Walden University
ScholarWorks

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection

2021

Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

Brandon Harris Gantt
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

 Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Pre-Elementary, Early Childhood, Kindergarten Teacher Education Commons

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Brandon Gantt

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Amy White, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Suzanne Wesson, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Donald Yarosz, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

by

Brandon Gantt

MEd, Southern Wesleyan, 2016

MBA, Walden University, 2012

BS, Newberry College, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2021

Abstract

Preschools provide a method of early intervention to prepare children for school. Reggio Emilia (RE) curricular approach widely used for early childhood education that has not consistently shown a positive influence on cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children. It is also unknown whether those who participate in the RE curricular approach perceive it to foster cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory case study was to investigate participant-perceived benefits of RE as a curricular approach. The conceptual grounding of the study was social constructivism because the RE curricular approach emphasizes the importance of the environment to the growth and development of children. The research questions explored the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the RE approach, as well as the experiences within the RE curricular approach that may prepare children for primary and elementary schooling. Interviews with twenty-one participants and observations at 3 childcare centers in a southern state helped to determine whether participants perceived the RE approach as preparing children for elementary school. The open coding process yielded themes of benefits of the RE approach, social and emotional benefits, the acquisition of essential skills for schools, and collaboration and indicated that parents, educators, and school leaders felt that the RE approach was beneficial for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. The findings may provide a shift in early childhood pedagogy that incorporates areas of the social constructivist approach found to have perceived positive effects on the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of children, leading to social change.

Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

by

Brandon Gantt

MEd, Southern Wesleyan, 2016

MBA, Walden University, 2012

BS, Newberry College, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2021

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who believed in me and encouraged me to reach for the stars. To my mother, Cynthia Gantt, who taught me to believe in myself. To my father, Thomas Roberts, who taught me strength, determination, and hard work. To my children, Lola, Ava, Nora, and Eliza, who I wake up every morning for. Nothing is greater than the works that we do for each other. To my brother, Tony, and my sister, Sharina, for supporting me in all circumstances. To my family, including nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts, and grandparents, for raising me up through prayers and love. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my wife, Beatriz Christina Gantt, who, in her own way, inspires me to be the best man I can be, to stand up for our family. She has been with me every step of this journey, and I love her dearly.

Acknowledgments

In my second year in undergrad, I sat across from Dr. Cindy Van Buran, and we spoke about the influence that educators can have on the lives of children. That conversation propelled me to dedicate my life to education. Dr. Glenna Zeak and Dr. Cathy Mitchell both helped continue to nurture my love for education and my love for children as they mentored me to be an educator of children and not simply a teacher. Thank you to all the professors at Walden who helped me develop into the researcher that I have become. To my chair, Dr. Amy White, who was willing to fight for me and motivate me to do the best work that I could do. To my second chair, Dr. Suzanne Wesson, thank you for your guidance and support. To all my friends who have encouraged me throughout this entire process, thank you. Thank you to all the parents, teachers, and school leaders who participated in this study and were willing to give me their time to tell me about their experiences with regards to Reggio Emilia. And to Loris Malaguzzi and the community of educators who developed the social constructivist approach of Reggio Emilia.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since the 19th century, the United States has used early childhood centers or preschools to provide early-childhood-aged children an environment in which to learn and grow (Wilinski, 2017). Research has shown that children who are exposed to early childhood or preschool programs gain several cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that they would not otherwise receive (Ansari, 2018; Campbell et al., 2018; Williams, 2019). Although the benefits of widely used early childhood programs were well researched, Lipsey, Farran, and Hofer (2015) called into question whether all early childhood programs had a positive influence on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Lipsey et al. (2015) noted two major findings that challenged the outcomes and benefits of widely used voluntary prekindergarten or preschool programs:

1. Children who attended traditional, voluntary prekindergarten preschool programming scored lower than children who did not attend an early program by their second-grade year.
2. By the spring of their first-grade year, teachers rated children who did not attend more traditional, voluntary prekindergarten preschool programming as being more prepared for school, having better work skills in the classroom, and feeling more positive about school than children who attended traditional, voluntary prekindergarten preschool programming.

Whereas research had shown that children who are exposed to early childhood or preschool programs gain a number of cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that they would not otherwise have received (Ansari, 2018; Campbell et al., 2018; Williams,

2019), the evaluation from Lipsey et al. (2015) showed that results of these programs are mixed.

One social-constructivist-based approach to early childhood education, Reggio Emilia, was introduced in the United States in the early 1990s (Edwards & Gandini, 2015; Reggio Children, 2012). With an emphasis on the image of the child, the Reggio Emilia approach incorporated the environment as the third teacher, constructed curriculum based on the interests of the child, and applied the ideology of multiple intelligences by way of the hundred languages of children (Edwards et al., 2012; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Vatalaro et al., 2015). The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education has been shown to be an effective method of instruction (Abdelfattah, 2015; Edwards et al., 2012; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Several researchers studying the Reggio Emilia approach have illustrated the benefits of the approach for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood students; however, there was a gap in past research on the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development by educators and families of students enrolled in Reggio Emilia-based programs (Abdelfattah, 2015; Edwards et al., 2012; Hall, 2012; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). The purpose of the current study was to understand the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children.

In Chapter 1, I will provide a brief background on the importance of early childhood education with regard to the development of children. Then the research problem will be stated to provide evidence that the problem addressed by this study is

current, relevant, and significant. The purpose of the study will be explored, followed by the research questions. A brief outline of the conceptual framework will be presented, highlighting key influences on the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. The nature of the study will be explained, and key definitions will be presented to help the reader better understand the context of the terms used within this study. Assumptions of the study, scope and delimitations, and limitations will be analyzed, along with the significance of the study. There will be a summary of the entire chapter in the conclusion of Chapter 1.

Background

The original preschools, originally known as *infant schools* in the United States, served to better socialize children of poverty and to provide the appropriate environment to meet the developmental needs of students in preparation for elementary school (Cahan, 1989; Wilinski, 2017). Infant schools brought poor children to access a moral culture while also providing wealthier children academic enrichment. With the growth of the public school and the development of primary schools, infant schools did not last in the United States.

In 1965, as a response to the War on Poverty, Head Start was developed as a large-scale preschool-based intervention with the goal of providing educational enrichment for economically disadvantaged children (Thompson, 2018). Since their inception, Head Start and other preschool programs have been developed for economically disadvantaged children as well as children from affluent backgrounds. According to Child Trends Data Bank (2014), there was a 6% increase (55% to 61%) in students attending center-based early childhood care and education programs from 2007

to 2012. As was the case with infant schools, different early childhood programs have served different purposes based on demographics; however, all current early childhood or preschool programs seek to prepare children for primary, elementary, and secondary schooling in some capacity (Cahan, 1989; Rees et al., 2016; Thompson, 2018). Differentiating from Head Start, a number of programs began appearing in the United States with different origins to provide children with developmentally appropriate practices that would foster cognitive, social, and emotional growth in preparation for primary, elementary, and secondary schooling (Barnett & Friedman-Klauss, 2016; Delaney, 2018). Reggio Emilia was a curricular approach that migrated to the United States from Reggio Emilia, Italy in the early 1990s, which emphasized the importance of the student being the center of all decisions made during teaching and learning (Edwards & Gandini, 2015). A social constructivist approach that emphasizes the importance of the child, Reggio Emilia incorporates practices that have been proven to foster cognitive, social, and emotional development in children through the use of its fundamental principles (Balfour, 2018; Cagliari et al., 2016; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Yonezu, 2018). However, after over 30 years of implementation in the United States, a gap in the literature remains regarding the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach from the points of view of educators and parents of children who attend Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Existing studies on the Reggio Emilia approach have indicated a primary focus on the researchers' points of view.

As evident in a 2014 report (Child Trends Data Bank, 2014), as well as a host of research completed for decades, preschools and early childhood education are beneficial

for children. However, the findings of Lipsey et al.'s (2015) first randomized controlled trial showed underwhelming benefits of voluntary and state-funded prekindergarten programs. Rees, Booth, and Jones (2016) stressed the importance of early childhood education, emphasizing the connection between brain development and the environment of the child. Research has also indicated that preschool is beneficial for students as a method of early intervention and preparation (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016; Delaney, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Nonetheless, the findings of Lipsey et al. (2015) show that preschool programming, with the practices currently being used, is not producing the proposed outcomes. The initial benefits of preschool programming fade quickly for students, and, in some instances, show the potential to have adverse effects (Lipsey et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018; Whitehurst, 2018). The findings of the current study could have policy implications for the redevelopment of voluntary prekindergarten programs as they become more common and better funded as well as other preschool programs so that they better meet the developmental needs of children.

Problem Statement

The problem that compelled this study is that the widely used curricular approaches for early childhood education have not consistently shown a positive influence on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children, and it is unknown whether those who participate in the Reggio Emilia curricular approach perceive it to promote cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood. Currently, there have only been a few studies on Reggio Emilia, and the results of these studies have been mixed. Del Boca et al. (2014) evaluated the use of the Reggio Emilia

approach in the cities of Reggio Emilia, Parma, and Padova, Italy to measure its effectiveness by looking at outcomes related to employment, socioemotional skills, high school graduation, election participation, and obesity and found that in comparison to outcomes for individuals exposed to alternative forms of childcare, the effects were not significant. On the other hand, Hong, Shaffer, and Han (2017) investigated how the Reggio Emilia approach inspired children with and without disabilities and found that children both with and without disabilities who received education with the Reggio Emilia approach developed in the areas of relationship, communication, and play skills and showed increased interest in and motivation for learning.

In the United States, national concern for effective early childhood education was articulated in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In 2017-2018, a budget of $606 million was proposed for child care and preschool programs, along with $1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start programs (Legislative Analyst Office, 2017). The increased funding reflected by this figure was a result of research linked to the benefits of early childhood programming for student development (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016).

The results reported by Lipsey et al. (2015) suggested regression in terms of academic achievement for students who attended an early childhood program. In contrast, Rees et al. (2016) stated the importance of a universally targeted education program that encouraged brain development. Lipsey et al. (2015), however, cited the need for a better definition of "high-quality" programming in preschool education. There

is a need for further investigation of early childhood curricula that may provide sustained outcomes for young children (Lipsey et al., 2015; Rees et al., 2016).

Williams (2019) analyzed spillover benefits from preschools in the state of South Carolina to determine the benefits of targeted preschool programs that serve students with high needs, indicating that eligible students receive free or reduced-price lunch or Medicaid at age 4. The results of the research indicated that students attending preschools in the state of South Carolina saw a slight increase in math and reading scores when they were exposed to preschool programs by about 0.13 and 0.14 standard deviations; however, students who did not come from a high-needs background and were not exposed to preschool saw less benefits in math and reading by a standard deviation of 0.45 (Williams, 2019). Furthermore, behaviorally, there were no differences within the population of students considered to have high needs based on whether they attended preschool.

Though there are benefits for students attending preschool programs in South Carolina, an academic achievement gap continues to exist, and traditional preschool programs have been unable to claim cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for attending students. Preschool has proven to be advantageous for the children who attend; however, both Lipsey et al. (2015) and Williams (2019) emphasized the approach implemented as a key factor in producing the intended cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children.

Delaney (2018) referred to quality in an early childhood education as an aspect uniquely determined by the setting, encompassing communal beliefs, language, practices,

and shared knowledge. "It becomes the work of the adult observer and the measure to determine quality, rather than the children, teachers, and families within the setting," Delaney wrote (p. 169). With Delaney's declaration of what a quality early childhood program is, it is important to address what qualities an early childhood program exhibits with regard to a curricular approach that encourages brain development to grow the student cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

The Reggio Emilia curricular approach is concentrated on the curricular components of the environment, the image of the child, relationships between the parent and the teacher, and the atelier or educational practices valuing expressive languages of children, to grow students cognitively, socially, and emotionally (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Santín and Torruella (2017) stated that Reggio Emilia is committed to developing creative, critically thinking, and collaboratively engaged citizens through its foundation in the development of communication and social skills. Furthermore, Gardner and Jones (2016) contended that because the Reggio Emilia approach empowers students by scaffolding student development, igniting students' interests, and creating a caring environment, it should influence other curricular approaches to early childhood education. With Reggio Emilia-inspired programs across the United States, it has proven to be one of the most notable preschool programs (Keskin, 2015; North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2018; Walsh & Petty, 2007). Keskin (2015) stated the benefits of the social-constructivist approach to teaching and learning; however, there is little literature on the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of Reggio Emilia as a

curricular approach from the perspectives of educators and parents of children who attend Reggio Emilia-inspired programs in the United States.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory case study was to investigate the participant-perceived benefits of Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in privately funded, voluntary prekindergarten early childhood programs in a southeastern state. Research has shown the benefits of early childhood education for the development of children (Britto et al., 2017; Heimer & Winokur, 2015; Moss, 2016; Williams, 2019). Britto et al. (2017) analyzed early childhood development interventions across five sectors: health, nutrition, education, child protection, and social protection. Britto et al. indicated the importance of nurturing care in the form of early childhood preparation and programming with an emphasis on the development of the child. Lipsey et al. (2015) also suggested the benefits of early childhood programming with an emphasis on effective programming and curricular approach.

