary recalled how her granddaughter became engaged in the forest animal project. Her decision to learn about foxes had personal meaning. Mary believed that she could “relate to it much easier probably” because there was a family of three foxes that lived near their house. She shared, “Almost everyday, either when we left or in the evening when we came home, they’d run across the road, and she asked, ‘Where are y’all living? Where is that hole y’all are coming out of?’”

The Reggio Emilia inspired approach to learning that was embraced in my kindergarten classroom also led to several enrichment opportunities outside of school for participants and their children. Cora explained, “She loved to draw. A lot of times at night she’d come home and want to make books about stories she’d read or things that you’d done that day.” She continued, “So she’d kind of do her own projects based on what we would look at in the documentation.” For her family, this frequently included a
field trip to various places of interest. Cora shared one such instance. “She’d always talk about what the book was or what the story was you had read that day. And then we’d often have to go to the library and get the book or get other books,” she said, adding, “So, it definitely spurred her into different things that she would not have been interested in herself. So, it kind of broadened her horizons that way.”

Participants identified additional ways that the engaging environment at school stimulated learning at home. Tom noticed that his son would come home from school and want to “sit down with crayons and color a picture and make a project” instead of watching television or playing outside. He commented, “Whereas before we’ve never seen that from him.” While reading with his older son, Tom also observed his kindergartener son trying to read along, too. “I just couldn’t believe that he was that motivated and interested in what was going on. And it wasn’t just a one-time thing. He always tries to do it,” he stated.

In addition, participants mentioned other opportunities for families to learn together at home that were extensions of things the children had learned at school. Mary shared, “M. recently was trying to teach me a new card game she learned in school and also talked to me about how they made some blue gunk.” On the other hand, others shared more serious life-lessons that were learned. In one project, the children collected over 100 canned goods to donate to a food bank located within the school. Cora recalled how her daughter “loved collecting the canned goods,” but more importantly, for the first time, realized that “some children have no families and not enough to eat.” As Cora expressed, “Through everything she learned, from books to classroom discussions about sharing and being respectful, she was learning empathy.”
Furthermore, many participants discussed the effects of a group recycling project and field trip to a local college to visit an environmental center and EcoScape. Due to overwhelming interest and excitement, the children initiated a school-wide recycling program. They established a recycling center in the classroom to collect aluminum can pop tops, plastic bottle tops, old batteries, and used printer ink cartridges. As Tom stated, “He has really gotten us more on the ball with regards to ‘going green.’” Others concurred that their children had become more environmentally responsible. Jane shared that her son had become more aware of recyclable items by showing her “the recycling symbols on bottles.” Likewise, Edith noted that her children had become “very interested in conserving energy” and the concept of “recycle, reduce, and reuse.” She explained, “Every time we drink a soft drink, we’ve got to pop that top off. . . . They want to recycle everything.” She added, “Even, in my neighborhood we don’t recycle glass and we don’t save it to recycle either, but they want to. They say, ‘But we can reuse this, Mom.’ And they turn off the lights and they turn off water.” Others reflected how the engaging environment at school provoked a global awareness within the children as they came to understand their role in the world. Cora revealed her thoughts concerning this with the following statement:

I know you went on the field trip to the environmental center and so she would come home and say, “We need to turn off the lights and recycle.” She never really knew what our recycle bin was, and she got really into that. She was kind of going around the house talking about how we had to get the plastic. So that was definitely an awareness of the world on a level of social responsibility that she was much too immature to have even clued in to before the class. Just feeling like she was part of the community.
Informed. Participants indicated that both the product and process of documentation created a classroom environment in which they were informed. When referring to the documentation of the children’s learning, Mary stated, “It just really has shown me a lot about what she has learned. If you didn’t have the documentation, you wouldn’t have a clue about what your child was learning.” Others believed that the documentation provided a more detailed understanding of the children’s learning. As Edith shared, “For both my children, the thorough documentation of their learning is keeping me informed of their learning and their progress in ways that simple parent-teacher conferences could not do.” Therefore, she felt more prepared for parent-teacher conferences when they were scheduled:

I do feel like I am better prepared than in the past to go to a parent-teacher conference with you because I’ve seen what’s been going on through the video clips, through the newsletters, through the other emails that you send, and the other information that you send home. I do feel like I know what is going on . . . I have a better feel for where their learning’s going, where they are as far as how much they’ve progressed from the beginning of the year till now. A parent will come in more informed than just little notes and things, like satisfactory, needs improvement, progressing, if you have the documentation before sitting down and talking.

Additionally, the informed environment eased concerns for some. Anna, who just wanted to “make it out alive” through a very transitional year for her son, shared, “I felt very informed and very confident in everything that went on last year, and like I said, it far exceeded my expectations.” Similarly, Cora’s main concern coming into kindergarten was that her daughter would have a great school experience and be happy. According to her, “I felt like I had a great understanding. I was never wondering or apprehensive about any part of her.” She continued with the following:

I never had a doubt what was happening in that classroom. I knew that every minute was being used and that she was having a great time and she was getting a lot out of it. I saw her grow tremendously in this year. I just was not so concerned
with the details of if she knew how to add 2+4 and she did, but that wasn’t what we were focused on. I was happy to see her with her friends in centers and pictures like that and seeing the artwork that she would bring home and the songs that she would have learned. That was all much more important than those little details.

In addition, participants were appreciative of the documentation that resulted in an informed environment. Tom shared, “We’ve never had so much feedback. I love the feedback. I love knowing and being informed everyday on what’s going on, and I think it’s an excellent tool.” Others believed that the documentation was a fun and exciting way to share the children’s enthusiasm for learning. Mary stated, “It is fun and it is exciting when you get to see the things they have learned, the things that they are working on and they’re enjoying themselves and their excitement about those things.”

For others, the informed environment allowed parents to feel connected to the children’s learning even though they were not able to be there as much. At the time of the research, Edith was doing her student teaching and unable to participate in various events as much as she would have liked. She felt “guilty” for not being there for her children. However, despite feeling removed, she still believed she was “very well informed as to what’s going on.” Other participants, like Mary, thought that the documentation allowed them “to share a little bit” of what the children did at school “even though [they] weren’t there.” She explained how she felt included in her granddaughter’s learning even when she was unable to be there:

I think that the documentation or the emails or whatever really helps the parents feel more at ease that she’s letting me know what’s going on and that I feel a part of it whether or not I’m there. I don’t have to control it because she’s letting me be a part of it. That helps a lot of parents. I am so thankful that she’s enjoying school, that she’s learning, that she’s progressing. But because there is so much information coming home, either physically or electronically, that kind of keeps you up to date on what’s going on.
Several participants thought the informed environment encouraged conversations. According to some, conversations with the teacher occurred more naturally. As Anna explained, “It just provided an easy, two-way street, conversation kind of environment. I never felt intimidated or like I should have known something. The information was so freely given.” She added, “I never felt like I couldn’t say, ‘Oh well, what else are y’all doing with that?’” Likewise, Rose believed that the teacher was “open to talk” to her. She always felt “very informed” and had a clear understanding of “what was going on for the week and what to look towards.” Others directly attributed more meaningful conversations with children to the informed environment. Feeling more informed, Tom explained how the documentation promoted conversations with his son. He said, “It gives us specific examples, specific things to discuss with him, because I feel informed about everything that goes on in the day . . . so we can ask him. And you give us key things to have conversations about.”

Furthermore, participants shared how the informed environment created through documentation permitted them to be more supportive at home. Tom shared how the documentation let him “be involved in the lessons” while also being “supportive at home.” He said, “That’s where we can take off and be supportive and helpful as parents.” Others acknowledged the important role of parents in children’s education. Like Tom, Edith believed that “documentation informs learning by allowing parents to reinforce what you are learning at school at home.” She elaborated, “If I just got a report with checks, that wouldn’t really tell me as a parent what I could be doing to kind of help my child, because I think that the parents have big roles to play, too.” Edith summed it up perfectly, “It’s not just the teacher’s job.”
Summary. The participants in the research all identified ways that documentation contributed to the overall classroom environment. Documentation led to a kindergarten environment that was encouraging, engaging, and informed. Each proved to be valuable components of the classroom environment. Examples of each emerged during participant interviews and the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum observation. Participants indicated that the classroom environment created through the Reggio Emilia inspired approach to teaching affected both the children as well as the parents. Overall, the participants thought that the encouraging, engaging, and informed environment of the classroom empowered the kindergarten children to accomplish amazing things.

Relationships

Another theme that was identified was relationships. All participants discussed ways that documentation helped them build relationships with both their children and the teacher. There were two sub-themes that were identified within the theme of relationships. These included communication and appreciation.

Communication. There was a general consensus among participants that documentation of the children’s learning in the classroom increased overall communication among and between children, teacher, and parents. This helped to build strong relationships. First of all, participants indicated that there was good communication with the teacher. According to Jane, “You do a great job communicating with the parents. It’s always very supportive and very detailed.” Cora agreed, “I felt like the communication in
your class was excellent. I just felt very aware of what the daily routine was like for the kids in your class and what you were trying to do.” She added, “That was really reassuring and helpful.” Tom expressed similar sentiments. “You keep us very informed on how the class is doing as a whole and how T. is doing as an individual. You are on top of things so we always feel secure.” Furthermore, he believed that relationships between teachers and parents were vital to children’s learning. “We’re all trying to be in this together,” he said, “All that communication helps.” Edith concurred, “Having the teacher constantly update you on what the child is actually doing just has to benefit the relationship between the parents and the teacher.”

Participants also thought that documentation increased opportunities for them to engage in conversations with the teacher. Mary shared, “This has given us more of an opportunity to talk about what y’all have learned the most of anything because we are talking about specific things.” By communicating with the teacher, she noticed her granddaughter “growing in her ability to learn in every area,” because the documentation provided her with so much information. In addition, several suggested that documentation made it easier to talk with the teacher about their children’s learning. As Anna explained, “It just kind of opens up that communication, and I felt much more comfortable being like, ‘Okay, well, tell me more about this,’ to you.” Tom agreed, “It keeps the line of communication open between us. I mean I feel like we could call or email anytime and you would never be upset if we called or emailed or set up a time to talk to you about how he’s doing in class.”

