

MASTER OF EDUCATION THESIS DEFENSE

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Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education in Three Childcare Centres on Prince Edward Island

ABSTRACT

This research is a situational, interpretative case study of three childcare centres in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, which are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. This study investigates how these centres came to be inspired by the Reggio principles, the benefits and/or challenges they have encountered in the process, the future goals these centres have for their programs, and the support the centres need to continue implementing the Reggio Emilia pedagogy. Was it worth all the effort to change their former way of teaching? Would the benefits to the children outweigh the challenges involved in implementing the Reggio approach? Could this pedagogy be localized to Prince Edward Island; and, if so, with what results? This study has been inspired by my own personal commitment to the Reggio Emilia principles. Additionally, I had a keen interest to extend the extensive literature regarding the localization of the Reggio approach in other countries and cultural contexts, to Prince Edward Island. Four interviews were conducted with supervisors, early childhood educators, and parents from each of the three centres (a total of twelve interviews). Twenty hours of observations were also undertaken in each of the centres (a total of sixty hours). This data was analysed, using situational, interpretive case study, in the light of both the existing literature about the Reggio Emilia approach, and the author's personal journal, which was kept while attending a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in April 2010. Findings from this research indicate that, although the process of becoming Reggio inspired has not always been smooth, the three centres are implementing the Reggio principles according to the needs of their children and their own cultural context. The three centres are practicing the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Supervisors and educators have a positive image of the child. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning, while educators are trying to get them more actively involved in their centre. Educators are working more collaboratively to co-construct their children's learning. Children's learning is being made visible through documentation, and all three centres are using the environment as a means of enhancing this learning. This research also identifies a number of challenges that these centres faced in the process of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood learning. These include: overcoming initial educators' fears, apprehensions, and self-doubts; time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning; and convincing parents that their children are learning nevertheless through play. As a result of this research, the study also offers a number of considerations for future research, and some suggestions and recommendations to all stakeholders involved, including policy makers.