Multiple early childhood program approaches have been implemented across the United States, and more specifically in southeastern states, including Montessori, Bank Street, High-Scope, and Waldorf, along with Reggio Emilia (Keskin, 2015). There are perceived benefits with each approach for student development and student readiness. Previous research regarding the Reggio Emilia approach has examined the theory behind Reggio Emilia as well as the history of the approach. Nonetheless, there is a gap in the literature on parent and educator perceptions of the Reggio Emilia approach as leading to cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood-aged children. This

study was conducted to develop a better understanding of the experiences of children in a Reggio Emilia setting to determine the components that led to cognitive, social, and emotional development for early-childhood-aged children.

Research Questions

Research questions in a qualitative, exploratory case study prepare for further examinations of the phenomenon (Zainal, 2007). The results of this case study may lead to future research detailing the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach?
2. Which experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach did parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive prepared children for primary and elementary schooling?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded the current study was the theory of social constructivism, with a closer look at multiple intelligences and adaptive curriculum to gain an understanding of the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for early-childhood-aged children. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism emphasizes the importance of the environment for the growth and development of a child. Vygotsky stated that learning and developing meaning are coordinated with other people and the environment (Edwards et al., 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Gardner (1997) furthered the social-constructivist view through research,

addressing the multiple intelligence theory as a powerful tool and partner with pedagogy and curriculum, stating that multiple intelligences assisted in student engagement and encouraged deeper understanding. Additionally, Bruner (1977) promoted the incorporation of a more flexible curriculum, based on the interests and strengths of the student. Proponents of Reggio Emilia seek to create an environment for students to grow socially and emotionally and access multiple intelligences through a curricular approach whereby students can grow cognitively as well. These elements framed the research questions because they highlight the elements of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that are perceived to be effective in the cognitive, social, and emotional development of students. The framework was useful in analyzing the data generated in the study by providing the context of the foundational values of the Reggio Emilia curriculum.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the current study aligned best with the qualitative, exploratory case study approach because the intent was to determine the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional developmental benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach to the curriculum for early childhood students. The exploratory case study approach was used to explore and understand the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for children by gaining an understanding of the perceptions of educators and families in schools practicing the Reggio Emilia methodology in preschool programs.

The intention of an exploratory case study is to explore and investigate a phenomenon during real-life events or conditions, providing context to the relationships that occur (Zainal, 2007). Through exploring the phenomenon of how the Reggio Emilia

curricular approach is perceived to affect the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children, further examination can be completed to determine the specific components that may be utilized in other preschool programs.

The goal of the current research was to gather an understanding of the experiences of educators who worked in Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, and families whose children attended a childcare program using the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. Face-to-face, in-depth interviews and questionnaires were used as data collection tools. Parents, teachers, and school leaders were questioned concerning their similar experiences of the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for early-childhood-aged children.

Definitions

Key concepts in the current study are listed below to help the reader understand the context in which the terms were used:

Atelier: A working area similar to a studio space in Reggio Emilia programs. Ateliers serve as a foundational part of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, providing an area for children to explore self-expression through the arts by use of different materials (Panciroli & Macuada, 2017).

Cognitive development: The neurological development that allows for the processing of information as well as understanding language, problem solving, decision making, and retaining information (Carey et al., 2015).

Curricular approach: The method of delivering curriculum, including assessment, instructional strategies, and educational theory and design leading to the acquisition of information by the student or pupil (Bruner, 1977; Rovegno, 1992).

Early childhood aged: Children between the ages of 2 and 5 years. Piaget (1952) referred to the developmental stage of early-childhood-aged children as the preoperational stage in which children are prone to build experience through observation of the world around them.

Early childhood programs: Childcare facilities that serve children between the age of infancy and kindergarten (Abdelfattah, 2015; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Hundred languages of children: A belief found in the Reggio Emilia approach that children have a multitude of mediums to express themselves, including visual, musical, artistic, and other modes (Edwards et al., 2012). Malaguzzi's (1998) concept of the hundred languages of children aligns with Gardner's (1997) concept of multiple intelligences.

Infant schools: Original early childhood schools serving children of poverty to develop socialization and to prepare children for elementary school (Cahan, 1989; Wilinski, 2017).

Primary school: Refers to schooling that educates students in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade (Çetin, 2020).

Reggio Emilia early childhood programs: Refers to the educational programs developed by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards et al., 2012).

Reggio Emilia-inspired program: An early childhood program located outside Reggio Emilia, Italy, that uses methods and practices that align with the theories of Reggio Emilia (Abdelfattah, 2015).

Social-emotional development: Having the ability to express and manage emotions. Also refers to having the ability to regulate behavior and build relationships (Cohen et al., 2005).

Voluntary prekindergarten program: Publicly funded early-childhood-age programs that are designed to support students before kindergarten. Programs can be housed within public schools as preschool programs but can also be a part of childcare facilities operating exclusively for preschool-aged children, such as Head Start (Lipsey et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2019).

Assumptions

For the current study, I gathered data on three Reggio Emilia-inspired early childhood programs in the southern region of the United States. Each of the three programs was part of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA), indicating that the schools practiced the Reggio Emilia approach as the primary curricular approach, and upon graduating from the early childhood program, students will attend public kindergarten, first grade, or second grade. Each of the programs adhered to the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, including (a) maintaining a focus on the image of the child; (b) establishing strong relationships between children, educators, families, and communities; (c) developing the environment as the third educator; (d) addressing the hundred languages of children; (e) using educational observations and documentation

to further develop students; (f) accessing the atelier to establish for students a laboratory within the classroom in which to learn and express themselves; and (g) offering project-focused curriculum based on the interests of the student (Edwards et al., 1998, 2012; Fyfe, 2016; Istituizone of the Municipality of Reggio Children, 2010; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2018). Although each of the programs practices the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, they are all aligned with the Reggio Emilia programs in Italy but are unable to fully replicate the original instruction as a result of differences in cultural beliefs about education and pedagogy (Abdelfattah, 2015). Nonetheless, each of the programs practices the principles of Reggio Emilia and includes educators and families who are committed to the social constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Scope and Delimitations

This study examined the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach in a southeastern state. The focus of this study was chosen due to a gap in research on the topic of the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for cognitive, social, and emotional development based on the perceptions and viewpoints of parents, teachers, and school leaders. Previous research addressed the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach from the theory of practice; however, there has been a gap in the literature regarding the specific cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the approach through the lens of parents, teachers, and school leaders in a southeastern state.

Previous research has addressed the disadvantages of the Reggio Emilia approach with regard to the approach being applied in the United States. Abdelfattah (2015)

proposed that because of cultural differences in views regarding education in Italy and the United States, it was very difficult to fully implement the approach in the same manner in which it was used in Europe. Nonetheless, the perceived disadvantages of the Reggio Emilia approach were not included for the purpose of this study. Rather, a brief response to the disadvantages of the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach is included in Chapter 2 to control for bias.

Wiersma and Jurs (2008) defined delimitations as the boundaries established by the researcher within a study. The data collection sites used for the current study were tuition-based Reggio Emilia-inspired programs in a southern state. The location of the programs was delimited based on the localization of the problem. Furthermore, when discerning the delimitations of this study, it is important to understand that the population did not include parents of students who attended voluntary prekindergarten programs. All participants could afford to send their children to the tuition-based program rather than sending their children to a more traditional preschool. This delimitation was applied as a result of not having access to a voluntary prekindergarten program that used the Reggio Emilia approach. As a result, with regard to the transferability of the current study, the results provide rich data to transfer to similar contexts. Nonetheless, there was a possibility of excluding families of lower socioeconomic statuses. When transferring the results of the current research to future studies, it is important to consider that the data were collected from participants of higher socioeconomic status; future researchers in this area may seek to use a more diverse group of participants in terms of socioeconomic status.

Limitations

The qualitative, exploratory case study research design used for this study had both advantages and disadvantages. Yin (2009) suggested that a common disadvantage of a qualitative, exploratory case study lies in the absence of systematic procedures due to a relative absence of methodological guidelines. In an exploratory case study, the researcher needs to develop methodological considerations in order to clarify and ground the research. As the researcher in the current study, I was aware of the importance of reflecting on the methodology for collecting, analyzing, and sharing the data while also ensuring alignment between the research questions and the literature review, which would lead to a more systematic approach to the methodology.

A second limitation was the assumption that the educators and parents understood the components of the Reggio Emilia approach as well as developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education leading to cognitive, social, and emotional development. Interviews were conducted to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children attending Reggio Emilia-inspired programs that followed the curricular approach. I anticipated that educators would have a greater understanding of developmentally appropriate practices leading to cognitive, social, and emotional development; however, it was also anticipated that parents and families would not have as much knowledge. Nonetheless, through their responses, parents would be able to articulate how they perceived their children as developing cognitively, socially, and emotionally based on what their children could accomplish.

The third limitation was the issue of external validity or generalizability, as noted by King et al. (1994). To ensure more reliability within the research, I used a qualitative exploratory case study approach. I collected data from three different Reggio Emilia-inspired programs within a southern state to compare the data and the responses to better establish a rationale for common phenomena. By analyzing three different programs, I sought to identify patterns within observable behaviors within the approach that yielded cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for the students as perceived by the educators and parents.

Significance

The findings of this current study illustrate the perceptions of educators and parents about the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the social-constructivist-based Reggio Emilia curricular approach. Lipsey et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of high-quality programs for the development of early-childhood-aged students. With policymakers continuing to fund early childhood education to provide children access to high-quality programming, programs must be designed to best develop the children whom they serve. A Child Trends Data Bank report (2014) showed that early childhood programs can have benefits for cognitive, language, and social-emotional development; nonetheless, it is imperative that the curricular approach is one that meets the developmental needs of the child.

The results of this study may contribute to the field of early childhood education by providing early childhood practitioners with practices found in the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that can be implemented in voluntary prekindergarten programs,

which may lead to long-term academic and social-emotional success for children. Local stakeholders, such as local school districts, may benefit from the findings, in that they will have more information about Reggio Emilia when developing their voluntary prekindergarten programs to better serve their students with a nontraditional curricular approach, potentially increasing the opportunity for cognitive, social, and emotional development, leading to children being more prepared for success in primary, elementary, and secondary schooling.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate the perceived effectiveness of the social-constructivist-based Reggio Emilia curricular approach in promoting the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children. Chapter 1 presented an explanation of the study, including background information and the statement of the problem. The purpose of the research helped to align the research question. Chapter 1 also included a discussion of the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations to the research, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 will include a current review of literature related to the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach with a focus on cognitive, social, and emotional benefits to children attending a social-constructivist-based Reggio Emilia-inspired program. A brief reflection on common options for early childhood programming will be included, followed by a summary of the history of Reggio Emilia and the core values of the approach to better understand the Reggio Emilia philosophical approach. The

cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of such programs, as presented by the literature, will be examined and reviewed against current psychological studies on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of preschool-aged children. Brief context for how U.S. preschool programs have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach will be presented, along with the perceived limitations of Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in early childhood education. Lastly, there will be an explanation of past research related to the current study, including studies with a similar conceptual framework as well as seminal works.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Reggio Emilia, a social-constructivist-based approach to early childhood education, has been shown to be one of the most effective methods of fostering the development of preschool-aged children; nonetheless, state and federal funding still favor methods shown to be less effective (Brown, 2015; Öztürk, 2016; Parker et al., 2019; Thompson, 2018). Previous research has shown that voluntary preschool programs are not achieving the intended benefits for students, even though funding continues to increase annually (Lipsey et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2019). Comparatively, the Reggio Emilia approach to preschool-aged instruction has been cited as an effective approach to preschool programming. There is a gap in the current literature on the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach from parents', teachers', and school leaders' points of view (Bandura, 2002; Cagliari et al, 2016; Parnell, 2012). In the current study, I investigated the experiences of preschool-aged children, parents, and educators in South Carolina regarding the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the social-constructivist-based Reggio Emilia approach to preschool education.