In particular, participants shared ways in which documentation made the teacher more approachable, especially if there were concerns. As Rose expressed, “I think if I
had been concerned it would have really helped me talk to you about concerns.” Edith agreed, “You want to have that line of communication open so that if you feel there is an issue you can come to the teacher.” She continued, “I think it gives parents the opportunity to open up discussions if they have something they really wanted to address or question or find out things.” Likewise Cora explained, “I just always felt like if I had a concern I could ask you about it.” She recalled a time when she wanted to know more about her daughter’s writing. Because of the documentation, she felt more comfortable coming to the teacher to discuss her concerns. She reflected, “It did make it easier to talk about things . . . and then talking about it made a lot more sense. But I wouldn’t have noticed that without the documentation.” Anna shared her thoughts on the subject:

Well, it definitely helped me to know what was going on and then be able to ask further questions if I wasn’t getting enough of a story out of M. If there was something that just didn’t feel right, I at least had some clue as to say, “Hey, what’s going on?” or “What are y’all doing with this?” I just felt like I knew what y’all were doing for the whole day. Even if there were other things I didn’t know, I still felt better informed and that was comforting in a way to know that I could ask.

By being able to address concerns with the teacher, participants thought that they could be more supportive of the children’s learning. Tom believed because he was so well informed that it was “easier to approach the teacher.” He stated, “You would know specific questions to ask about how you could help or how you could be supportive of the teacher and help your child learn to the best of their ability.” Mary agreed, “I would be able to come to you and say, ‘So, I see in this we’re not doing this. What can we do at home to help?’”

Additionally, some participants acknowledged that written communication from the teacher in the form of daily newsletters and notes was important to establishing rela-
tionships and partnerships with the teacher. According to Cora, “The newsletters were so useful explaining all that they would be doing. So I felt like even though I wasn’t talking to you always about that you were updating me through writing.” Jane shared her thoughts as well. “You spend extra time writing specific notes about my child’s day, personality, and qualities. I save each one and look forward to reading them each day,” she said, adding, “I can see that you see your job as a ministry and partnership in helping my child grow.”

Furthermore, participants reported that they were talking more to their children about their learning because of the documentation that was taking place in my kindergarten classroom. Tom believed that his communication with his son had greatly improved, because he had “specific things to ask him about each day.” For some, these moments together were highlights of their day. As Jane expressed, “I love when he tells me what they’ve done for the day. It’s never blah. It’s always exciting.” Cora shared that the documentation was fun for her whole family, while also benefitting her daughter. “We love talking about projects and the Smilebox videos are always fun to share as a family,” she said, continuing, “She narrates them, explains who’s who and what they are doing, laughs, and it’s really given her opportunity to develop her communication skills.”

Moreover, as Cora engaged in conversations with her daughter, she was able identify ways in which she had grown. “She talked a lot about her friends and a lot about what had been going on in the class that day or things she was interested in from school,” she said. She explained more:

Sometimes at dinner she’d just come out with a funny story about one of her friends, which was a new thing for her. You know, in preschool, we didn’t get any of that kind of feedback from her. So just her verbalizing it and seeing how she was part of it was a huge growth for her.
Other participants explained ways in which documentation led to more detailed conversations with their children about their learning. For Mary, it gave her a “springboard” to ask about things that they learned at school. She said, “The pictures, the videos, all those Smileboxes which are pictures and videos, that tells us where they’ve been, what they’ve been learning, what they’ve seen. And of course when I ask her questions about it, she remembers everything.” She further elaborated, “She talks about what y’all did and where you went and why and what you saw when you were there and the habitats that you were learning about.” Anna agreed that the documentation “provided that platform that kind of sparked the conversation.” In addition, Jane shared that the documentation allowed her to have deeper conversations with her son:

> It gives me something concrete to go on. I can point to something and say, “Tell me about this. Tell me what you did. How or where did you start? What made you draw him like that?” It gives me something physical to go on or to quote or describe so that he’s better able to talk to me about it. It makes conversations easier because I know what I’m asking. I know what questions to ask or how to ask him. It seems more open ended that way instead of yes/no’s.

Through increased communication, participants discussed ways in which documentation enabled them to feel more connected to the children while they were at school. As Anna stated, “The documentation helped me stay informed so that we always had something to talk about and it was relevant and relative to what was happening the other eight hours of his day.” She added, “So, I felt like we were all on the same page all of the time. I could ask and probe and dig more deeply.” Likewise, Cora thought the documentation definitely provided a good “visual” for conversations between her daughter and her.

> “It was a good way to ask her about what was happening. I always just felt very informed about what she was doing without having to be there myself.” Tom shared a spe-
specific example in which he felt more connected to his son’s learning after viewing documentation of a Thanksgiving project. He shared, “I could say, ‘What were you doing or what were you thinking when you made your name that you came up with for that?’ He could draw out more conversation. ‘How did you do this particular design on this?’” He continued, “If I didn’t get those pictures or whatever, I mean that would be something that we would never strike that conversation up.”

Additionally, participants believed that the documentation made the children eager to share their learning with their parents. According to Edith, when she looked at the various forms of documentation with her children, “they instinctively reflect on what they did at school.” She said, “They are always eager to share, and compete to be the first to tell me something.” She recalled a time when she and her children recreated an experiment that they had seen in one of the videos sent to parents. She explained, “We brought the pumpkins home first and then you sent the video out so we were able to see how it was created. They had such a fun time doing it.” Tom also shared his son’s excitement. As he explained, his son is “very detailed” telling him almost “verbatim” about his learning experiences at school. “We watch the video clips and Smileboxes 500 times. ‘That’s when M. did this. That’s when D. did that.’ It feeds conversation about what has gone on. And we always have to play it over and over and over,” he said.

Other participants thought that documentation fostered quality time for children to share their thinking and ideas more openly with their parents. Rose recalled how she enjoyed spending time with her son each day looking at documentation:

We could look at the pictures together when we got home and he could tell me a little more. I think the newsletter helped start conversations between what’s going on at school and tying it over at home just to reinforce what y’all were learning and to have fun with it. Even him bringing home the artwork with the farm,
we could talk about going to the farm field trip and what he’s learned and we can carry it over to the field trip.

Because the children were sharing more, participants indicated that they were amazed at the many capabilities of the children. Observation of the *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum revealed that the children were engaged in active communication with their parents and families about what they had learned about animals. Jane reported that she felt “very proud” of her son for learning all that he did about his animal and for sharing it with everyone that visited the museum. Mary also said that her granddaughter would spontaneously start talking about her forest animal at home and all “the neat and different things about it.” She believed it was because they saw a lot of foxes around their house. When they saw them, her granddaughter was prompted to “talk about the name that fox babies are called and that they live in a den and that kind of stuff.” She said, “And when she would learn something new, she would come home and say, ‘Oh, you know what?’ And she would tell us those things because she’d be thinking about it.” Mary also recalled other information that she learned from her granddaughter through the documentation about the forest animals:

> All the pictures of the woodland creature, the habitat stuff and the museum you did, she remembers all that stuff. If you ask her about it, she can tell you about the fox and the opossum, the deer. She can remember all of them. And she can tell you about each one of them. She did the fox, but she can tell you about the others one, too.

**Appreciation.** As it has long been acknowledged, appreciation is the foundation of all good relationships. Participants in this research expressed sincere appreciation for their children’s experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Thus, strong relationships were forged between the teacher, the parents, and the children
through documentation. For some, appreciation was shared through simple words of gratitude. After receiving a Smilebox with pictures and dialogue documenting the children’s fieldtrip to the nature preserve, Jane replied, “Love it! You rock!” Similarly, upon reviewing documentation of his son involved in a human body project, Tom responded, “Thanks for sharing. You are such a great teacher. T. is a lucky little guy.” Edith agreed, “Thank you for teaching my children! They are lucky to have you.”

Other participants expressed similar thankfulness for regular documentation and being included as valuable partners in the children’s learning. Mary often responded after receiving emails documenting her granddaughter’s learning. On one such occasion, she said, “This is so sweet of you to do for us. I really appreciate your letting us enjoy what the kids do while at school. It makes you feel a part of what they are doing each day.” She added, “Thanks again for being such a great teacher!” For some, the documentation showed that their children were prepared to succeed in public school. They expressed their gratitude for this. As Rose stated, “I feel like he just did really well. I knew he was more than prepared for kindergarten. I knew he was way beyond ready. He almost could jump up to a first grade class in some ways.” Speaking of her son, Jane concurred, “He’s learning so many new things that are going to benefit him when he gets to school.” Similarly, Tom affirmed his appreciation with the following statement:

I think the approach to learning that is implemented by you is great! I feel this way because my oldest son, T., had you and his [public] kindergarten teacher raved at how prepared T. was when he started school due to the work you did with him. And other students that she had come out of your program that they are just always successful because she feels like they had the right groundwork. “Please thank his 5K teacher for me because he is so prepared emotionally, socially, academically.” So we’ve had positive feedback not only about how we feel about it but from his kindergarten teacher regarding all these learning styles and the things that we’re doing.
Additionally, participants shared how the children’s learning experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom exceeded their expectations. As for her son, Rose reflected, “I think that he overall had an incredible experience last year. It went way above and beyond what I ever expected, and I felt very comfortable with you.” Others shared similar sentiments about their children. According to Jane, “I am absolutely, extremely happy with what I’m seeing, and I think that he’s even grown more than what you are able to show me through documentation.” She continued, “He’s getting more out of it than I would have expected to be honest. He’s blossomed.” Anna agreed, “M. had an amazing and very beneficial year in 5K. The amount of information he learned, the maturity he gained, and the enjoyment with which he experienced this year far exceeded my hopes and dreams.” She further stated, “We were both truly blessed by our experience in 5K.” Moreover, Cora epitomized the correlation between documentation and relationships as she eloquently articulated her sincere appreciation for her daughter’s experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom:

My daughter really flourished in this kindergarten and with your teaching style! She made more progress than I could ever have wished for, and the documentation, right up to the end with the beautiful end-of-the-year scrapbook, is something we’ll always treasure. She really enjoyed going to school each day and never resisted. Your documentation is so much more meaningful to me than any kind of reading level determination based on vocabulary test or nonsense word fluency scores. You truly nourished the whole child, and her growth has been a joy to witness. I wish she could continue with this Reggio Emilia method throughout elementary school.