In Chapter 2, I will justify the use of social constructivism as a conceptual framework for this study of the Reggio Emilia approach. I will highlight Bruner, Gardner, and Vygotsky as key influencers of the approach. Following that, I will present a review of literature on Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in preschools in the United States and abroad. My examination will focus on the benefits associated with the

Reggio Emilia approach from a cognitive, social, and emotional perspective, along with the proposed outcomes of the implementation of the approach.

The literature review will be structured to ensure that previous literature related to the Reggio Emilia approach is presented in relation to the various topics included in this chapter. I will explain the search strategies that I used to conduct the literature review as well. Subsequently, I will present a detailed description of the social constructivist educational philosophy. The description will address social constructivism as an extension of the constructivist educational philosophy, contrasting the social constructivist approach with non-social-constructivist educational philosophies. I will also reflect on common options for early childhood programming. A brief history of Reggio Emilia will be provided, and the core values of the approach will be described in relation to its perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. The core values associated with the approach will be reviewed against current psychological studies on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of preschool-aged children. I will offer context for how U.S. preschool programs adopted the Reggio Emilia approach. Additionally, I will address the perceived limitations of Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in early childhood education. Chapter 2 will close with a chapter summary.

Literature Search Strategies

A saturated literature review was conducted through exhaustive keyword searches of multiple databases, which included Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Walden Library ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Search terms were used in multiple combinations to ensure that articles related to the study from

specific scholarly journals were collected and organized. The following search terms were used: *Reggio Emilia in early childhood, benefits of Reggio Emilia*, *Reggio Emilia learning, Reggio Emilia and cognitive development, cognitive development in early childhood, Reggio Emilia and social development, social development in early childhood, Reggio Emilia and emotional development, emotional development in early childhood, perceptions of Reggio Emilia, application of Reggio Emilia, long-term effects of Reggio Emilia, early childhood programs, benefits of preschool*, *social constructivism*, *constructivist*, *academic-based preschool*, *constructivist based preschool*, *early childhood development*, and *Reggio Emilia American programs*.

After analyzing the primary literature that I reviewed for this study, which consisted of peer-reviewed articles from the aforementioned databases, I reviewed additional literature such as seminal articles and books to provide further context for the study. The majority of the articles selected for the literature review were written within the last 5 years; however, older materials such as peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations related to the topic were also reviewed. Existing literature regarding Reggio Emilia was centered on the philosophical benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach in preschool; I found a limited amount of research regarding the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of Reggio Emilia in the development of early-childhood-aged children. I cross-referenced psychological and educational articles to compensate for the limited number of scholarly educational articles relevant to the study topic.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of elements of the social constructivist philosophy and work on multiple intelligences. I developed this framework as a means of investigating the aspects of the Reggio Emilia curriculum that research suggests should benefit preschool learners cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Additionally, I reviewed the work of Bruner (1977), Gardner (1997), and Vygotsky (1978) on social constructivism. I applied the conceptual framework to explain the philosophy behind the Reggio Emilia curricular approach and provide a greater understanding of the purpose of this study.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism supports the perception that the environment plays an essential role in cognitive growth. According to social constructivist theory, individuals learn and develop meaning in coordination with other people as well as the environment. Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012) considered Vygotsky's research on social constructivism to be the pinnacle of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The philosophy of social constructivism is apparent in one of the core values of Reggio Emilia: positioning the environment as a teacher (Rinaldi, 2016).

Bruner (1973) stated the importance of social constructivism with a focus on the development of the curriculum. Bruner (1977) emphasized the importance of constructing the curriculum alongside the child to ensure that the developmental needs of the child are met. Bruner's (1977) research informed the Reggio Emilia approach, which focuses on children participating in learning that promotes their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Palmer, 2001).

Gardner (1997) furthered the social constructivist view through research supporting multiple intelligence theory as a powerful tool and partner with pedagogy and curriculum. Gardner (1997) stated that multiple intelligences assist in student engagement and encourage deeper understanding. Proponents of the Reggio Emilia approach seek to create an environment in which students can grow socially and emotionally and develop multiple intelligences through a curriculum that also fosters cognitive growth. As Firlik (1994) explained, "Reggio Emilia places such a high value on the development of these intelligences—the individual learner no doubt is awakened to certain emotional affiliation to these active experiences" (p. 17). Social constructivism, flexible curriculum, and multiple intelligences framed the research questions because they highlight the elements of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that are perceived to be effective in supporting the cognitive, social, and emotional development of students.

Social Constructivism

The main principle of social constructivism supports the belief that the child's immediate environment plays an essential role in development, where learning and cognitive, social, and emotional development are influenced by the people within the environment along with the environment itself (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) considered the environment of a child to contain components of his or her culture. Social constructivist theory provided the foundation for Reggio Emilia, in which the environment serves as the "third teacher" of the Reggio child, along with the lead teacher in the classroom and the peers of the student (Edwards et al., 2012; Gardner & Jones,

2016). Rinaldi (2016) suggested that the physical space of the classroom and the people within the classroom account for a child's development. McNally and Slutsky (2017) emphasized the importance of social constructivism as a foundation of Reggio Emilia, including the educational theories of Bruner (1977), Gardner (1997), and Vygotsky (1978).

Reggio Emilia has deep roots in social constructivism, in that the whole environment is positioned as developing the child in this approach (Edwards et al., 1998; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Santín & Torruella, 2017). Reggio Emilia was influenced by numerous educational theorists and philosophers who subscribed to the constructivist approach to teaching and learning. These theorists and philosophers included, but were not limited to, Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, Dewey, Gardner, Piaget, Rousseau, and Vygotsky (Edwards et al., 1998, 2012). In using social constructivism as the framework for this study, I decided to ground my research in the theories of Bruner (1977), Gardner (1997), and Vygotsky (1978).

The theories of Bruner (1977), Gardner (1997), and Vygotsky (1978) are intertwined within the philosophy of social constructivism and the Reggio Emilia approach. Proponents of the Reggio Emilia approach seek to create an environment in which students can grow socially and emotionally and access multiple intelligences through a curricular approach that allows for cognitive growth as well. Social constructivism, flexible curriculum, and multiple intelligences framed the research questions by highlighting the aspects of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that are perceived to be effective in promoting the cognitive, social, and emotional development

of students. The framework was useful in analyzing the data generated in the study by providing context for the foundational values of the Reggio Emilia curriculum.

Bruner

Bruner was a key theorist in developing the theory of constructivism in terms of an educational approach. Bruner (1977) was a proponent of negotiating the curriculum by inviting children to plan, contribute to, and modify their learning experience. Bruner (1973) also stated the importance of the social aspect of learning. Bruner's notions of negotiating curriculum and learning through a social process represent core values of the Reggio Emilia approach, in which they lead to cognitive, social, and emotional development (Gardner & Jones, 2016). One of the core values of the Reggio Emilia approach is developing an emergent curriculum, such that the teacher works collaboratively with the children to develop the curriculum based on the children's interests (Gardner & Jones, 2016; Palmer, 2001). Furthermore, the Reggio Emilia approach supports the use of projects and collaborative work between children in a social context (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Bruner was a key contributor to the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning (Edwards et al., 2012).

Gardner

Gardner (1983) furthered Malaguzzi's view of the hundred languages of children through research developing multiple intelligence theory as a powerful tool and partner with pedagogy and curriculum. According to Gardner (1983), multiple intelligences assist in student engagement and encourage deeper understanding. Gardner (1983) outlined seven intelligences based on characteristics observed in children and their

relationship with the learning process: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

To develop children's potential, Gardner (1991) contended that they should be educated with reference to the multiple intelligences, suggesting that this must involve a natural process of development passing through a predictable set of stages. With its emphasis on advancement through stages and development occurring through natural, environmental elements, Gardner's (1991) theory of multiple intelligences links the social constructivist aspects of understanding children to establish a formal structure of education that adheres to the practice of teaching and learning as developed by Malaguzzi. Firlik (1994) stated that major aspects of Reggio Emilia such as projects based on students' interests are consistent with the theory of multiple intelligence, in that they allow students to tap into their experiences and strengths within the different intelligences.

Vygotsky

Vygotsky (1978) contended that when the environment fostered social development, learning could occur. Students develop based on the interactions that they have with their environment. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized play and imagination, noting that children are able to access knowledge between play and school instruction. Vygotsky (1978) posited that learning involves the *zone of proximal development*, or "the distance between the child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance" (p. 131).

Malaguzzi (Edwards, et al., 1998) extended Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of social constructivism by seeking to develop a school with a focus on children, teachers, and families working together. Taking the approach developed by constructivist thinkers, Malaguzzi (1998) emphasized the importance of the family and the environment to children's development. The ideology of social constructivism played a vital role in the development of the first Reggio Emilia schools, which had core values of creating an environment as a child's third teacher and maintaining a high level of focus on parental involvement (Cancemi, 2011; Gardner & Jones, 2016).

Social Constructivist Educational Philosophy

The social constructivist approach was derived from Piaget's (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000) theory of constructivism, in which the principal ideology is that knowledge is constructed. However, a key difference between Piaget's (1952) constructivist approach and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach is that Vygotsky emphasized the importance of the environment as well as factors that make up the environment in the development of the child. Opponents of social constructivism make the epistemic claim that if social constructivism is valid, then knowledge is relative to the social group (Van Bergen & Parsell, 2019). Proponents of social constructivism do not disagree with this claim; nonetheless, they suggest the importance of developing an environment that leads to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of the child.

Vygotsky (2004) stated the importance of reproductive and combinatorial activity, whereby children can relate to their environment and develop new ideas within the environment. With a pedagogy that encourages relating and developing new ideas within

the environment, children can use their imagination and not be exclusively limited to their social group (Edwards, 2017). Lai et al. (2018) emphasized a pedagogical approach of adding a more interactive, play-based framework to early childhood education that connected to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. Through interactive, play-based pedagogy, children are allowed to complete both reproductive and combinatorial activity within their day-to-day instruction (Lai et al., 2018). Likewise, Lourenço (2015) echoed Vygotsky's sentiments regarding social constructivism, explaining how interactive, play-based instruction creates an environment that promotes social interaction.

With the rise of standards-based instruction and standardized testing, greater expectations were placed on preschool children in preparation for kindergarten (Christakis, 2016). This emphasis on kindergarten preparation limited the amount of interactive, play-based instruction that preschool children received. As standards-based education and curriculum development for early-childhood-aged children became the dominant approach, learning through discovery, exploration, and play became associated with laissez-faire approaches to teaching and learning (Wood & Hedges, 2016). The focus on standards and readiness for kindergarten led to many early childhood programs developing learning outcomes to illustrate the content that children would be exposed to in the following years (DeBruin-Parecki & Slutzky, 2016). Research has indicated that programs with an emphasis on getting children "school ready" such as Head Start yield an initial increase with regard to school readiness and test scores for children, yet those gains quickly fade (Thompson, 2018).

Review of Current Literature

This portion of Chapter 2 reviews the current gap in the literature regarding the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. The review of literature begins with early childhood programming options and then focuses on Reggio Emilia. The literature reviewed in this section provided the rationale for the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Early Childhood Programming Options

Very little has changed regarding the purpose of preschools since the 19th century. Barnett and Friedman-Krauss (2016) echoed the two purposes as the on-going purpose for preschool programs in the 21st century: providing a method for better socializing children and meeting other developmental needs in preparation for elementary school (Cahan & Cohen, 1989), resulting in an increase in funding for voluntary pre-kindergarten programs (VPK). However, since its inception in the United States, there have been a variety of philosophical and pedagogical approaches to preschool programming – some with aspects of social constructivism and some without.