*Summary.* All participants discussed ways that documentation helped establish relationships with both their children and the teacher. Relationships involved both communication and appreciation. To begin with, participants thought that documentation in-
creased communication between parents, teacher, and children, which led to strong relationships. The documentation enabled the participants to better understand the children’s learning, which in turn supported good communication with the teacher. As participants’ awareness increased, conversations with the teacher not only increased but also were easier. Participants agreed that the documentation made the teacher more approachable, especially if there were any concerns, in order to be more supportive of the children’s learning. The documentation also led to increased communication with the children by the participants. They indicated they were more informed and able to talk to children about their learning at school. Participants also thought that the documentation made the children more open and eager to talk to their families. Through increased conversations with children, participants felt more connected to the children’s learning.

In addition, the participants expressed appreciation for their children’s learning experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Appreciation was important for strong relationships between children, parents, and teacher. Some participants shared general words of gratitude, while others were thankful for more specific things. Appreciation was expressed for allowing them to become valuable partners in the children’s learning. Also, participants were appreciative that their children were prepared to succeed in public school. Others even expressed appreciation for exceeding their expectations for kindergarten. Whether simply stated or articulately detailed, each expression of gratitude was heart-felt and sincere.
**Images of Children**

The final theme that emerged from the data was that documentation fostered positive images of children as well as within children. All participants overwhelmingly attributed these positive images to the Reggio Emilia inspired approach and the multiple types of documentation used in my kindergarten classroom. The three sub-themes identified within this theme include the following: amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy.

**Amazement.** Participants reacted to the use of documentation in their children’s classroom with amazement. They were surprised that kindergarteners could engage in such creative and rigorous expressions of learning. According to Cora, “I knew she was having a good time and learning, but I just didn’t realize that it translated into the kinds of skills that every kindergartener needs.” When speaking of her son’s experience, Anna shared that the most surprising thing to her was “the overall attention to detail that could only have come from consistent and intentional learning in an engaging and memorable way.” She continued, “I was truly astounded at some of the observations and the memory that M. would have about classroom activities.” Jane further emulated this same thought about her son when she said, “I am very proud of D. I am amazed at how he has changed since school started. I am very excited to see how he progresses.”

Others were amazed by individual growth that resulted from children working and learning together. Cora described her amazement as she observed through documentation her daughter interacting with her peers. She said, “It was amazing to witness the genuine love and affection that was fostered among her and her classmates. They became incred-
ibly close, and my daughter learned so much from each of them.” She added, “These were her first friends, though she had had many sweet classmates previously.”

Tom also expressed his surprise when given the opportunity to share in his son’s writing journal. He reflected, “I am impressed and a little surprised with the progress in writing and the number of words I could make out on in his descriptions of his pictures.” Other participants also disclosed their amazement about their children’s writing development. As Edith communicated, “I was amazed that I could make out what M. was writing about. She is clearly connecting sounds to letters. She loves writing and expressing herself.” Edith was proud of her son as well for “using more letters.” She added, “I also love that I can identify some of his drawings.”

Additionally, participants expressed their amazement through their responses to several class books that the children made to represent their learning. After completing a project on signs, the children made a book about the various types of signage that could be found around the school. The book was shared with parents. As Mary stated, “What great pictures! You guys did a great job!” Edith agreed, “Excellent work, 5K! Such smart children!” Tom also shared his amazement. “Wow, 5K! Very nice observations as you went on your walk to look for signs. I’m also very impressed with the beautiful artwork in the book. Great job!” Others were surprised by what they learned from the children’s book. “Smart class! Thank you for teaching me all about the signs,” shared Jane.

This sense of amazement was especially prevalent during the *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum that the children created to represent their learning from their forest animal projects. Parents and family members as well as other children and teachers at
school were invited to the museum so that the kindergarteners could teach them about their animals. As an observer, I overheard many expressions of amazement from parents and family members. Over and over again, I heard parents exclaim, “Wow!” or “Cool!” I also heard comments such as “Great job!” and “Thank you for sharing this information with me.” In particular, Edith’s reaction to the event spoke volumes. She commented, “I can’t believe that my child actually created a life-size painting of an opossum. It’s incredible and so accurate, too. And he knew so many facts. That it has 50 sharp teeth, it’s nocturnal, and plays dead when scared. It just floors me! A five year old!” Tom also shared his astonishment over his son’s deer project. “I was like ‘Man, T., how do you know so much about deer?’ He blew me away! He did really well,” he said. According to him, his son truly became a “deer expert” through learning opportunities such as this.

Excitement. Participants noted the visible presence of excitement within the children in the kindergarten classroom. School was something that the children looked forward to each day. Jane said that her child “wants to go to school everyday and be there.” She added, “He always comes home in a good mood and always wants to go back the next day. For me, that’s huge. It tells me that he’s excited about stuff.” Rose agreed that her son “really enjoys school.” Referring to his son, Tom stated, “I feel like he’s taken a big step this year to try to be more educated and be involved in schooling where like he enjoys going to school.” For Cora, her daughter’s positive attitude each day indicated that she was “happy and excited about learning.” She expressed, “I think this approach worked better for my child than any other she has yet experienced. . . . She went from being resistant about going to school to being happy, motivated, and eager to learn.”
Participants also referenced their children’s excitement when discussing and sharing their learning with them. “D. has literally just blossomed,” said Jane, “It’s like he came out of whatever little shell he might have had. He was excited to learn. He was learning brand new things. He’s excited to show me and he wants me to see it and be a part of it.” Anna added that her son “seems to be excited by and thankful for those moments when others notice his work and are proud of him.” Other participants mentioned that the children’s excitement overflowed to home. Tom commented that his son was “very excited” to share his learning with his family. “When we pick him up, our big thing is always to see what are things we can go over from the day of what he did. And he’s happy to tell us as well. It’s like an excitement to tell us,” he stated. Rose conferred that her son’s excitement for school was evident at home. She said, “He is very excited about what he learns and does enjoy showing his work.” She continued, “H. enjoyed 5K so much. He came home very excited about all of the lessons and activities.” His excitement was apparent through the things “he would want to do at home or the work that he would bring home and show.”

The various forms of documentation used in the classroom provided an ongoing, visible record of learning, thereby making it exciting for the children. As a result, this excitement led to feelings of worthiness and autonomy among the children. Edith shared that while looking through her son’s writing journal with him he noticed some “scribble scrabbles” but also noted “some really good stories, too.” The fact that “he acknowledged that” was something new for her son. “He was taking pride in his work,” she said. Additionally, Jane shared that her son was intrinsically motivated to share his learning by his enthusiasm for school:
He’s always really excited to share with me what he’s learned, but even then he
doesn’t really know that he’s sharing it with me. It’s in the math that he does or
in the way that he says, “Mom, you spell truck, t-r-u-k.” He’s doing it on his own
without having to be asked. He’s volunteering the information. I’m very, very
pleased.

During the recent Actual Size Forest Animal Museum, the children’s excitement
filled the air. It could be felt and heard in ways that were impossible to understand
through the interviews alone. Walking into the room, visitors were enthusiastically
greeted by the children. “Hi! Welcome to the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum! Can I
tell you about my animal?” pleaded one eager kindergartener. As parents and family
members worked their way around the room, children were eager to share what they had
learned with their reports and life-size paintings. In return, the adults listened intently
and shared high fives and hugs with the children to congratulate them on a job well done.
A buzz of excitement permeated throughout the whole observation. Speaking of her
granddaughter’s project about foxes, Mary shared, “She was very excited to show me.
She was very proud of it.” Jane summed up the experience precisely with the following
statement:

   My son is excited to share what he learned about raccoons with others and that
   makes me excited. I even learned a few new things today like raccoons can live
   in trees, under rocks, or on the ground. They climb up and down trees headfirst
   and use their tails to balance. They even use their front paws just like hands!

Self-efficacy. All of the participants indicated that documentation in my kinder-
garten classroom helped to instill images of self-efficacy within the children. When al-
lowed to represent their learning in a multitude of ways, children felt unique and appreci-
ated. As Cora expressed, “You truly make each child feel loved and respected as a
unique individual. You don’t expect kids to fit cookie cutter molds.” She continued,
“We are so blessed to be with you each day and will miss you so much when we go, ready and secure, on to the big school next year.” Other participants further supported this sentiment. Jane agreed that the documentation throughout the year supported a “positive self-image” within her son. “It makes him feel special. I just think that anything that he can be involved in that he has been part of and can share that with his family makes him feel really, really good,” she said, adding, “He’s very proud of those things.”

As a valuable member of a community of learners, Jane believed that her son felt “a little bit more grownup” in the kindergarten classroom. Anna also commented that the documentation made her son “feel really wanted, like people wanted to know what he was doing and how he was doing—just important.” She expressed her thoughts about this:

Whenever someone is taking a picture of you or jotting down what you say or something like that, it makes you feel important, because it’s kind of noted and as well as it all being kind of a gift. So, we would curl up on the couch and look through these photos or sit at the table and read the books, and they were like little presents from his school that we had at home to talk through. It was very subtle, but I do feel like it was a treat and it really made him feel important. It made him feel successful.

Documentation also reaffirmed feelings of significance and worth, especially among children dealing with insecurities and difficulties. Cora noticed “tremendous growth” in her daughter’s “self-confidence and self-awareness,” observing that “she would always brag about things she had mastered and never spoke of any negative experiences—things she can’t do.” She shared the following thoughts about her daughter:

She was always really proud to show off everything that she did. She just really came into her own, feeling secure about who she was. That she was L. Kind of proud of all those little eccentric behaviors that maybe had been discouraged in the past. She just really kind of came into her own and became just a lot happier about who she was and what she could do. It was a lot of positive reinforcement. She just had a lot more confidence.
Furthermore, the kindergarten classroom was a place where all children could leave their problems at the door and be on equal ground. Anna articulated these thoughts concerning her son. “You have comforted and loved my little boy through an incredibly difficult and transitional year in his personal life,” Anna said. “You have made him feel so loved, empowered, and successful. This has been very encouraging to him.”