Walsh and Petty (2007) analyzed early childhood program options offered in the United States from 1995 to 2005. It was concluded that the six philosophical approaches most common in early childhood were Bank Street, Head Start, High Scope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf. Each of the programs contains an approach that provides children an opportunity to grow cognitively, socially, and emotionally; however, most of the programs attempt to align with standards that may or may not be developmentally appropriate for children (Clements et al., 2017). Head Start, for example, the largest of

the six programs, promotes learning through four different activity models: free play, group instruction, individual instruction, and scaffolded learning (Lippard et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the focus of creating school readiness is found within the classroom model that is designed similarly to that of a traditional kindergarten classroom, providing whole group, small group, teacher-directed individual activities, distributed activities, and child-selected activities (Lippard et al., 2019). With the many early childhood programming options, Lipsey et al. (2015) noted the importance of developing early childhood education programming to meet the specific, developmental, behavioral, and instructional needs of early childhood-aged children. Therefore, Reggio Emilia serves as the single, philosophical approach investigated in this current study as the approach is perceived to meet children's behavioral and instructional needs.

Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Benefits of the Reggio Emilia Approach

In order to gain a better context of the Reggio Emilia approach, a brief, literature-based summary of the history is explored. Then, I review current literature to examine the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach, comparing the benefits to current neurological studies on the cognitive, social, and emotional developmental needs of preschool-aged children. Following, there will be a brief description of how the Reggio Emilia approach has been adopted by United States preschool programs along with the perceived disadvantages of the approach and a closing summary.

Brief History of Reggio Emilia

The philosophy and practice of the Reggio Emilia approach originated in the small, northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia just after the Second World War (Cagliari et al., 2016). The idea of the first schools was to bring together the community by establishing a system of schools with a focus on the child, their peers, their educators, their families, and the environment in which they lived (Balfour, 2018). Unlike the new constructivist approach to pedagogy also developed in Italy, Montessori, is a program with an emphasis on the importance of home, developing the educational space as a "surrogate home" for the child (Yonezu, 2018); Reggio Emilia sought to align the interests of the child with pedagogy, making the environment into not only a home but an educational space in itself (Balfour, 2018). Though Reggio Emilia was very much a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, the social and the environmental aspect of the philosophy separated it from other constructivist approaches and non-constructivist approaches (Edwards et al., 2012; Balfour, 2018). Inspired by not only constructivism, but social constructivists such as Bruner, Gardner, Piaget, Vygotsky, and others, Malaguzzi shifted the paradigm of pedagogy in Reggio Emilia from traditional institutions led by the Roman Catholic Church to schools that had a focus on the individualized development of each child (Edwards et al., 2012; Cagliari et al., 2016). From its inception with the original Reggio Emilia schools, as of 2015, there were 46 infant, toddler, and preschool programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy along with programs in over 30 countries (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2018).

Fundamental Principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Reggio Emilia is centered on the "richness" of children. Cagliari et al. (2016) pronounced the importance of believing in the potential of every child as a cornerstone of the Reggio Emilia approach. Likewise, McNally and Slutsky (2017) acknowledged the first Reggio Emilia schools as learning communities that sought to "honour and educate all children" (McNally & Slutsky, 2017 p. 1925). To reach the potential in all children and provide educational support, Malaguzzi (Cagliari et al., 2016) stated the importance of not only emphasizing the cognitive needs but the social and emotional needs as well. The fundamental principles of Reggio Emilia were designed to address the cognitive, social, and emotional developmental needs of early childhood-aged children (Cagliari et al., 2016). McNally and Slutsky acknowledged the fundamental principles of Reggio Emilia as the image of the child; relationships; the parent; the environment; the atelier; the teacher; and other factors that intertwined within the day-to-day interactions of the child. Fyfe (2016) added, as principles, the hundred languages of children; short- and long-term projects; and observation and documentation. I have blended the works of both McNally and Slutsky and Fyfe while examining the works of the Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards et al., 2012; Fernández-Santín, & Feliu-Torruella, 2020; Istituizone of the Municipality of Reggio Children, 2010; North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2018) to establish the principles of Reggio Emilia for the purpose of this study. The principles lead to a better understanding of how the Reggio Emilia curricular approach develops children cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

1. The image of the child

2. Relationships between children, educators, families, and community
3. The environment as the third educator
4. The hundred languages of children
5. Educational observation and documentation
6. The atelier: A make-space
7. Flexible planning and project work

The image of the child. The Reggio Emilia approach placed a great emphasis on the rights and capabilities of the child (Hans, 2019; Hong et al., 2017). Malaguzzi (1998) declared that children were 'rich in potential, strong, powerful, and competent' (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 10). Though seven principles are listed, the image of the child is at the heart of the approach. Reggio Emilia provides children the opportunity to construct their learning. By providing respect to the child, the teacher establishes collaboration that yields further engagement amongst the children, and engagement amongst the children and the adults within the classroom setting (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Hargreaves (2019) examined how the educational purpose of schools developed social efficiency within students. Further, Hargreaves found that schools could engage in practices to decrease pupils' resignation, enhancing resilience and social development by adapting the school to the child rather than having a focus on test scores and content knowledge. Birhan (2018) evaluated the appropriateness of textbooks to determine the quality of the curriculum. Birhan's findings, like Hargreaves, indicated that curriculum was an important aspect in developing cognitive thinking within children. Children need to be

able to have concrete representation within their study to provide children an opportunity to have the curriculum fit their level of cognitive development (Birhan, 2018).

The concept of purposing the school and designing the curriculum around the child is the cornerstone of the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 2012; Malaguzzi, 1998). Every child within the Reggio Emilia classroom is treated as a valuable member of the class (Hong et al., 2017). The child is seen as being an expert in some aspect of the needs of their learning group and the classroom as a whole. The role of the teacher in this community is to help children recognize and appreciate the differences in each other as they all make up the community (Hong et al., 2017). McNally and Slutsky (2017) echoed the importance of the child provided by Hong et al., suggesting the importance of holding the child with a high value. Zorec (2015) researched the influence of training on Reggio Emilia educators, finding that the principle of the training lied in understanding how to focus the learning around the student. Zorec (2015) stated that the value that students are held to in Reggio Emilia leads to an establishment of self-concept, which Brummelman and Thomaes (2017) expressed as the representation and evaluation of children on themselves. Kristen-Antonow et al. (2015) indicated the importance of self-concept in children through a longitudinal study investigating the responsiveness to social partners in children. Kristen-Antonow et al. (2015) found that the development of self-concept in children led to stronger relationships and social development, making children more responsive towards the social world. Thus, by emphasizing the importance of the child, the Reggio Emilia approach leads to social development in children that can potentially last a lifetime (Edwards et al., 2012; Kristen-Antonow et al., 2015)

Relationships between children, educators, families, and community.

Relationships are another key principle of the Reggio Emilia approach. McNally and Slutsky (2017) recognized that student learning through the Reggio Emilia approach was as much a response to how children interpreted their interactions with people, places, materials, and ideas as it was with teaching. O'Connor et al. (2017) evaluated programs designed to promote parent-child relationships in the early childhood setting. After observing and collecting data on numerous early childhood programs, O'Connor et al. found that relationships within the early childhood setting had a direct influence on the child's social and emotional development. O'Connor et al. stressed the importance of the relationships of parent-to-child, educator-to-child, and educator-to-parent. McNally and Slutsky (2018) continued with research examining the benefits of the relationship between children and educators. The findings of McNally and Slutsky's research showed that children developed cognitively and emotionally, learning self-regulation skills and school adjustment and social skills when they were able to develop high-quality teacher-child relationships.

The relationship between the child, educators, families, and community are intertwined and lead to better define the child's image of self (Biermeier, 2015; Lim & Cho, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2017). Biermeier analyzed the Reggio Emilia method, stating the importance of relationships in the Reggio Emilia setting, including fostering self-identity, discovery and investigations, connecting families to the classrooms and vice versa, forming respectful relationships and encouraging different perspectives, as well as engaging multiple senses, and creating collaborative learning experiences. McNally and

Slutsky (2017) agreed with Biermeier with regards to the importance of a relationship with a focus on time. McNally and Slutsky suggested the importance of not forcing connections for any of the components. Rather, allowing children to be able to explore the nature of their relationships and make sense of their place within them (Biermeier, 2015; Hong et al., 2017; McNally & Slutsky, 2017).

The environment as the third educator. Cagliari et al. (2016) expressed a close correlation between the development of children and the nature of their relationship with their environment. The Reggio Emilia classroom environments are created with keen detail in a way that interconnects forms that foster interaction, autonomy, exploration, and research amongst the children and adults that make up the environment (Harris, 2018). Montag et al. (2018) examined the influence of the environment on the acquisition of language, analyzing the effect of an increased amount of language being provided to children and the diversity of words. In the research, Montag et al. pronounced how a rich quantity and diverseness of language within the environment played a pivotal role in the acquisition of words. Instruction is necessary for the cognitive development and the language development of a child; however, the environment also plays a pivotal part. The Reggio Emilia school is designed to have an identity with each portion, including the hallways, bathrooms, kitchens, and other shared spaces that have a particular purpose (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Shared spaces within the Reggio Emilia environment are key for establishing collaborative activities. These spaces are usually designed to showcase the work of the children in an exhibition-like setting (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Wien et al. (2018) analyzed the importance of the

Reggio Emilia environment on the development of the child, stating that the environment supports social, emotional, intellectual, and physical interactions by providing autonomous activity allowing children to explore and engage in meaningful content to develop their thinking and expression. Students can explore and are provided the space to be creative by accessing the environment as the third educator, exploring cognitive abilities (Wien et al., 2018).

Malaguzzi (Edwards, 2017) argued against behaviorist thinkers such as Bandura (Karwowski et al., 2015) who believed that children were products of their environments. The Reggio Emilia approach saw that children were, instead, pupils of their environment (Edwards et al., 2012). Hall (2017) explored key designs within the Reggio Emilia environment that led to cognitive development: space, engagement, aesthetics, and media. Space focuses on both the interior and exterior learning spaces, interconnecting each for the benefit of the child. With engagement, consideration of the developmental needs of the child was met. The environment is designed to allow a flow for both teacher and student to transition (Hall, 2017). Hall continued with aesthetics, stating the importance of the look and feel of the Reggio Emilia environment to provide a full range of use of student's creative modalities. Lastly, media was represented by digital play as the shift in technology has become a major component in the world around the students (Hall, 2017). Hall concluded that the brain and the body were fully interactive with a suitable physical and social environment. With the environment serving as the third educator, particular emphasis must be placed on space, engagement, aestheticism, and media to ensure the best learning for children.

The hundred languages of children. Creativity is an important factor in the development of children. Gardner (1983) connected his theory of multiple intelligences to the idea of creativity and cognitive development. Puryear (2016) added to Gardner's focus on creativity and multiple intelligences, linking to the recognition of metacognition in creativity development. "The creative process involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the transformation of knowledge into new forms, and the rendering of these forms into a shareable product. Each stage in the process entails cognition" (Armbruster, 1989, p. 177). To gain a better understanding of assessing cognitive development through creativity Gardner (Harvard Education, 2017) suggested, creating the environment and having children *navigate*. Sabet and Kiaee (2016) investigated the relationship between teaching through multiple intelligences and the development of reading comprehension for second language learners, finding that components of multiple intelligences assisted in the development of verbal-linguistic intelligences. By engaging learners in activities that allowed them to utilize multiple intelligences such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic, Sabet and Kiaee saw an increase in reading comprehension skills and cognitive development. The Reggio Emilia approach provides children multiple methods of expressing themselves such as visually, musically, artistically, and in more ways in which Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012) referred to as the hundred languages of children (Bond, 2015).