In addition, participants understood the role that opportunities to share played in developing feelings of value within children. Documentation in the form of projects, learning logs, writing journals, charts, drawings, paintings, photos, and video recordings all created opportunities for the children to share their learning with parents, family members, children, and other adults. As Rose expressed, her son was very proud to share his learning with others. She said, “I think that all the different types of documentation from the journals to the portfolios at the end of the year and the reading and the books helped him to see how much he had done and to be proud of what he had done.” She further commented, “He’s always been real proud to do his best and show it off. . . . He gets real excited about hanging work up and showing people. I think he thinks a lot about learning, and he’s real proud . . . and excited about learning.” Jane agreed that her son was excited to share his work with her. “He wants me to see it and be a part of it. He’s proud of it,” she said. Similarly, Mary believed that her granddaughter was proud of her accomplishments, but thought it was sometimes hard to tell because “to her it’s just natural.” “This is what we do. This is how I learn. I learned how to do this,” she said. She added, “But, yeah, I think she’s proud of what she’s learned. I don’t think she has any problems with confidence when it comes to learning and being able to do things.”
Other participants believed that documentation also promoted feelings of ownership within the children. Speaking of her own children, Edith explained, “It gives them a sense of pride when I sit down with them and let them tell me about what they have done or show me or read something to me, because it’s their work and they do take ownership of it.” She elaborated with a specific example involving her daughter. One day when picking up her children, her daughter was excited to show her the sign that she had made for the newly established school recycling center. Edith recalled, “She had to show me the sign. ‘See, Mommy, this is my sign.’ She was very proud of what she contributes to the classroom.” Additionally, some participants shared that the children’s pride encompassed other learners as they came to respect the significance of community. According to Cora, “I think that L. was always proud to show me the projects that she did at school. My daughter was always proud to show me her classmates’ work as well. She really understood learning as teamwork, a group effort enterprise.”

Moreover, when given opportunities to share their learning with others, young children believed that their contributions to the classroom, the community, and even the world were significant. Kindergarteners came to see themselves as rich, capable, and full of potential as shared by Tom in the following example:

So T. was educating mommy and daddy about the process a caterpillar goes through as they transform to an adult. He remembered so much including the protective shell known as a chrysalis. He was a wealth of knowledge. I asked him how he remembered all that and he said, “Dad, you know I have a big mind!”

Summary. The participants in the research identified varying images of children that were created by using documentation in my kindergarten classroom. These images included amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy. Participant questionnaires, inter-
views, and observations were important factors in identification of these images. Documentation proved to be responsible for supporting positive images of children as well as within them. When shown documentation of children’s learning, parents were amazed at what the young children were capable of doing in a kindergarten classroom. The commitment to documenting the children’s learning in the Reggio Emilia inspired classroom fostered feelings of excitement in the children. Not only did they enjoy coming to school, but also they were eager to share their learning with others in varying ways. Overall, participants believed that the children felt as though their thoughts and ideas were respected which supported feelings of value, worth, and uniqueness regardless of personal circumstances.

Lessons Learned

This qualitative case study sought to understand seven parents’ and a family member’s perspectives of pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia-inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States. The participants in this study were purposefully chosen because they had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Accordingly, the following six themes were identified from the analysis of the data collected throughout this study: perceptions of learning, expectations for kindergarten, understandings of documentation, environment, relationships, and images of children.

The findings from this research revealed the participants’ perceptions of learning in kindergarten, which included descriptions of kindergarten learners, what counts as learning, how children learn, learning styles, and what parents want to know about learn-
ing. Participants envisioned the children as full of potential by describing their various interests and abilities. They also believed that growth in school, excitement for school, and interactions with others counted as learning. They shared various ways that children learn through play, hands-on learning, and interactions with others. In addition, participants agreed that children had many different learning styles, including hands-on, visual, independent, and collaborative learning. Furthermore, participants wanted to be informed about the children’s learning in all areas in order to be supportive.

Other findings specified participants’ expectations that they had for their children while in kindergarten, including academic, social, and emotional. As a private, faith-based kindergarten, many enrolled their children in my class to provide extra time to meet these goals before going to public kindergarten. Academically, participants wanted their children to become proficient in reading, writing, and math in order to be prepared to succeed in public school. Socially, expectations included being able to interact with peers and adjust to change. Emotionally, participants wanted their children to learn how to balance their emotions while also developing independence and confidence.

Additionally, the findings indicated that the participants’ understandings of documentation included both the products of documentation as well as the process involved. Products included physical collections of evidence from the children’s learning as well as written communication and technology. Additionally, the process involved in documentation was equally important to the participants as it showed a complete picture of the children’s learning from beginning to end.

The findings further showed that documentation contributed to the classroom environment. Participants discussed ways that it helped to create a kindergarten environ-
ment that was encouraging, engaging, and informed for both the children and the parents. Participants acknowledged that the overall classroom environment was essential to the children’s learning.

As indicated in the findings from this research, documentation was instrumental to the participants in building relationships with both their children and the teacher by means of communication and appreciation. Participants thought that documentation led to increased communication with both the teacher and the children in various ways. They also expressed appreciation for the children’s learning experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom, which strengthened relationships between children, teacher, and parents.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggested that documentation contributed to positive images of and within children, including amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy. Participants were often amazed by the children’s capabilities. In addition, they expressed that their children were excited to come to school and learn because their thoughts and ideas were valued and respected. Participants also noticed increased images of self-efficacy within the children. Through documentation, children felt rich, capable, and full of potential.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reveal the perspectives regarding pedagogical documentation from seven parents and a family member who had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States. The pedagogical documentation served to make learning visible by children’s interpretive designs of what they learned over the course of a few months. The participants were purposefully chosen because they had children enrolled in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom.

A qualitative research approach using the case study tradition was employed to conduct this study. The central research problem was as follows: How do seven parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States? The following sub-questions were also asked: (a) how does pedagogical documentation help parents and a family member understand children’s learning experiences in kindergarten; (b) how does pedagogical documentation support parental and familial participation in children’s learning experiences; and (c) how does pedagogical documentation promote the rights and potentials of children?
Major Findings

A new direction in research was explored through the perspectives of seven parents and a family member regarding documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in order to fill a gap in the early childhood literature. Through systematic data analysis, as well as the triangulation among data pieces and the literature, research questions were addressed and six major themes were acknowledged. In an effort to identify themes that most accurately portrayed the participants’ understandings and beliefs regarding documentation, the following were distinguished: perceptions of learning, expectations for kindergarten, understandings of documentation, environment, relationships, and images of children. Within each theme, sub-themes were also recognized as recurring. Rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and direct quotes were used to describe the participants’ understandings and beliefs concerning teaching and learning documentation about my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the research questions were answered via a discussion of the major findings within each theme in this final chapter.

Perceptions of Learning

From the onset, parents have assumed a prominent role in the education of young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Days after the end of World War II, it was parents who rallied for a school based on freedom and democracy for the youngest citizens (Barazzoni, 2005, Malaguzzi, 1998a). Today, the schools in Reggio Emilia remain places of close relationships where the children, teachers, and parents are all considered protagonists in the children’s education (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006;
The “active, direct, and explicit participation of parents” is not only welcomed but also essential to the approach (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 19). Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, I, too, regard parents in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom as engaged partners in the educational process. As the children’s first teachers, they can provide valuable insights about their children of which only they are privy (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Thus, the first theme that was identified from the data was parents’ perceptions of kindergarten learning, including the following five sub-themes: descriptions of kindergarten learners, what counts as learning, how children learn, learning styles, and what parents want to know about learning.

Even though there are “hundreds of different images of the child” (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 52), one’s image of the child is purely a social convention of what he or she knows and accepts about the child, directly affecting interactions amongst them (Rinaldi, 2006). In Reggio Emilia, educators embrace the idea of a child that is rich in potential and completely competent with rights from birth as a full member of society. Born equipped to learn, the child actively engages with the world and makes meaning out of it as a co-constructer of knowledge rather than a passive receiver and reproducer of pre-determined objectives (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). As such, the child socially constructs meaning out of life within the learning context of his or her relationships with other children and adults in many different ways using a hundred different languages (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998b). The child is appreciated not only as an individual but also in relation to other children, the family, the teachers, the school environment, the community, and society as a whole. The emphasis on relationships under-
scores a classroom consisting of children with individual interests and abilities (Dewey, 1899; Fu, 2002; Gandini, 1993; Gardner, 1983; Malaguzzi, 1993; Wolfe, 2002). Thus, the hundred languages of children serves as a metaphor for the numerous potentials of children as well as the many different ways with which they think and express themselves (Reggio Children, 2010). Likewise, the participants in this research study shared simple yet profound beliefs that children are rich in capabilities. By focusing on many strengths and interests, they each described their children as smart, eager learners with unlimited potential (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). The children’s hundred languages, including reading, writing, drawing, painting, singing, and other forms of creative expression, were celebrated as participants also expressed love and genuine concern for the children’s well being (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2005c; Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998b; Rinaldi, 2006).

Furthermore, participants shared various ideas about what counted as learning for children in kindergarten. Anna and Edith believed it was the ability to see growth in their children. Additionally, Edith, along with Jane, thought children talking about their day and asking questions counted as learning. Others such as Rose and Tom attributed learning to their children’s excitement and increased interest about school. According to Mary and Cora, children’s experiences playing and interacting with each other were equally important aspects of learning (Bruner, 1960, 1996; Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Gandini, 2004b; Gardner, 1983; Malaguzzi, 1998a, 1998b; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

Equipped with a hundred or more different languages, all children in Reggio schools are taken seriously and valued for their individual, unique contributions to learning (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini et al., 2005; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998b; Reggio Chil-
Similarly, participants in this study described the many different ways in which children learn. Edith and Rose agreed that all children learn differently. Like educators in Reggio Emilia who believe that children learn through physical interactions with the environment, Mary, Tom, Edith, and Jane discussed the many benefits of hands-on learning (Dewey, 1899; Gardner, 1983; Malaguzzi, 1993; Piaget, 1937/1971). Desiring social interactions, children innately pursue opportunities for positive relationships with others (Cadwell et al., 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dewey, 1899; Gandini, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; New, 1998; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). This co-construction of knowledge through play, curiosity, and internal motivation generates creative thinking among the children, teachers, and parents (Bruner, 1960; Cadwell et al., 2005; Dewey, 1899; Gandini, 2004b; Gardner, 1983; Reggio Children, 2010). Consistent with the Reggio philosophy, Cora, Edith, and Anna emphasized the importance of social interactions between children, teacher, and parents for learning.