The concept of the hundred languages of children is held with high regard within the Reggio Emilia approach. Children are given multiple mediums of learning to support their creativity and development. Vatalaro et al. (2015) described the Reggio Emilia

programs as environments that yielded creativity in children by providing several ways for children to think critically and to be creative. Mitchiner et al. (2018) examined the incorporation of Reggio Emilia practices, most specifically, the practice of incorporating the hundred languages of children, which allowed for multiple methods of expression for deaf children to measure cognitive outcomes. The data from the research completed by Mitchiner et al. showed that the hundred languages of children encouraged deaf children to represent their ideas in different types of media such as verbal dialogue, graphic representation, and symbolic languages. The children in Mitchiner et al. study were able to express themselves in multiple ways leading to both cognitive and emotional development. Likewise, Hesterman (2017) completed an ethnographic case study to determine how one teacher's incorporation of the hundred languages of children would bridge diversity and global connectedness in an early childhood classroom. Hesterman realized that the incorporation of the hundred languages of children approach led to maximizing the opportunities for children to demonstrate the *Early Years Learning Framework's* five outcomes: 1. Children having a strong sense of identity; 2. Children being connected with and contributing to their multimodal world; 3. Children having a strong sense of well-being; 4. Children being confident and involved learners; 5. Children being effective communicators (Hesterman, 2017, p. 370). Hesterman, like Vatalaro et al. recognized the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of incorporating the hundred languages of children. The Reggio Emilia program serves as the environment that Gardner (Harvard Education, 2017) requested. The belief in the hundred languages of

children pairs children with a method of instruction that meets children's cognitive, social, and emotional needs.

Educational observation and documentation. Paananen and Lipponen (2018) examined the power of documentation in the early childhood setting by documenting how pedagogical documentation contributed to understanding children's perspectives and examining equality in early childhood hood programs. Through the incorporation of observation and pedagogical documentation, Paananen and Lipponen discovered that a more participatory and equal early childhood program was developed. Observation and pedagogical documentation take the child into account, allowing for educators to make conscientious decisions on the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of the child, helping 'scrutinize equality' in terms of participation within learning (Paananen & Lipponen, 2018). Observation and documentation serve a vital role in the Reggio Emilia approach. The relationship between teacher, student, and the environment fluctuates so frequently that it is important to attempt to capture as much as possible (Nutbrown, 2006). Learning is dynamic in the Reggio Emilia setting. Children are expected to question, explore, research, and use their creativity. Teaching consists of multiple observations so that the teacher can provide feedback and adjust the environment in a way that is most beneficial for the student (Bond, 2015). On the other hand, Reggio Children (2012) stated the importance of observation but coupled the significance of documentation as well. McNally and Slutsky (2017) defined documentation as a noun and a verb, stating the benefits of the unique process. Reggio Emilia educators document students' behaviors. Fyfe (2016) noted that the process of documentation was cyclical, establishing a theory of

negotiated learning (Forman & Fyfe, 1998; Fyfe, 2016). Students in the Reggio Emilia approach are constantly being monitored with opportunity for reflection to allow the educator to develop a plan to assist the student cognitively, socially, and emotionally (McNally & Slutsky, 2017).

The atelier. Panciroli and Macuada (2017) referred to the atelier as a *laboratory*, stating it was synonymous with the space provided for scientific experimentation. The design is to provide a location in which its inhabitants can explore, discover, manipulate, and innovate (Panciroli & Macuada, 2017). The Reggio Emilia approach is established on the foundation of providing students a workshop or studio for learning: the atelier. Panciroli and Macuada referred to the atelier in a didactic environment as a component of the environment "to observe, communicate, conceptual elaboration along with verbal and logic elements that developed imagination and knowledge construction" (Panciroli & Macuada, 2017, p. 135). Lewin-Benham (2010) concluded from recent findings in neuroscience with observations of Reggio Emilia practices, most specifically, the atelier, to determine how interactions with a variety of materials stimulate the early childhood brain. Lewin-Benham discovered that through the incorporation of the atelier, children were able to develop neuroplasticity within the brain by being exposed to sensory-rich stimulations. When the atelier is used within the Reggio Emilia setting, adults may "tap maturational imperatives and stimulate the growth of neuronal networks" (Lewin-Benham, 2010, p. 16). This phenomenon allows children to develop cognitively as their brains undergo a sense of development as new connections are made throughout the child's brain (Lewin-Benham, 2010).

The atelier serves as the space for extended project work and a location for representing ideas and exploring for children (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 1998) considered the environment as a third teacher; however, the atelier was designed to be a place in which children could express their multiple languages through art, or music, or visual language, or any other way in which they could communicate (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Lewin-Benham (2010) referred to the atelier as a location in which children were able to be shaped by the materials. In addressing the link between the atelier and the development of artistic expression, with an emphasis on music, Hanna (2014) found that children truly benefit from the accessibility of visual art as well as musical experiences that are provided through the atelier. Jimenez-Eliaeson (2017) used a transdisciplinary approach to determine how the atelier could be utilized to develop communication and establish cross-boundary projects. Jimenez-Eliaeson clarified the importance of the atelier referring to it as the highest level of integration or transdisciplinary. Jimenez-Eliaeson continued defining the atelier as a space in which Reggio Emilia children were able to grow cognitively by being able to "carefully switch between planned and unplanned environment" (Jimenez-Eliaeson, 2017, p. 52). Like the environment, the atelier provides children another teacher within the setting of the classroom, yielding potential cognitive developments (Jimenez-Eliaeson, 2017; Panciroli & Macuada, 2017).

Flexible planning and project work. DeBruin-Parecki and Slutzky (2016) compiled a report of national pre-K age four learning standards to determine how similar the pre-K age four learning standards were across the United States, and how different

they were. The results of the study showed that pre-K age four learning standards varied greatly; nonetheless, DeBruin-Parecki and Slutzky emphasized the importance of early learning standards to establish student expectations and increase for academic success. With the incorporation of standards-based instruction, early childhood-aged children would be able to get away from a more laissez-faire approach to learning and be provided a clear path to academic development (Borisova et al., 2017; DeBruin-Parecki & Slutzky, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Conversely, Lai et al. (2018) argued that a standards-based approach would stifle the outcomes for children such as cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and communicative benefits. Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012) also promoted the removal of a more standards-based approach to instruction. Malaguzzi declared that set curriculums pushed for teaching and not for learning (Edwards et al., 2012). Within the Reggio Emilia classroom, there is great importance on long-term investigations that are organically crafted based on the individual needs and interests of the student. As Bruner (1977) stated, it is vital to establish a learning approach that gives students choice in their learning.

The Reggio approach is developed on a foundation that is child-originated but teacher-framed and facilitated (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Teachers provide the space (atelier) and flexible planning for long-term and short-term projects, taking a non-intrusive approach to children's learning (McNally & Slutsky, 2017). McCormick and Twitchell (2017) evaluated the learning experiences of children that participated in a project-based learning environment finding that children were able to explore and investigate their curiosities. Though McCormick and Twitchell did not observe a Reggio

Emilia-inspired school, they noticed that the incorporation of a project-based learning approach in the early childhood setting led to children taking the position of problem solvers, illustrating cognitive and social development. Further, in the research completed by Kokotsaki et al. (2016), it was found through quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design that incorporating long and short-term projects lead to student autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication and, reflection in students. Children are also positioned to use their imagination and interests in their project work. Reggio Emilia teachers promote multiple modes of learning and expression and the opportunity to collaborate and share learning. By utilizing their imagination, children are able to make better sense of the world and grow cognitively, socially, and emotionally (Edwards, 2017).

Perceived Benefits of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia approach provides a variety of competencies in children that has a positive influence on the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills in early childhood-aged children. Acknowledged benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach have included the development of collaborative and critical thinking, internal motivation, appreciation and expression in the creative arts, and self-confidence (Baker, 2015; Bond, 2015; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Harris, 2018; Hickey, 2019). The acknowledged effects benefit the development in early childhood-aged children cognitively, socially, and emotionally. A list of acknowledged benefits is provided in greater detail in the following section.

Collaborative thinking. One of the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for early childhood-aged students is the development of collaborative thinking (Cancemi, 2011; Hong et al., 2017). Hong et al. investigated the social and cognitive benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for students with and without disabilities. The results of the mixed-methods study showed that through the utilization of the Reggio Emilia approach, children were able to develop in the areas of relationship, communication, and play skills (Hong et al., 2017). Children in the Reggio Emilia program are encouraged to collaborate with their peers, their teachers, their families, and their environment to develop learning (Cancemi, 2011; Edwards et al., 2012; Hong, 2017). Hong et al. suggested that the outcomes of the Reggio Emilia approach had positive benefits on children with and without disabilities. Children were able to develop authentic friendships, learn compassion, cooperate, and collaborate with others, communicate effectively, and had a better sense of inclusion and openness (Hong et al., 2017). It is in this collaboration that students can develop socially. Burger (2015) researched strategies that led to the cognitive and social-emotional development in early childhood education, finding that social interaction and collaboration were vital elements needed within early childhood programs. Burger stated that social development was the learning of the values and skills needed to interact with others. Reggio Emilia constructs the environment that encourages children to collaborate and to communicate their needs as well as receive the needs of others (Hong et al., 2017; Whitmore et al., 2019). Similar to Burger's findings, Hong et al. identified how children who participated in Reggio Emilia programs developed collaborative thinking skills and learned how to interact with

others. White and Walker (2018) researched the lasting benefits of children who can access a curricular approach that emphasizes social and emotional development like Reggio Emilia. Through the study, White and Walker detailed that social and emotional development led to positive outcomes in school transition, academic achievement, relationships, and the overall wellbeing of the child in later years of life.

Critical thinking. The neurological development leading to children's ability to process information, understand language, solve problems, make decisions, and remember information (cognitive development) is determined by a child being able to build on his or her past learning (Carey et al., 2015; Lourenço, 2015). Providing children the opportunity to think critically and problem solve boosts cognitive development by providing skills needed for cognition (Loes & Pascarella, 2015). Leggett's (2017) research analyzed the role of teachers in developing a creative environment to allow students to grow cognitively. Through the findings, Leggett emphasized the importance of critical thinking, and identified the early years of a child's life as a pinnacle time to foster creativity: "Research suggests heightened creative ability during the ages of 4 through to 6 years" (Leggett, 2017, p. 847). Yet, for children to develop needed critical thinking skills, it is important for them (students) to be a part of an environment that fosters creative thinking (Leggett, 2017). One method in which Reggio Emilia develops critical thinking is through artistic work (Santín & Torruella, 2017). Children are positioned to express their thoughts and feelings while solving problems. They are taught to value creativity and thinking by expressing themselves in multiple disciplines (Santín & Torruella, 2017). Kim and Darling (2009) examined the experiences of four-year-old

students in a Reggio Emilia Program in Canada. The results from the study indicated that students were provided support in problem-solving that led to a practice that increased critical thinking in which students collaborated with their peers, analyzed problems that occurred through multiple perspectives, and reflected with their peers constantly (Kim & Darling, 2009). In nearly all aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach, children are expected to build on their learning and think critically (Edwards et al., 1998; New, 2007; Santín & Torruella, 2017). The Reggio Emilia approach positions students to be critical thinkers, developing cognitively through the incorporation of the project work to the use of the atelier.

Internal motivation. The Reggio Emilia approach is geared around the child. From the development of curriculum, to the activities, to the mode of instruction, everything is student-centered and student-based. Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012) stated the importance of developing inquiry within children to allow them to have a purpose to want to learn. Gardner and Jones (2016) attributed the fact that children could take ownership of their learning and be provided with materials and resources to assist their expression of learning as to key factors for increasing motivation. Boyd and Bath (2017) continued onto Gardner and Jones by investigating the perspective of students who participated within a Reggio Emilia environment. Boyd and Bath detailed the importance of providing children the opportunity to dive deeply into areas of interest as it would pass the external motivations of instruction. The results of Boyd and Bath indicated that students develop a strong sense of self-belief in their ability in which led to an environment that promoted social and emotional development within children. Harris

(2018) stated that children were more motivated within the Reggio Emilia program because they could explore their interests. Barbot (2019) connected the level of creativity that students practiced when they were motivated. Students were intrinsically motivated and as a result, showed they were more open to new experiences and the possibility of risk-taking (Barbot, 2019; Lanphear et al., 2017). Reggio Emilia's approach to children and the motivations of children is a key difference between the program and other early childhood-aged practices.