Additionally, as part of the underlying principles of the approach, the space and environment of the schools in Reggio Emilia are organized in such a way to create a third teacher for the children (Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006). Anna agreed that children learn best in an environment where children feel comfortable and are encouraged to think and express their ideas (Filippini, 2013; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). Furthermore, the Reggio curriculum is not explicitly defined but instead develops from children’s profound questions or hypotheses that emerge within the learning environments. Mary and Edith concurred that children learn best when they are given choices and opportunities to investigate their interests (Bruner, 1960; Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dewey,
Mindful of the hundred languages of children, participants described the different yet individual learning styles of their own children (Gardner, 1983; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a, 1998b). For example, Jane believed her son was a hands-on learner, whereas Tom and Anna both described their children as visual learners. Participants also mentioned the children’s preference for independent or collaborative learning. Most acknowledged the advantages of both and believed that their children worked equally well in either situation.

Malaguzzi (1993) advocated for small group learning consisting of two, three, or four children in order to maximize the classroom for an education based upon relationships. Within small groups, “complex interactions are more likely to occur, constructive conflicts take place, and self-regulatory accommodations emerge” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 11). Like Malaguzzi, Edith and Jane thought their children would reap the most benefits by working with a partner or small group (Lewin-Benham, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1993; Rinaldi, 2006). On the other hand, Rose, Cora, and Anna believed that their children favored working alone if given the chance.

In Reggio Emilia, the children, the teachers, and the parents are thoroughly connected. Together, they are all regarded as stakeholders or protagonists in the educational process and therefore valued in relation to the context of the whole group (Dahlberg & Moss, 2007; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010). Likewise, participants in this study understood their roles as one of the three protagonists in the children’s learning and upheld it very seriously. Generally, they wanted to be informed about the learning that took place each day in my Reggio Emilia inspired classroom. Par-
Participants discussed different aspects about their children at school that they wanted to know such as behavior, academic achievements, and social interactions with peers. Nonetheless, they all believed that being adequately informed enabled them to be supportive of the children’s learning both at school and at home (Dahlberg & Moss, 2007; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010).

*Expectations for Kindergarten*

In Reggio Emilia and throughout Italy, time is treasured and valued; it is not rushed or hurried. This idea transcends into the philosophy of the Reggio educational approach where clocks do not manage the school day. Rather, ample time is provided for children’s ideas to develop naturally and be completed with gratification (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Dewey, 1931; Hendrick, 2004; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Rankin, 2004; Wurm, 2005). Conversely, time in every aspect of American culture is rushed. Schools are no exceptions where time is extremely regulated and scheduled in such a way that children are rushed to perform and achieve at levels that are often developmentally inappropriate (Hendrick, 2004). Frequently parents think that their children are unable to handle the demands and pressures imposed upon them in public schools. In response, many choose to enroll their children in private 5K programs such as mine to give them extra time before starting public school (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). That is exactly what six out of seven participants in this research study chose for their children. This is noteworthy as participants delineated their academic, social, and emotional expectations for their kindergarteners, which became the second theme and corresponding sub-themes identified from the data.
In general, the participants in this study had very specific expectations coming into the kindergarten year. They wanted their children to be developmentally prepared holistically in all areas to be successful in public school, as shared by Tom, Jane, and Edith. Others had more specific expectations. Academically, Mary, Anna, and Tom wanted their children to succeed in areas such as reading, writing, and math. Edith especially wanted her twins to develop a love for reading. Participants such as Jane and Edith also shared that they wanted their children to be academically prepared in order to meet or even exceed kindergarten standards.

Such academic expectations were in direct opposition to the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach. The preschools in Reggio do not enhance “children’s development and preparation for compulsory schooling which includes starting school ‘ready to learn’” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 63). Void of any set expectations, the preschools in Reggio Emilia are not guided by a predefined curriculum but instead depend on the capabilities and resources of children. This concept known as progettazione develops from questions or hypotheses that emerge within the children’s environments, contingent to adjustments and changes of direction as learning progresses (Dewey, 1931; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

Participants also expressed social expectations for their children. Some of these included adjusting to change, making friends, and interacting with peers. Following her recent divorce, Anna especially wanted her son to adjust to a new city and make new friends. Similarly, Cora, Tom, Mary, and Edith all stated that their children’s social interactions with peers were important. Feelings of happiness, security, and connectedness in my kindergarten classroom were included among the participants’ social expectations.
Similarly, the schools in Reggio Emilia have always placed a great deal of importance on fostering a sense of connectedness with the community. From the beginning, the schools were packed up and transported to various places around town once a week in order to gain the trust and respect of the community. As a means to value children’s citizenship, this proved to be an effective way in which to showcase the children’s curiosity, happiness, and visible traces of learning (Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006). The total support and involvement of the entire Reggio community in the schools continues to promote children as fully human and deserving of utmost respect (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fu, 2002; Gandini, 1993). The Reggio philosophy also stresses the importance of strong relationships as fundamental to the approach (Cadwell et al., 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Dewey, 1899; Gandini, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; Reggio Children, 2010; Wolfe, 2002). Therefore, schools provide places for children to interact with others and forge deep relationships necessary for learning (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993).

In addition, participants shared their emotional expectations for kindergarten. Emotionally, Rose and Anna wanted their children to be able to handle change and disappointments. Jane, Cora, and Edith thought emotional maturity would result from children being more independent and confident in their abilities. Mary shared that she wanted her granddaughter to learn ways to balance her emotions and feelings while also being compassionate toward others. As the beginning tenets of citizenship, this prompted dialogues about being a citizen of the classroom. In Reggio, children are understood and recognized as members of society with full rights from birth. They become grounded in their autonomy during the first six years of their lives through experiences at school.
As places of democracy, schools are places for the transmission and creation of culture and values through children’s active relationships with the world (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Dewey, 1899; Rinaldi, 2006). Dialogues with others provide the constant reflection necessary to advance a more democratic existence as well as a more global concept of citizenship (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lanzi, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). Indeed, this is the only way in which the world will ever change.

_Understandings of Documentation_

In Reggio Emilia, pedagogical documentation is fundamental to the daily life of schools (Rinaldi, 2004). It is not only the process of collecting evidence and artifacts of what occurs at school but also the physical collection that leave traces of learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Reggio Children, 2010). More than simply a record of what has happened, pedagogical documentation makes learning visible by providing insight into children’s powerful learning processes. Furthermore, documentation serves as a means of reflection for children, teachers, and in this case, participants in this study. Documentation can include photos, video recordings, audio recordings, transcribed conversations, and children’s artwork as well as the interpretations, provocations, and hypotheses of adults (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; 2005c; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Through the ongoing process, pedagogical documentation “narrates an educational story and weaves together experiences, reflections, debates, theoretical premises, and the social and ethical principles” of all the protagonists (Edwards et al., 1998, p.10).
Pedagogical documentation as a means of reflection gives teachers the opportunity to revisit, reflect, and interpret children’s learning with them in order to open new avenues of inspiration and additional ways to become engaged (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006). As such, the children “become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (Malaguzzi, 1998a, p.70). This is instrumental in the construction of identity as children come to comprehend that they have value and meaning. Furthermore, through continuous self-reflection, documentation challenges teachers to reevaluate their own images of children in order to discover children are competent and rich in potentials (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2005c; Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006). Pedagogical documentation is also an excellent tool that affords parents the opportunity to see aspects of children’s learning that are often unknown (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). Not only does it directly increase parental involvement in the children’s learning, but it also fosters dialogues between parents, teachers, and children as well as strengthens parental understandings concerning the ways in which young children construct knowledge in relation with others (Gandini, 2004b; Katz, 1998).

From analysis of the data set, another theme that emerged was parents’ understandings of documentation as part of my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten-teaching practice. The two identified sub-themes were products and process. Participants characterized documentation as a combination of both the products and process of children’s learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Reggio Children, 2010). For these parents, documentation was a way to show how children construct, process, and organize knowledge while conducting their own research (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards
et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2004b, 2005c; Kaminsky et al., 2004; Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006).

Consistent with the research of Griebling (2011) and Kim and Darling (2009), participants agreed that children’s learning became visible through the concrete collection of products or evidence of the children’s learning. The products mentioned included self-portraits, charts, graphs, portfolios, learning logs, writing journals, class books, and artwork. Specifically, Jane, Edith, and Tom thought that the children’s projects and museum share days were among the important artifacts that made learning visible and reflection possible (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; 2005c; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Written communication in the form of daily or personal notes and weekly newsletters were greatly appreciated by Tom, Cora, Anna, and Edith as ways to be informed. Additionally, the participants’ reflections were coherent with the research of others concerning the exciting potential in the use of technology for documentation of children’s learning (Boardman, 2007; Mitchell, 2007; Trepanier-Street et al., 2001). Participants recognized several different forms of technology used to document the children’s learning, including emails, digital photos, videos, and the Smilebox photo sharing application. Technology truly connected parents to children’s learning in ways not possible through other physical artifacts. As Mary shared, it “tells us where they’ve been, what they’ve been learning, and what they’ve seen.”

Likewise, the participants believed that the process involved in the children’s learning was an equally valuable element of documentation. According to Malaguzzi (1998a), the process of documentation “introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectation” (p. 70). Through rigorous, systematic, and democrat-
ic reflection and interpretation, pedagogical documentation intensified parental understandings concerning the way young children co-construct knowledge with other children and adults (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Similar to findings in previous research, documentation increased parental awareness and provided a better understanding of children’s learning experiences at school (Goldhaber, 2007; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Haigh, 2007; Parnell, 2011). As Cora expressed, the process of documentation provided a window into the learning that took place in the kindergarten classroom on a daily basis (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006).

In addition, participants agreed that there was more to understanding children’s learning than a progress report that showed only bits and pieces. Documentation was a process that depicted the entire progression of learning from start to finish. As an authentic means of assessment, documentation substantiated the intellectual abilities that children possess (MacDonald, 2007; Buldu, 2010; Wien et al., 2011). Participants discussed ways in which the process of learning could be seen through the children’s self-portraits, writing journals, and class books. The diverse learning styles and many languages with which children expressed themselves were also noted (Gardner, 1983; Malaguzzi, 1998a, 1998b). Therefore, pedagogical documentation was valuable to the construction of the children’s identities as it enhanced the vastness and richness of their learning (Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). Documentation fostered images of children as rich, capable, and full of potential among participants (Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2006). Furthermore, the various forms of technology used in the process of documentation, including digital photos, video clips, and the Smilebox photo presentations, were discussed.
Participants concurred that the use of technology provided insight into the children’s learning and growth as well as their interactions with others (Boardman, 2007; Mitchell, 2007; Trepanier-Street et al., 2001). Overall, documentation as both product and process enabled parents to understand children’s learning experiences in kindergarten (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; 2005c; Kaminisky et al., 2004; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

Environment

Educators in Reggio Emilia aim to create an “amiable school . . . that is active, inventive, livable, documentable, and communicative. . . . where children, teachers, and families feel a sense of well-being” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 9). To achieve this, the space and environment of the schools are organized in such a way to bring together and strengthen the relationships among the children, teachers, and parents in order to create a third teacher for the children (Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993). True to this Reggio principle, the theme of environment was also identified through analysis of the multiple sources of data used in this case study. Participants described a classroom environment that was encouraging, engaging, and informed (Cadwell, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; New, 1990; Reggio Children, 2010; Wurm, 2005). Examples of each emerged during participant interviews and observations of the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum. They recognized the correlation between documentation of the children’s learning and the overall classroom environment.

The environment was first described as encouraging. As noted by Anna, Rose, Cora, and Jane, the environment was a safe, nurturing, and encouraging place for their
children to grow and learn due to the Reggio Emilia-inspired approach and the visible documentation of learning. This further created an environment where all ideas and thoughts were genuinely accepted. Participants like Tom and Edith believed that an environment in which children were encouraged to work together made them feel like valuable and contributing members of a group. Additionally, as Anna and Mary shared, the encouraging environment created through documentation of learning empowered children confronting adversity in their personal lives. The children had a relationship among the group, a co-existence, which created a cultural environment. The classroom became a place where the children had courage to be themselves and was permeated with communicating, questioning, inquiring, as well as developing notions of math, science, reading, and social studies (Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Malaguzzi 1993, 1998a; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006).

The participants also discussed ways that documentation created an engaging environment for children and parents. They believed that the documentation that was displayed throughout the classroom made it a welcoming place where children were encouraged to express their thoughts in a variety of acceptable ways. Anna talked about the classroom’s open door policy, which gave parents the freedom to come into the classroom at anytime. Jane believed that this policy made the children’s learning more authentic to the participants. Additionally, participants thought that this sense of openness fostered communication with the teacher (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Katz, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006).

The participants reported that documentation in the kindergarten classroom allowed them to become more involved and interested in their child’s learning. This was
especially evident during the *Actual Size* Forest Animal Museum. Moreover, the participants indicated that documentation created an environment where the children were engaged in meaningful learning experiences that complemented their learning styles and challenged others as they implemented the hundred languages. Similar to other research studies, participants described examples of children’s projects across content areas that derived from their natural inquiries (Christensen et al., 2006; Inan et al., 2010; Stegelin, 2003). Furthermore, documentation educated parents about the many ways children learn as well as appropriate ways to support learning at home (Buldu, 2010). This included meaningful conversations with children about learning through enrichment opportunities at home and local places of interest to support their inquiries. This in turn added another level of reflection for children and parents to jointly consider the ways in which learning occurred. Moreover, as the teacher, it provoked my own reflections into the ways children and parents contemplate learning (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2004b, 2005c; Goldhaber, 2007; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Haigh, 2007; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Parnell, 2011; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006).

In addition, participants indicated that both the product and process of documentation created a classroom environment in which they were informed as a part of the educational practice. For Edith documentation provided a more detailed understanding of her children’s learning. As a result, she felt better prepared for parent-teacher conferences when they occurred. According to others like Anna and Cora, documentation eased concerns so that they were never wondering or apprehensive about any part of their children’s learning at school. The environment allowed parents to be informed and feel connected to the children’s learning even though they were not able to be there as much.
Overall, participants expressed appreciation for an environment in which they were knowledgeable and able to converse through the process of the documentation of the learning process (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2004b, 2005c; Kaminsky et al., 2004; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006).

*Relationships*

As the “fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system,” relationships are central to the Reggio Emilia approach (Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10). Educators in Reggio Emilia put theory into practice by nurturing social relationships among children and adults “in substantive and emotionally supportive ways” (New, 1997, p. 225). Upholding this same principle, participants identified relationships as another theme that occurred in this research. They discussed ways that documentation enhanced relationships through increased communication between children, teacher, and parents as well as through words of appreciation.

Through relationships, pedagogical documentation promotes dialogues among the protagonists for reflection and creation of meaning (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fyfe et al., 2004; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006). Additionally, the context for every relationship in Reggio Emilia is based upon active listening between children, adults, and the environment and supported by pedagogical documentation in the schools (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2001, 2006). Likewise, participants in this research study indicated that documentation led to more communication, which included both dialogue and listening, among and between children, teacher, and parents. A similar study by Goldhaber and Smith
(1997) shared teachers’ voices concerning documentation as a way to promote collaboration and communication between children, teachers, and parents. The difference for this research, however, was the focus on parents’ understandings. As such, documentation enabled the participants to better understand the children’s learning, which also supported good communication with the teacher. Participants additionally thought that documentation increased opportunities to engage in conversations with the teacher. Specifically, Rose, Cora, and Anna believed that documentation made it easier to approach the teacher and address any and all concerns. Participants further believed that increased communication with the teacher via documentation enabled them to be more supportive of the children’s learning.

In addition, documentation led to participants’ increased communication with the children. They indicated they were more informed and able to talk to children about their learning at school. As Tom shared, he had specific things about which to talk to his son, because he knew exactly what happened at school each day. Acting as a springboard, documentation engaged participants in more detailed conversations with their children concerning their learning at school. They also believed that children were more open and eager to talk to their parents and families due to documentation. As children shared more, participants were truly amazed by children’s potentials and capabilities. This was particularly noticeable during my observation of the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum. As the children engaged in active communication with their parents and families, participants like Jane and Mary shared astonishment about what the children learned about the various forest animals. Participants indicated that increased conversations and active listening with both the children and the teacher enabled them to be more connected to the
children’s learning. Thus, they believed that they were important partners in their children’s learning in kindergarten. This was consistent with research by Christensen et al. (2006) who found that parental involvement intensified when a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, which included documentation, was implemented in the classroom.

Furthermore, participants expressed sincere appreciation for their children’s learning experiences in my Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. Their appreciation went a long way to strengthen relationships between children, parents, and teacher. Some like Jane, Tom, and Edith shared general words of gratitude; however, others were thankful for more specific things. Among these, thankfulness was expressed for regular documentation and being included as valuable partners in the children’s learning. Rose, Jane, Mary, and Tom expressed appreciation for preparing their children to succeed in public school. Others such as Anna and Cora were appreciative for exceeding their expectations for kindergarten. As a result, each genuine expression of gratitude strengthened relationships among all of the protagonists (Cadwell et al., 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Malaguzzi, 1993).

*Images of Children*

 Even though the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach are indissolubly linked, at the pinnacle is the image of the child who is “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10). It is this belief upon which everything else revolves (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Gandini, 1993; Lewin-Benham, 2006). Similarly, the final theme, images of children, was prominently based on the data. The participants in the study identified several different images
of children that emerged from the use of documentation in the kindergarten classroom. These included amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy. Participant interviews and classroom observation were equally important factors in identification of these images. Findings indicated that documentation fostered positive images of children as well as within them (Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006). In Reggio Emilia, the notion of the image of child is continually reimaged as it is connected and reconnected to more contexts creating cultural diversities that lead to children seeing themselves as capable (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

The participants were frequently amazed by the young children’s capabilities that translated into creative and rigorous expressions of learning. This sense of amazement was especially noticeable during the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum that the children created to represent their learning from their forest animal projects. For example, Tom said his son knew so many facts about deer that he was a “deer expert.” Participants also thought that the children were excited about school and learning because of the documentation process. According to all participants, school was an exciting, happy place that the children enjoyed coming to each day. Children were also eager to share their learning with others in varying ways, including museum share days. In addition, participants believed that documentation helped nurture images of self-efficacy within the children. Participants expressed that the children felt as if their thoughts and idea were respected in the classroom, which further supported feelings of value, worth, and uniqueness. As Cora shared, none of these images could possibly be measured by a standardized test. Therefore, the participants’ images promoted the undeniable rights and unlimited poten-
tials of their children (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malaguzzi, 1993; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

Prior research studies strongly supported documentation as a way to inform curriculum and change school culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Given et al., 2010; Krechevsky et al., 2010; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Moran et al., 2007). All of these studies had similar findings with those presented in this study. However, the main difference was that the participants were parents and a family member. The aforementioned studies all represented the perspectives of educators whereas this study presented the voices of parents and a family member. Overall, findings from this research indicated that the participants’ understandings of pedagogical documentation in my Reggio Emilia inspired classroom were positive and favorable. Documentation provided evidence of the children’s learning to the participants and also improved relationships with the teacher and children. They discussed ways that it involved them in the total learning experiences of the children, thereby leading to a greater understanding. Moreover, the findings showed that the participants thought documentation was a natural way to make learning visible by providing insight into the children’s development and learning processes in kindergarten (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini, 2004b, 2005c; Kaminsky et al., 2004; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004, 2006).