Creative arts. Creativity, imagination, and the arts are all major tenants in the Reggio Emilia approach. The concept of the atelier was developed to provide children a space to explore through the arts for extended periods (Edwards et al., 2012; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Panciroli & Macuada, 2017). Through that exploration, children are not only able to grow artistically, but cognitively as well. Piaget (1952) emphasized the developmental importance of early childhood-aged children having access to an environment with more opportunities for creativity and imagination. Edwards (2017) agreed with Piaget with regards to the importance of allowing children to engage in creativity and imagination, stating that creativity and imagination helped children to make sense of the world through the utilization of cognition. Furthermore, Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012) echoed both Piaget and Edwards by placing a great emphasis on the concept of the hundred languages of children. Gardner (1997) supported Malaguzzi's (Edwards et al., 2012) concept of incorporating the arts to foster creativity and to develop children cognitively. Gardner (2019) stated: "Creativity is most likely to happen if teachers and parents want it to happen and if they create interesting problems, questions,

challenges. And, of course, the ambient culture must value originality, not punish it" (Gardner, 2019, p. 57). Puryear (2016) assessed creativity, detailing the importance of developing a child's creativity for overall cognitive development. Using the cognitive-creative sifting model, Puryear is able to connect cognitive development and creativity. Reflecting on the works of Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget, Puryear's findings indicated that components of creative development: imagination, realistic thinking, reasoning, emotional motivation, social milieu, and life experiences fostered development in cognition as well as metacognition in children. The Reggio Emilia approach fosters creativity without limitations in children through the arts. As a result, children can acquire self-expression skills, imagination, creativity, and self-confidence, which Shirvanian and Michael (2017) stated yielded positive outcomes in cognitive development (Shirvanian & Michael, 2017; Smith-Gilman, 2015; Swann, 2008).

Self-confidence. The primary tenant of the Reggio Emilia approach is the image of the child. The curriculum is developed based on the students' interest; students are positioned to explore within their learning, the environment serves a key role in development, and collaboration and relationships are valued (Edwards et al., 2012; Hong et al., 2017; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). By developing the approach around the image of the child, Reggio Emilia students have a strong self-concept. Shabazian (2016) associated the confidence possessed by children in the Reggio Emilia program with the voice and choice of the children. Wood and Hedges (2016) investigated the benefits of children being able to express themselves through multimodalities. Following the study, Wood and Hedges discovered that the Reggio Emilia approach allowed students to

express themselves increased their ability of expression and increased their confidence in communicating and collaborating their thoughts, opinions, and ideas. Jia et al. (2016) referred to self-concept and confidence as the child's "consistent representation of him- or herself" (Jia et al., 2016, p. 226). Jia et al. continued stating that self-concept and confidence were developed through socialization where students needed to have an environment that promoted sociability, control, and assurance. Furthermore, Ashbrook (2019) discussed the importance of projects and a schooling program that emphasized children as a method to help children understand his or her place in the world. Malaguzzi (1998) understood the importance of a child's understanding of self when developing the Reggio Emilia approach. By establishing an approach that centered on the student, it allowed for cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

The Reggio Emilia Approach in the United States

Americans became familiar with the Reggio Emilia approach in the early 1990s, when the core values were attempted to be modified for early childhood programs in the United States (Edwards & Gandini, 2015; Reggio Children, 2012). Public and private early childhood centers tried to incorporate some of the philosophies of the approach; and since, Reggio Emilia is one of the most recognized early childhood approaches along with Montessori, Waldorf, and High Scope (Abdelfattah, 2015; Edwards & Gandini, 2015; Smith, 2014; Yonezu, 2018). Although many states within the United States have been able to adopt the Reggio Emilia philosophy such as South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, New York, California, among others, a looming difference in implementation continued to be displayed (Vatalaro et al., 2015). Vatalaro et al.

associated the difficulties in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach to a difference in cultural perspectives. A major shift in thinking had to come from the teacher as the role the teacher played in the Reggio Emilia classroom is a pivotal one.

Edwards and Gandini (2015) researched the importance of the role of the teacher in the Reggio Emilia approach, and how American teachers could establish the role of a Reggio Emilia educator in the United States. Overall, Edwards and Gandini found that the role of the teacher within the Reggio Emilia classroom was a paradigm shift for American teachers. The role of the teacher in the original Reggio Emilia classrooms was one that constantly evolved alongside the students. Teachers served as researchers, colleagues to both children and their families, adaptors of curriculum, and creators of the environment (Edwards & Gandini, 2015). Wood and Hedges (2016) researched the early childhood curriculum, addressing the role of the teacher and the delivery of content. In contrast with Edwards and Gandini, Wood and Hedges discussed the role of the teacher is to assist in the instruction in a less laissez-faire approach in which standards drove the curriculum. American educators needed proof that the Reggio Emilia approach could be beneficial with a standards-based educational system. In the case study completed by Mitchell et al. (2009), a teacher using the Reggio Emilia approach with fidelity was able to meet state and federal standards to show that the Reggio Emilia approach was possible.

There are numerous Reggio schools recognized by the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (2018). Each school implements the core values of the original Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, providing developmentally appropriate instruction for early childhood-aged children (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2018). Abdelfattah

(2015) completed a comparative study on one private and one public Reggio Emilia inspired program in San Francisco. The results of the research showed that Reggio Emilia was developmentally and culturally appropriate for American students; however, a major predictor for success was the educator's perceptions of the approach. Although schools could not completely conform to the Reggio Emilia guidelines, Abdelfattah suggested that with proper training and development of teachers along with teachers being provided the time to organize and plan, the approach could be very beneficial in the United States.

Perceived Limitations of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for early childhood-aged children. Perceived limitations of the Reggio Emilia approach were important to address potential bias. Both Cancemi (2011) and Abdelfattah (2015) indicated difficulties of the Reggio Emilia approach becoming common practice in the United States. Cancemi, a proponent of the Reggio Emilia approach admitted that traditional curriculum is developed to meet achievable outcomes, to master evaluation-based measures. Whereas projects are a main component of the Reggio Emilia approach, a traditional curriculum serves as a 'racecourse' for students to develop cognitively. Abdelfattah cited the governmental concerns with regards to licensure that would make operating a Reggio Emilia program difficult. Abdelfattah stated that childcare regulations impose specific standards on childcare facilities and practices that are not always optimal standards to develop children. The opinions towards education within the American culture and the

focus of legislation regarding education makes implementing Reggio Emilia with fidelity problematic (Abdelfattah, 2015; Cancemi, 2011; Elliott, 2005).

Hočevar et al. (2013) went beyond looking at the regards to standards and discussed difficulties in the Reggio Emilia approach. The Reggio Emilia curricular approach operates without a set curriculum (Edwards et al. 2012; Hočevar et al., 2013; McNally and Slutsky, 2017). Therefore, teachers have to be specially trained in order to operate within the reaches of Reggio Emilia. Hočevar et al. warned that with a lack of understanding and implementation from teachers, the approach could seem too open for educators to fully support. Abdelfattah (2015) agreed, stating that the Reggio Emilia approach required intensive commitment from the educators to create the environment needed for the child-centered practice. Furthermore, Hočevar et al. urged the importance of total support for the practice to ensure that the tenants to Reggio Emilia were practiced:

> Implementing the findings of various theories and concepts (i.e. the "rational foundation") is the result of each and every "agreement" or "negotiation" among the participants … in the educational process and their reinterpretations of the meanings. We believe this may open up a space for arbitrariness and interpretations that could—if realized within educational practice, especially where preschool teachers lack expertise—have consequences exactly the opposite of those intended. (p. 481)

It could be difficult to determine whether the approach designed in Italy is implemented in a manner that would yield the same results due to limitations found in governmental

policies, standardized education within the culture of American schools, and difficulties in implementing the approach.

Explanation of Related Past Research

A number of researchers have explored the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. The research has focused on the social constructivist method, or the integration of the arts, or the concept of inquiry-based practice. Past research has been written in peer-reviewed articles. The research that has been critical for this study are listed in the following section.

Seminal Works

The major seminal research regarding the problem statement of this study was conducted by Lipsey et al. (2015). Lipsey et al. evaluated the voluntary preschool programs in Tennessee to find that the program approach did not yield positive results for students in the long term. Instead, Lipsey et al. suggested a closer look at the curricular approach in order to achieve the developmental benefits of early childhood. With regard to the research conducted on Reggio Emilia, Firlick (1994) is responsible for conducting the major seminal research. Firlick's research provided insight into the Reggio Emilia approach in American schools, and how the practice aligned with the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood-aged children. With regard to the foundation and theory of the Reggio Emilia approach, Edwards et al. (1998) provided the research that examined the hundred languages of children while looking closely at the theory behind the Reggio Emilia approach.

Studies With Similar Scope and Rationale for Research

This section of the study is to provide access to previous research that was conducted on the topic as based on the gap in literature while also providing suggestions for future research.

Andrews (2012) conducted a quantitative casual-comparative study examining the effectiveness of different early childhood curriculum models preparation for kindergarten. For further research, Andrews recommended a more in-depth dive into each curricular approach, measuring its effectiveness in comparison to the others on a larger scale. Andrews also recommended an analysis of students with different backgrounds, living in different geographic locations across the United States to determine if patterns could be determined. This current study aligned with Andrews by investigating the Reggio Emilia curricular approach in a more in-depth manner to get a better understanding of how the curricular approach affected cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood-aged children.

Harris (2018) conducted a phenomenological study investigating parental experiences when choosing the Reggio Emilia program in the American Midwest. For future research, Harris recommended looking more closely at how children from a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool program transitioned into kindergarten. Harris stated the importance of finding the initial benefits of the Reggio Emilia setting on children to make suggestions regarding standards of practice in preschools. To support Harris' research, this current study examines the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach by examining how the approach prepares children for primary school.

Lawson (2018) investigated the emergent literacy skills children needed to learn through a multi-case qualitative study that examined the practices of Reggio Emilia-inspired schools. Lawson saw a need for further research to be conducted on the benefits of imaginary play in an environment that supported oral language development and social interactions in order to determine the full benefits in which the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs could play on early literacy skills. Though this current study does not examine early literacy skills, it does acknowledge components of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that is conducive to practices needed in terms of Lawson's study that inspires early literacy skills. Overall, Lawson is attempting to determine best practice techniques with a high effect size on early literacy skills needed for reading. Examining best practice techniques in literacy aligns with cognitive development, which is supported by this study while also serving to seek foundational skills needed for the future academic success of children.

Stroh (1995) conducted a study that addressed the lack of an early childhood curriculum that appropriately met the needs of early childhood-aged children and their teachers. Stroh looked at the needs of children and the curricular approaches that were available to address the needs. For further study, Stroh discussed the development of a general curriculum guide to determine the criteria and principles that were addressed within the curriculum that aligned with the needs of children. Furthermore, Stroh suggested a closer examination of the materials and resources that were developed in each curricular approach to support the teacher. In following Stroh's research, this

current study goes deeper into the Reggio Emilia approach, looking at the components of Reggio Emilia that support the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

Stowell (2014) conducted research on Reggio Emilia-inspired kindergarten programs to describe, interpret, and appraise the intentions of the program with an overall purpose of stating the aims, practices, and values provided in the Reggio Emilia approach. Stowell examined the intentions of Reggio Emilia, stating what the program looked like in practice, the environment of the Reggio Emilia program and parent perspectives and implications. Stowell suggested implementing a longitudinal study to follow children in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program alongside children in traditional programs to determine the benefits of both. In terms of this current study, there is an emphasis on the long term benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach by investigating the perceptions provided by parents as well as educators who currently teach in a Reggio Emilia setting.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Related Literature

Researchers have explored similar topics to the research problem presented in this study. There have been examinations of Reggio Emilia-inspired programs in the United States as a method of alternative pre-schooling. A strength found in the past research was detailed descriptions of the Reggio Emilia approach with development into the core tenants of the approach (Edwards et al., 2012; Firlick, 2994; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Previous research provided a commentary on the proposed benefits and limitations of the Reggio Emilia approach in terms of providing a child-centered, social constructivist approach to teaching and learning as well.

A weakness in the past research could be found in examining the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach on early childhood children. Most previous research provided a summary or qualitative view of the Reggio Emilia approach with an emphasis on one or two specific programs, looking closely at the practice of the programs in terms of the philosophical approach of Reggio Emilia (Abdelfattah, 2015; Hong et al., 2017); Stowell, 2014). Previous research did not examine the psychological aspect of cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood-aged children; therefore, this current study addressed the gap in the literature.