Implications for Practice

Although the Reggio Emilia approach is contextually bound and not a replicative model, educators in Reggio Emilia believe that all children regardless of culture share a common gift of potential and competency (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al.,
Therefore, the tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach are certainly transferable into other educational settings (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Lewin-Benham, 2006, 2008; New, 1997, 1998). Educators in Reggio Emilia challenge other educators, parents, policy makers, and community members to reflect upon their own ideas about children in order to advocate for a new image in which children are portrayed as plentiful in potential and competencies (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Bredekamp, 1993; Gandini, 2004b; Lanzi, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1998a; New, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006).

This qualitative case study was conducted to explore the perspectives of seven parents and a family member in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom regarding pedagogical documentation that served as making learning visible by children’s interpretive designs in a southeastern state of the United States. Due to its qualitative design and small number of participants, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to other settings but may be relevant and transferable to those with like characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping this in mind, there were several implications for practice that emerged from this study. It is believed that the results of this research will evoke new ways of thinking about pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired settings that will positively influence teachers, parents, and children.

Teachers will benefit as they reflect on their teaching practices and enter into more collaboration with colleagues, parents, and students. They will be better prepared to understand and share ways that children construct knowledge. Reflecting on documentation in a Reggio inspired classroom, teachers will be better able to understand the importance of context in relation to identity development. Teachers may also consider
more long-term projects with students and even looping with their class for several years to strengthen the documentation of their students’ learning and progress over time. In addition, teachers will benefit from dialogue and listening conferences with children as well as other colleagues. By and large, what is learned about documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom has potential to inform and spur new ideas for teachers regarding their curriculum practice. Particularly in the age of high stakes testing, documentation provides educators with important information about children’s learning that cannot possibly be measured through decontextualized evaluation tools. Teachers will gain immeasurable insights through their observations and documentation of their students’ learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini, 1993, 2004b; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2004, 2006).

Documentation of children’s learning can be used to provoke parents to think about children from a different perspective and to observe their many complexities and abilities. Once aware of the powerful thoughts, ideas, and feelings of children through documentation, perhaps parents will be inspired to advocate for change within the public schools. With children’s learning made visible to parents and families, this could result in greater parental support at school. This research provides multiple ways to involve parents and families in children’s learning as they enter into important reciprocal relationships with both children and teachers, thereby leading to increased communication and connection between them all (Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini, 1993, 2004b, 2005b; Katz, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998a; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).
The children will also benefit from this study. Through documentation, they are celebrated and seen as competent and capable. Additionally, it gives children multiple ways to represent learning through differentiated instruction and assessment. This could have enormous benefits for students that are English Language Learners (ELL) as well as students with special needs, too, as each child is valued for their potentials rather than deficiencies. Moreover, children could benefit from the positive impact of documentation as an alternative and more authentic way to represent learning in an age of skills-based learning and standardized testing. Documentation of learning through a multitude of mediums can provide compelling evidence to the public of their abilities that would otherwise be immeasurable through any other means (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 1998; Fraser, 2000; Gandini et al., 2005; Katz, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 1998, 2006).

Insights

In the United States, the debate continues concerning what actually counts and what does not as evidence of young children’s learning. Among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and policy-makers, there are many diverse opinions about the best ways to support and assess learning. Policy-makers often perceive assessment as a means to enforce accountability. This has resulted in an abundance of decontextualized evaluation tools in the form of high stakes testing to measure children’s abilities (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Casbergue, 2010/2011; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Seidel, 2001, 2008). However, those who engage in children’s actual learning experiences, such as educators and parents, tend to assess learning according to what children are able to do at different points in
their development. As such, assessment is more of an ongoing, strategic, and purposeful process that includes observation, portfolios, and documentation of learning within children’s natural settings along the process of learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009; Cas-bergue, 2010/2011). Yet, for more than 20 years, the drive for scientific, quantitative validity in the United States continues to trump more authentic forms of assessment. Children are all subjected to one shot testing over the course of several days regardless of circumstances. This is the common socially accepted present measure of learning in the United States.

Over the past several years, I have studied, embraced, and been inspired by the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach while also tailoring it to fit within my own context (Cadwell, 1997, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Hendrick, 2004; Lewin-Benham, 2006, 2008; New, 1997, 1998). Although all principles of the approach are interwoven, pedagogical documentation as both a process and product has been of special interest to me as I struggle with the push towards standardized testing for assessment in early childhood education knowing in my heart that it is developmentally inappropriate for young learners. Pedagogical documentation functions as a “tool for opening up a critical and reflective practice challenging dominant discourses and constructing counter-discourses, through which we can find alternatives pedagogies” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 152).

When the participants in this study became protagonists in the learning journey that took place in my kindergarten over a course of a year, they had no prior knowledge of Reggio Emilia, Italy, much less the history or fundamental principles surrounding one of the finest examples of high quality early childhood education in the world (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991; Katz, 1998; Lewin-Benham, 2008). Nevertheless,
they were supportive and accepting of the learning that took place on a daily basis in my classroom. From the very beginning, they viewed their children as rich, capable, and full of potential while further expanding this image over time. As valued partners in the learning process, they came to understand that knowledge is socially constructed through authentic learning experiences with others and expressed through the children’s many different languages (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Reggio Children, 2010).

Specifically, participants came to regard pedagogical documentation as an authentic form of assessment that values the processes and procedures of children (Reggio Children, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004). Over time, the different types of documentation that were implemented presented a comprehensive representation of children’s learning for participants. They truly comprehended that documentation entailed more than checkmarks found on periodic progress reports. Participants came to expect and appreciate documentation as part of their children’s learning in my classroom. Moreover, documentation supported the development of democratic education through an inquiry approach that informed teaching, extended learning, and offered viable alternatives in assessment. This enabled children to become citizens who think critically, regard good teaching, and participate in meaningful discourses essential for democracy (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006).

The Reggio Emilia inspired approach challenges teachers, parents, and community members alike to reevaluate their images of children using a critical lens (Bredekamp, 1993; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gandini, 2004b; Lanzi, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1998a; New, 1997, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). Equipped with knowledge gained from their experience in my
Reggio inspired class, I believe that pedagogical documentation generated new ways of thinking for these participants about children’s learning and knowledge construction as well as core issues prevalent early childhood education. As a result, they are better positioned to advocate on behalf of all children by provoking, informing, and empowering policy-makers in order to make a difference in the lives of young children (Dahlberg et al., 2007; New, 1997). Considering every aspect of the Reggio philosophy is thoroughly reflected, discussed, and refined, pedagogical documentation can be compelling assessment of children’s learning (Rinaldi, 2006; Seidel, 2001, 2008). It provides “a way to communicate the depths of children’s learning experiences to those who expect or mandate specific learning outcomes for young children” (Kaminsky, 2006, p.22). Ultimately, as authentic assessment, pedagogical documentation respects the rights and potentials of young learners everywhere by challenging “conformist practices and oppressive relationships” to reconceptualize early childhood education (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 84).

Recommendations for Future Research

To further understand documentation in Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms, there are several recommendations for future research. To begin with, the participants in this study all were Caucasian of middle socioeconomic status. Even though the findings from this study may be transferable to similar contexts, future research should be conducted to include more racially diverse parents. In addition, future research should be conducted to understand the implications of documentation for parents with low socioeconomic status. Research to understand the perceptions of parents of English language learners should also be conducted. It would be especially interesting and informative to see how docu-
mentation influences home to school partnerships with these parents. Furthermore, this study was conducted at the beginning of the school year. Three of the participants had children in my class the previous school year and had been immersed in the Reggio Emilia inspired approach for an entire year. The other four participants only had four months exposure to the Reggio Emilia inspired approach at the time of research. Future research to compare parents’ understandings of documentation at the beginning of the year to their understandings at the end of the year could potentially provide great insight into the power of teaching and learning documentation.

The present study was conducted in a kindergarten in a private, faith-based early learning center. Future research should be conducted to understand parents’ perceptions of documentation in a public school kindergarten where there are many more pressures to meet state and federally mandated standards. Additionally, future research could examine families’ understanding of documentation in other public early elementary classrooms such as first, second, and third grades.

Most of the previous research conducted on pedagogical documentation has been done to understand teachers’ perspectives while only a handful have been done to understand parents’ perspectives. Even fewer, if any, have sought to understand children’s perspectives of documentation on their own learning in a Reggio Emilia inspired classroom. Therefore, future research should also be conducted to include the perspectives of children themselves regarding teaching and learning documentation.
Summary

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the major findings from this research. These corresponded with the data that was analyzed and described in Chapter 4 through themes. As a result, implications for transferability, insights, and recommendations for future research were detailed.

Providing a minimally researched perspective, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to reveal the understandings of seven parents and a family member in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom regarding pedagogical documentation that served as making learning visible by children’s interpretive designs in a southeastern state of the United States. The participants were purposefully chosen because they had children in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom. The following research problem guided my research: How do seven parents and a family member characterize pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States? The following sub-questions were also asked: (a) how does pedagogical documentation help parents and a family member understand children’s learning experiences in kindergarten; (b) how does pedagogical documentation support parental and familial participation in children’s learning experiences; and (c) how does pedagogical documentation promote the rights and potentials of children?

Six themes were identified through data analysis and triangulation of multiple sources of data. These themes included perceptions of learning, expectations for kindergarten, understandings of documentation, environment, relationships, and images of children. The themes helped to answer the research questions that framed this study. It was concluded that the participants’ understanding of documentation in my Reggio Emilia
inspired kindergarten class were positive and favorable. They characterized documentation as a combination of both the products as well as the process of children’s learning. For these participants, it was a way to show how children acquire, process, and organize knowledge through authentic learning experiences. The participants in this research overwhelmingly suggested that documentation enabled them to have a better understanding of their children’s learning experiences at school. As such, it promoted dialogues with their children and the teacher. By presenting an all-encompassing picture, documentation was eye opening to the participants. Children’s learning was more than a grade on a progress report; it was a process that showed the participants the entire progress from start to finish.

The participants also discussed ways that documentation created an encouraging, engaging, and informed environment for parents and families. An open door policy allowed parents to come into the classroom at anytime, making the children’s learning more authentic to participants. Participants also indicated that they felt more involved in their children’s learning through project share days such as the Actual Size Forest Animal Museum. Documentation educated the parents about the many ways that children learn as well as ways to support learning at home. This included meaningful conversations with their children about their learning as well as enrichment opportunities to support their interests and inquiries. As a result, participants felt like important partners in their children’s learning.