Studies With an Exploratory Case Study Approach

The exploratory case study approach was used for this study because the research questions intended to determine the perspectives of educators and families of children attending Reggio Emilia programs on the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. The exploratory case study approach is appropriate for this study. Through the exploratory case study approach, a deeper look at specific Reggio Emilia programs in the Southeast can be done. Questions can be posed to develop a greater understanding of the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood-aged children. There are many components of the Reggio Emilia approach that are considered developmentally appropriate practice that align with the social constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Abdelfattah, 2015; Biermeier, 2015; Firlick, 1994). To capture the aspects of

the approach that fostered cognitive, social, and emotional development for children, the exploratory case study approach was chosen.

Bond (2016) utilized an exploratory case study to document the journey of a teacher negotiating the role of music in a Reggio Emilia inspired program. Bond explained that the use of the exploratory case study design was most appropriate because of not having a clear, single set outcome. Bond provided a description of the case that corresponded with the first research question, and then identified themes found in the data. Like Bond's research, the exploratory case study approach was used in this study to develop themes found in the data to determine the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach on cognitive, social and emotional benefits on early childhood-aged children. My choice for utilizing an exploratory case study approach was similar to Bond, to investigate a topic without a single set of outcomes within a focus that has yet to be explored.

Summary and Conclusions

The Reggio Emilia approach places a heavy emphasis on the image of the child (Hong et al., 2017; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). The approach utilizes the environment and the teacher, the family, and classmates as the teachers. The social constructivist approach values the importance of relationships and fosters relationships early to provide a foundation for children to build. The context of the Reggio Emilia approach was provided through the brief history of the program beginning in Italy following the Second World War. By looking at the history of the program, the culture of the philosophy and the purpose of the approach were viewed. The principles of the Reggio Emilia also gave context to this current study. Previous studies, regarding the Reggio Emilia approach,

investigated the fundamental benefits of the approach. Previous studies emphasize the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach as it fosters socialization and collaboration while also providing an environment that is considered to encourage creativity and academic risk (Abdelfattah, 2015; Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2012; Malaguzzi, 1998). Past studies have examined the different principles of the Reggio Emilia approach as a method to gain a further contextual understanding behind the purpose of the approach as well as the goals which the Reggio Emilia sought to accomplish with the first schools (Cagliari et al, 2016; Edwards et al., 2012; Fyfe, 2016). More investigations were researched to determine the positive benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. Past research was completed to examine the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of early childhood programs and the potential limitations of traditional programming (Lipsey et al., 2015). The gap in literature remained to determine what aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach had positive benefits on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood-aged children.

Previous studies with a focus on the developmental benefits of the Reggio Emilia program were investigated to align with the problem that compelled this study. McNally and Slutsky (2017) researched the elements of the Reggio Emilia approach that yielded positive outcomes as an early childhood program while Smith-Gilman (2015) investigated the benefits of the program on children. Nonetheless, questions remained regarding the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood-aged children. There was limited research available that could provide the developmental benefits in relation to preparation for a

more traditional K-12 program with standards and testing. From my study, there was minimum research providing the points of view of educators and families to address how each felt about how the Reggio Emilia approach developed the child cognitively, socially, and emotionally, preparing them for schooling beyond the Reggio Emilia program. The findings from the study may fill the gap in the literature by exploring the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach on early childhood-aged children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Chapter 3 will provide a more detailed description of the gap in the literature by investigating the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach to cognitive, social, and emotional development through an exploratory case study design.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children. The qualitative case study approach was used to identify the thoughts and beliefs of the participants based on their everyday experiences with children who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool (Annells, 2006; Mills et al., 2010). Chapter 3 addresses the research method for the current study, with details on the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, the methodology used, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions provided direction to the current study:

1. What are the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach?
2. What experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach did parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive prepared children for primary and elementary schooling?

A qualitative exploratory case study approach was chosen for the current study to explore and understand the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach by gaining an understanding of the perceptions of educators and families of children attending a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. Yin (2016) emphasized the importance of

qualitative studies, contending that such studies allow researchers to consider the views and perspectives of participants while accounting for real-world contextual conditions to explain behavior. In this study, I sought to gather the views and perspectives of parents and Reggio Emilia-inspired educators to gain an understanding of how the curricular approach benefits students who attend these schools. Breslin and Buchanan (2008) reflected on the benefits of a case study approach, detailing the fact that a case study allows a researcher to explore the space between theory and practice. In this study, the purpose was to go beyond the theory and determine the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach as perceived by parents, teachers, and school leaders currently involved within the Reggio Emilia setting, either by having children attend a Reggio Emilia-inspired program or by teaching at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program.

During the process of determining the research design for this study, I considered other methodological approaches but determined that they were not as beneficial as a qualitative case study. The quantitative method was rejected based on the purpose of the current study, in which I did not seek to detail causal inferences by observing a large sample size to develop quantitative data (Allen, 2017; Babbie, 2010). Phenomenology was considered as an alternative qualitative research design but was dismissed because the goal of investigating the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach would not have been realized fully with a phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that the benefit of a phenomenological research design is that it allows for identifying common themes across data based on shared experiences. Nonetheless, outcomes are determined based on experiences through a

phenomenological study, in which biases can skew data. If participants share a positive experience, their responses to interview questions will indicate the experience; conversely, if participants share a negative experience, their responses will also be negative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In contrast, the case study approach involves investigating the phenomenon of real-life events (Zainal, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Serving as the sole researcher in this study, I was responsible for all aspects of developing an understanding of the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. The educational setting that I chose for this study was a Reggio Emilia-inspired program in an southeastern U.S. state. I am a public middle school administrator who is not involved with Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools in southeastern U.S. states. For the purpose of this study, I had to complete steps as the researcher to acquire the necessary data to respond to the research questions posed.

My relationships with the gatekeepers—the school leaders of each data collection site—were established for the purpose of this study. I had no previous professional or personal relationships with these individuals. The findings of this study was provided to each of the gatekeepers in executive summary form following the research.

As the researcher, I had the role of communicating with the gatekeepers of the multiple programs. I coordinated a visit with each program to learn more about it from the point of view of the director. As an observer, I collected the first form of data through my own general observation tool (Appendix B) to identify that the key principles

of the Reggio Emilia approach with the perceived acknowledged benefits were evident. The general observation consisted of reviewing artifacts that identified the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach at the school and classroom level, in which no individual or identifiable child behaviors were recorded.

As the interviewer, I scheduled, conducted, and audio-recorded each participant interview, posing specific questions to parent participants (Appendix E), teacher participants (Appendix D), and school leader participants (Appendix C). Recordings were transcribed and then provided to each of the interviewed participants for accuracy. Each participant received an audio recording of their interview and had the opportunity to examine their responses for contextual accuracy and correctness. Once the participants had approved their transcripts, the transcripts were used as data to support this study. Participants did not receive any type of incentives for their participation; however, the findings of the study will be provided to each of the participants following the study.

Methodology

For this study, I used a qualitative, exploratory case study approach bounded to one region of a southeastern U.S. state. Qualitative research was consistent with the investigation of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach to determine its perceived benefits for developing students cognitively, socially, and emotionally. To effectively investigate the Reggio Emilia curricular approach, three different programs were used as data collection sites. A general observation was held at each program. Interviews were also held with the school leaders of each of the programs, along with teachers and parents of students who attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired program. To triangulate data for the

findings of this research, I used four forms of data collection: a general observation and three interviews with three different groups (school leaders, teachers, and parents). The interviews differed for parents, teachers, and school leaders, as these groups had different perspectives and backgrounds concerning cognitive, social, and emotional development in children. By acquiring a greater sampling of participants from three data collection sites and using multiple forms of data (i.e., general observation and three sets of interview questions) and three groups of participants, I expected that patterns would emerge to better reach saturation and allow triangulation of data (Emmel, 2013; Stewart, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Participant Selection

The participants selected for this study were educators who worked within a Reggio Emilia-inspired setting, as well as parents of children who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired early childhood program. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to identify participants who were considered to be especially knowledgeable about the Reggio Emilia curricular approach and participants who were available and willing to participate, with the ability to communicate their experiences for the purpose of this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Five to 10 participants, who included school leaders, teachers within the Reggio Emilia-inspired program, and parents of children who attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired program, were considered at each data collection site. To ensure the depth of data collected, the participants were drawn from the population of three separate programs within the region.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to determine the data collection sites for the current research. I researched each of the data collection sites online to ensure that they met the criteria to be selected as Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Then, I visited each of the data collection sites to ensure that there was evidence of the Reggio Emilia approach being used (see Appendix B). I looked for the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach as well as the acknowledged benefits of the approach in children. In my initial search, I looked for Reggio-Emilia inspired programs that were located in an southeastern U.S. state in which students generally transitioned out of the Reggio Emilia program into a publicly funded primary or elementary school. I chose the data collection sites based on the following outline:

1. I chose Reggio Emilia-inspired programs listed on the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) website because each of the programs elevated the image of early childhood education; connected with Reggio Emilia, Italy; provided a voice to the global community of Reggio Emilia; consisted of dedicated professionals committed to innovative educational practices; and was a member of NAREA (NAREA, 2018).
2. The Reggio Emilia-inspired programs were geographically located in an southeastern U.S. state and were feeder programs to public kindergarten, first, or second grade. The geographic location was important to ensure that demographic factors were similar in the population for the study.

3. Edwards et al.'s (2012) work on the implementation principles of Reggio Emilia was used as a checklist (see Appendix B) to confirm that the elements of the Reggio Emilia approach were present in each program.

Sampling

According to Kadam and Bhalerao (2010), the sample size is the number of participants used in a study. Every individual within the population should have an equal opportunity to be a part of the sample, with the participation of one participant not hindering the participation of others (Kadam & Bhalerao, 2010). With regard to the number of participants chosen for the sample, Stebbins (2001) suggested that there should be enough participants to achieve data saturation. The participants for this study were drawn from three different Reggio Emilia-inspired programs with five to 10 respondents to achieve data saturation. With a more homogeneous sample of similar programs used for participant selection, fewer cases were needed for saturation (Stebbins, 2001).

Program participants for this exploratory case study were determined through participant selection, whereas educator and parent participants were invited to participate through an email explaining the purpose of the current study and the significance. The invitation to participate email provided details on the current study, including the purpose, problem statement, and significance of the study. The letter also requested the participation of parents of children who attended the data collection site, teachers, and school leaders by agreeing to be interviewed. Details of the interview were included to

announce the proposed timeframe of the interview and the location of the interview, which was at the data collection site.

Instrumentation

To achieve data saturation in the current study, participant perceptions from three different Reggio Emilia-inspired programs were explored. The data collection instruments that I used for this study were general observations of the school and classrooms and one-on-one interviews consisting of my own interview questions. The design of the interview questions captured the essence of the two research questions driving this study. The interview questions were posed to seek detailed responses influencing the outcome to common themes regarding cognitive, social, and emotional development in children attending Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Along with the interview questions, relevant follow-up questions were posed to ensure a natural conversation and more in-depth responses. The interview questions were differentiated based on the participant group. One set of interview questions was used for the school leader (Appendix C), with another set of questions used for the teachers (Appendix D) and a different set of the questions used for the parents (Appendix E). The questions were developed based on the assumed level of understanding that each group had regarding cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment of Participants

Richardson (2015) suggested that purposive sampling should be used when participants in a study need to meet certain criteria. The participants within this study

were selected based on their involvement within each data collection site. The use of purposive sampling within this study provided a process for creating an opportunity to acquire a sample whose members were knowledgeable about the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach for children (Hulley et al., 2013). The participants in the study served as a sample of the population representing only the data collection sites and meeting the inclusion criteria. After the approval of the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB; 05-29-20-0291728), all of the invited participants served as either leaders within the school site, teachers, or parents of students who currently attended the Reggio Emilia-based school. The school leader forwarded the invitation to all qualified potential participants but did not recruit them. The sample consisted of between five and 10 participants at each program location. There were between three and five teachers, along with three to five parents and the school leader.