Furthermore, participants recognized several images of children such as amazement, excitement, and self-efficacy. They believed that documentation supported positive images of children as well as within them. When shown documentation of children’s
learning, parents were amazed by the capabilities that the young learners possessed. Participants expressed that children believed their thoughts and ideas were genuinely respected in the classroom, supporting feelings of value, worth, and uniqueness. None of these images could possibly be measured by a standardized test. The findings in this study suggested that parents’ images of children promote the undeniable rights and unlimited potentials of children.

From humble beginnings driven by hope for the future came an amazing legacy that remains an exemplary example of high quality early childhood education. One of the most valuable lessons that can be learned from Reggio Emilia is what can happen when parents advocate for a better quality of life for children. Through the systematic documentation of learning, the schools in Reggio Emilia are “places where children’s voices can be heard, respected, and shared with the wider community” (Krechevsky & Mardell, 2001, p. 293). Thus, the artifacts created through pedagogical documentation become the culture of the school. As such, “schools do not merely reflect the surrounding culture, they re-elaborate and develop that culture. In this view, learning groups not only transmit culture and knowledge, they create them” (Krechevsky & Mardell, 2001, p. 294).

It is my hope that this study provided a much needed perspective about the power of pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten setting as authentic assessment of children’s learning that has evoked fresh thinking about important issues in early childhood education. In turn, perhaps what has been learned will foster a culture in American schools in which the flames of individual strengths, potentials, and capabilities are fanned and not squelched. Pedagogical documentation respects children as valuable members of society by giving them choice, voice, and opportunities to con-
struct meaning of the world with others while also sparking a lifetime of curiosity, learning, and democracy (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). As Cora said best, “Your documentation is so much more meaningful to me than any kind of reading level determination based on vocabulary test or nonsense word fluency scores.” She further added, “You truly nourished the whole child, and her growth has been a joy to witness. I wish she could continue with this Reggio Emilia method throughout elementary school.”
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM
Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB’s Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: WHETSTONE, MELISSA G
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X120725007
Protocol Title: Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parent’s Descriptions of Documentation

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 8-7-12. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB’s Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.
IRB Approval Date: 8-7-12
Date IRB Approval Issued: 8-7-12

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.
Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA0000057006 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: WHETSTONE, MELISSA G
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X120725007
Protocol Title: Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parent's Descriptions of Documentation

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 7-24-13. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.
IRB Approval Date: 7-24-13
Date IRB Approval Issued: 7-24-13
IRB Approval No Longer Valid On: July 24, 2014

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:
The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER
Participant Recruitment Letter

August 28, 2012

Dear Family Member,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This study partially fulfills the requirements to finish the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood education. My study is titled “Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parents’ Descriptions of Documentation” (Protocol X120725007). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore parents’ perspectives about teaching and learning through documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States.

Data collection will be conducted from August 2012 to December 2012. You are invited to participate because I believe that you have valuable information and insight that will contribute to my study. All parents in my current classroom as well as last year’s classroom have been chosen to participate. The first seven that respond will be included in the study. At the beginning of the research, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which may take up to 45 minutes and return it to me via email, mail, or in your child’s daily take-home folder within 2 weeks of receiving it. You will also be asked to participate in an audio recorded, face-to-face interview with me that will last approximately 45 minutes. You will be asked open-ended questions to clarify your perspectives of teaching and learning documentation from your child’s kindergarten classroom. Prior to the interview, you will receive a copy of the open-ended questions to give you time to gather your thoughts and reflect on your answers. You may be also be asked to participate in a focus group interview, which may last up to one hour. Additionally, during classroom events to showcase the students’ learning through documentation, I may observe your interaction with the children.

Although you may not benefit directly from taking part in this study, your participation may help educators and parents better understand documentation as a form of assessment for young children’s learning as part of regular classroom practice. Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your choice to leave this study will in no way affect your relationship with your child’s preschool, my institution, or me.

If you volunteer to participate, confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your name or any other identifying information will not be used in the study. Instead, I will use a coded name for you. Minimal risks include the potential for the loss of confidentiality. All documents related to this study will be kept on a password protected laptop computer or in a locked cabinet. After the study is completed, all documents will be destroyed.
All data collected will be used solely for the purpose of this study. Findings may be published or presented at educational meetings. Students, faculty, and parents may also receive the results. However, no individual participant will be identified or identifiable in any publication or presentation.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me by email, mgwhet@uab.edu, or phone, (205) 381-5318. Furthermore, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all other calls” or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

Thank you for your time and consideration for participating in this study. If you would like to participate in this study, please let me know by Friday, September 7, 2012, in writing or email. I look forward to hearing from you soon and beginning this exciting project.

Sincerely,

Melissa Whetstone, mgwhet@uab.edu
Principal Investigator
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE
Parent Questionnaire

Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parents’ Descriptions of Documentation

1. Tell me about your child. What is s/he like?
2. What do you as a parent know that would be important for me to know?
3. What are your child’s interests?
4. How do you see your child as a reader, a learner, and as a person?
5. What are your expectations for your child in kindergarten?
6. What does your child tell you about his/her day at school?
7. Describe ways that your child talks about the things that s/he has learned at school at home.
8. Does your child talk about ways in which his/her ideas are accepted by others (students and the teacher) in the classroom? To what extent? Please provide specific examples.
9. Do you think your child works best alone, with partners, or in a group? Does your child discuss this at home? Please provide specific examples.
10. What do you think about the approach to learning that is implemented in this classroom?
11. Tell me about any new or surprising things that your child has taught you from what s/he has learned at school.
12. What types of learning materials at school does your child talk about at home that you think have contributed to his/her learning process?
13. Is there any other information that you would like to know about your child in school?
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parents’ Descriptions of Documentation

Time of Interview: ______________________________
Date: _______________________________________
Interviewer: __________________________________
Interviewee: ___________________________________
Position of Interviewee: _________________________

Introduction:
(Participant name), I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. What you have to say is very important, and I don’t want to miss anything. Given this, I would like to tape record this session. Please know that you are free to ask me to stop the tape at any point during this session. As stated in the recruitment letter, I am conducting a qualitative case study for a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This study partially fulfills the requirements to finish the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood education. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore parents’ perspectives of teaching and learning documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States.

Throughout this study, documentation will be defined as both an ongoing process as well as important content learning in that process. The content refers to concrete materials in the form of notes, photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, computer graphics, and examples of children’s work that makes learning visible. Children are able to reflect upon what they have learned and what others learned through the documentation. The process refers to using the materials as a means of reflection for teachers, children, and families regarding how children’s learning processes and potentials are a different set of expectations than state standards. In addition to tape recording this session, I will also be taking notes. I will transcribe the audiotapes in their entirety for review. As noted in the recruitment letter, your name will not be used in any written documents. Instead, I will use a coded name for you. You will be able to read the transcribed interview once it is done and change anything that you wish to change or add anything that you wish to add.

Questions:
Icebreaker #1: Tell me a little about yourself. Probe for hometown, age, education, profession, interests, and family situation.

Icebreaker #2: Tell me about your child. Probe for characteristics, likes/dislikes, and learning style.
1. What are your expectations for your child in kindergarten?
   Probe for social, emotional, and academic expectations.

2. What do you want to know about your child’s school experiences?

3. What are your beliefs about how children learn?
   Probe: What counts as children’s learning?

4. What does the documentation of learning look like in your child’s classroom? For instance,
   Probe for use, types, and specific examples.

5. How has documentation contributed to your child’s learning in general?
   Probe for observations of improvement in child’s learning.

6. Describe how you think that documentation is useful as a way to measure your child’s learning and progress in kindergarten.
   Probe: What have been the contributions of documentation to your thoughts regarding the assessment of your child’s learning? Do you think it is a useful tool for teachers to communicate child’s learning with families?

7. How does documentation contribute to your child’s thoughts about his/her identity?
   Probe for child’s interest, motivation, and engagement during the documentation process.

8. How has documentation helped you to talk with your child about his/her learning?

9. How has documentation helped you to talk with the teacher about your child’s learning?

10. Is there anything that I have not asked that you think that I should know?

Thank you for your time. May I meet with you again in the next several weeks if I need to clarify anything? Please be assured that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the reporting process.
APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

PROTOCOL
Focus Group Interview Protocol

Visible Learning in a Reggio Emilia Inspired Kindergarten: Parents’ Descriptions of Documentation

Time of Interview: ________________________________
Date: _________________________________________
Interviewer: _____________________________________
Interviewee: ______________________________________
Position of Interviewee: _____________________________

Introduction:
(Participant name), I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today as part of this focus group. What you have to say is very important, and I don’t want to miss anything. Given this, I would like to tape record this session. Please know that you are free to ask me to stop the tape at any point during this session. As stated in the recruitment letter, I am conducting a qualitative case study for a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This study partially fulfills the requirements to finish the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood education. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore parents’ perspectives of teaching and learning documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired kindergarten classroom in a southeastern state of the United States.

Throughout this study, documentation will be defined as both an ongoing process as well as important content learning in that process. The content refers to concrete materials in the form of notes, photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, computer graphics, and examples of children’s work that makes learning visible. Children are able to reflect upon what they have learned and what others learned through the documentation. The process refers to using the materials as a means of reflection for teachers, children, and families regarding how children’s learning processes and potentials are different of set expectations than state standards. In addition to tape recording this session, I will also be taking notes. I will transcribe the audiotapes in their entirety for review. As noted in the recruitment letter, your name will not be used in any written documents. Instead, I will use a coded name for you. You will be able to read the transcribed interview once it is done and change anything that you wish to change or add anything that you wish to add.

1. In the past three months that your child has been in kindergarten, what have you learned through his/her documentation as a part of learning?
2. What have you learned about your child through the documentation of his/her learning?
3. Which subjects do you think show the most progress from documentation?
4. Explain some ways that you think documentation informs learning.
5. Explain some ways that you think documentation informs curriculum.
6. How does documentation create ways for children to reflect on what they have learned at school?
7. How do you think documentation assists me as your child’s teacher to assess his/her abilities, identify gaps in learning, and plan for future learning?
8. Do you have anything else to add?