Inclusion Criteria

The population of this research included school leaders, educators, and parents of children who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired school that met the purposive sampling criteria. The characteristics of the purposive sample frame for school leaders and educators consisted of having worked in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for at least one school year and having signed written informed consent. The characteristics of the purposive sample frame for parents consisted of having a child who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for at least one school year. Parents also needed to have a child planning to attend a publicly funded primary or elementary school that served students in

kindergarten, first grade, and second grade and needed to sign a written informed consent document.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1. Has worked in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for at least one school year. 2. Has a child who attends or a child who has attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for at least one school year. 3. Has a child who will be attending a publicly funded primary or elementary school that serves students in kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. 4. Provides written informed consent.	1. Declines to participate in the study. 2. Does not provide written informed consent to participate in the study. 3. Has not been a part of a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for greater than one school year.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process involved collecting three types of data by way of interviews from school leaders, teachers, and parents of children attending one of the three data collection sites. Once the data had been collected, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed word for word using scribie.com, an automated speech-to-text transcription service, and then the findings were shared with the participants involved for greater dependability. Significant statements and responses for the interviews were clustered into codes for better interpretation and familiarity. The descriptions of the codes were organized to answer each research question appropriately. For analyzing the collected data, I used a combination of Quirkos and Microsoft Word to code the responses.

Table 2

Data Collection Information

Data collection process	Sources for instrument development	Frequency	Duration	Recording data	Follow up
Data were collected through virtual, general observations at the data collection site.		1 virtual, general observation per data collection site.	2-2.5 hours each.	Anecdotal checklist.	Anecdotal observations were recorded.
Data were collected through participant interviews at the data collection site.	Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input. *Pathfinder International*. Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.	1 time per participant.	1-1.5 hours each.	Audio recording.	Interviews were transcribed and provided to each participant. The results of the interview will be shared with the participants at the data collection site after the dissertation is approved.

Quirkos, a qualitative analysis program, assisted in coding the interview responses, where labels were created, and then participant responses were managed and sorted to allow analysis, finding common themes and patterns related to the benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children (Quirkos, 2019). A priori coding was considered initially during the data collection process to have a clear direction of how the responses would be coded

to better align with the conceptual framework (Saldana, 2016; Stuckey, 2015). Nonetheless, due to the open-ended responses and to remove potential bias, responses were coded after the entire collection of interview responses were completed (Stuckey, 2015). Responses to the open-ended questions were inserted in the Quirkos software like the interview responses to find common themes and patterns. Therefore, a more inductive method of coding was used. Saldana emphasized the importance of inductive coding, stating that through inductive coding, researchers were able to allow the process of coding to be emergent with a more data-driven essence. The data was organized into themes, in which patterns of the phenomenon could be observed. The results formulated answers to each of the two research questions. Following the use of data for this research study, data will be stored on an external flash drive in a locked cabinet of the researcher's personal office for five years. Following the five-year period, the data will be disposed of.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) referred to trustworthiness of qualitative research as the degree of confidence in the data, the interpretation, and the methods used to ensure the quality of the study. Four criteria were used to determine trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following section will address how each of the criteria is addressed.

Credibility

The credibility of the study is a crucial aspect. The study should be grounded in theory, comparable to other grounded theory studies (Connelly, 2016). To establish

credibility within this current study, prolonged engagement with program sites was used through general observation of the data collection sites and interviews with parents, teachers, and school leaders. Additional studies with the focus on Reggio Emilia were explored along with studies that utilized an exploratory case study approach. By examining previous research regarding the researched benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach, and citing each within Chapter 2, this study is grounded in theory studies (Connelly, 2016). Limitations to this current study were also added in Chapter 2, confirming that the literature was reviewed and qualified for accuracy.

Dependability

Dependability within the study refers to the stability of data over time, or how likely the research would continue yielding the same results. To add dependability to this study I recorded the process of data collection including the use of member checking. Brear (2018) referred to member checking as the process of checking their recorded interview transcript for accuracy with the ability to expand or amend their responses with possible follow-up interviews or written responses. After transcribing the interviews, participants were provided access to their responses. Although I have the names of the participants, I ensured their confidentiality by using a pseudonym to describe each participant. The findings of this study will also be shared with the participants to analyze the findings based on their responses. Brear (2018) explained the benefits of member checking lead to the revelation of unrecognized researcher biases and the identification of errors of fact while also establishing more equitable relationships between the researcher and the participants. By member checking, the participants were able to validate their

experiences as well as ensure accuracy within the data. Recording the process and using member checking allowed for an audit trail of the process (Brear, 2018; Connelly, 2016).

Confirmability

Similar to dependability, member checking proved to ensure confirmability as Connelly (2016) referred to confirmability as the neutrality of the study, in that the research was written objectively. To also provide confirmability to this current study, I added a statement regarding the limitation of this current study and a difference in culture and implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States that is comparable to Reggio Emilia, Italy. Weaknesses within the research were also provided to ensure neutrality.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings could be useful to people in other settings (Connelly, 2016). Transferability is supported by a detailed description of the context, location, and people studies to inform readers of the process used to complete the study so that there is a possibility of replication or extension (Connelly, 2016). To add transferability to this study, I created a detailed description of the data collection site and the participants of the study. The data was collected and explained so that future researchers will be able to analyze the details of this study for future research.

Ethical Procedures

Zimmer (2018) emphasized the importance of embracing contextual integrity and addressing ethical concerns within the research. Much thought was put into the research design and the methodology to ensure that ethical practice will be implemented

throughout the data collection process. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the need to develop trust between the researcher and the gatekeeper as well as transparency. I provided a detailed description of the purpose of this study and the benefits that could be yielded from this research. I completed in-depth research on the data collection site and visited the sites to observe the programs. After permission from the Walden Institution Review Board (IRB 05-29-20-0291728), I met with the gatekeepers and was open, answering any questions and providing as much transparency as possible to establish trust. To address ethical concerns within the data collection process, informed consent was obtained from all of the participants prior to any data collection. The informed written consent detailed the purpose of the study, the significance, and guarantee confidentiality in which I used a pseudonym for each participant. Participants were also provided with an explanation of the right to participate or to withdraw at any time. Details of the data collection process were provided to the participants along with possible benefits of the study prior to any data collection as well. Participants were informed of the audio recording prior and given the transcripts of the recording. Further details addressed any and all possible risks for the participants and an explanation of confidentiality protection. Participant interview responses will be kept confidential between only the participant and me. Transcript data from the interviews will be stored on an external flash drive in a locked cabinet in my personal office, which is also locked for no less than five years. Lastly, to address any additional ethical concerns all participants followed up with me to ask any questions regarding the study or the research,

and all participants will be provided a copy of the results following the completion of the dissertation.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the methodology for this current study. Beginning with the research design and rationale, the justification was provided why an exploratory case study approach was chosen over a phenomenology approach. My role as a researcher was described in detail along with my plan for determining the data collection sites and data collection. A participation selection logic was provided detailing the sampling, instruments, and procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The data analysis plan was expounded upon, providing a detailed description of how data would be collected and the tools that would be utilized to assist in data collection. Issues of trustworthiness were explained to ensure that this study had credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. With regard to ethical procedures, Chapter 3 also provided an explanation of how ethical considerations were made within this study to ensure that participants were treated ethically and how confidentiality will be honored. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the results for this current study in the format of a story, detailing the setting of the data collection site, demographics of the participants, data collection and analysis methods, the results, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The investigation of participant-perceived benefits of Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in privately funded voluntary prekindergarten early childhood programs in a southeastern state guided this study. The first research question for this study was developed to determine the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach. The second research question examined which experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived as preparing children for primary and elementary school.

Chapter 4 will include brief descriptions of the data collection sites, general demographics of the participants, the data collection process, and the procedures for data analysis. Additionally, I will present the results of data collection organized by research question. After providing evidence of trustworthiness, I will conclude the chapter with a summary.

Setting

Since the inception of the first Reggio Emilia schools in Italy after the Second World War, the fundamentals of the approach have been used in preschool programs in over 30 countries (Cagliari et al., 2016; NAREA, 2018). The initial plan to determine the data collection sites was for me to complete research on each potential site and then visit each to ensure that there was evidence that the Reggio Emilia approach was being used (see Appendix B); however, with the outbreak of COVID-19, I was forced to alter my plan of visiting each potential data collection site. Consequently, I used the NAREA

website to locate programs that were identified as members. Membership in the NAREA indicated that the program had been vetted for implementing the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach schoolwide (NAREA, 2018). Each program was also geographically located in a region of a southeastern state and served as a feeder program to public kindergarten, first grade, or second grade.

I chose three programs as my data collection sites in a southeastern U.S. state. Each program had been a member of the NAREA and had been operating for greater than 10 years. After researching and communicating with over 20 possible data collection sites, I was able to find three data collection sites whose leaders were willing to allow me to complete a general observation to identify that the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach with the perceived acknowledged benefits were evident. For the safety of each program and me, safety measures were taken during each visit in accordance with CDC guidelines due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Some programs declined participation in the study for safety and health reasons associated with COVID-19. Each of the three programs visibly integrated the main principles of the Reggio Emilia approach based on my general observations of artifacts that suggested the program's focus on the image of the child; relationships between children, educators, families, and community; the environment as the third educator; the hundred languages of children; educational observation and documentation; the atelier; and flexible planning and project work.

Demographics

The participants in this study included school leaders, educators, and parents of students at the three data collection sites. Each of the school leaders had been the

director of their respective program for at least one school year, and each of the teachers had taught in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program for at least one school year. Each parent had a child who attended one of the data collection sites and planned to attend a publicly funded primary or elementary school that served students in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade.

Pseudonyms were given to the participants to protect their real identities as well as each data collection site. Communication with participants occurred through email or telephone correspondence. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and each participant signed an informed consent form that provided information regarding the study (see Appendices G, H, and I). In total, there were three program director participants; 10 educators, who included teachers and exploratory teachers of subjects such as art, music, and world language; and eight parents of children who attended one of the three data collection sites. A total of 32 parents and educators were contacted, and 21 participated in the study. Tables 3-5 present the demographic data for the participants in each group.

Table 3

Demographics of School Leader Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Level of education	Years as school leader	Years as school leader in Reggio Emilia-inspired program
Leader 1	Master's	8	6
Leader 2	Bachelor's	11	11
Leader 3	Master's	36	11

Table 4

Demographics of Educator Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Level of education	Years teaching	Years teaching in Reggio Emilia-inspired program	Age levels teaching
Educator 1	Associate's	2	2	3-4
Educator 2	Bachelor's	8	5	3-4
Educator 3	Bachelor's	5	5	1-5
Educator 4	Bachelor's	12	12	1-5
Educator 5	Associate's	2	2	2-3
Educator 6	Associate's	5	2	3-4
Educator 7	Master's	3	3	4-5
Educator 8	Associate's	4	4	2-3
Educator 9	Bachelor's	4	4	3-4
Educator 10	Bachelor's	7	7	1-5

Table 5

Demographics of Parent Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Occupation	Number of children in the family
Parent 1	Female	27	Married	Bachelor's	Sales	1
Parent 2	Female	34	Married	Master's	Medical field	4
Parent 3	Female	30	Single	Master's	Self-employed	2
Parent 4	Male	53	Married	Master's	Medical field	1
Parent 5	Female	42	Married	Bachelor's	Education	3
Parent 6	Male	25	Married	High school	Self-employed	2
Parent 7	Female	29	Married	Bachelor's	Stay-at-home mom	3
Parent 8	Female	22	Single	Associate's	Education	1

Note. Each participant was given a pseudonym for anonymity.

Data Collection

Data collection began with in-depth interviews of 21 participants who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, with an additional 15 minutes to review the transcript for accuracy. Each interview was completed individually by either phone or Google Meet because of COVID-19 safety measures. All interviews for the 21 participants were held within a 1-

month time frame. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants through the iPhone Voice Memo application.

The virtual, general observations of each center were held following the interviews. The virtual, general observations consisted of photographs of student and teacher work, with all names and identifiable components redacted or unused. School syllabi, newsletters, websites and webpages, and promotional videos capturing the essence of each program were viewed. The virtual observations were done at the program or classroom level, with no individual or identifiable child behaviors recorded for visual components of the Reggio Emilia-inspired program. Any names of students, teachers, or people within the program that could be used to identify the program were redacted or unused.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Interview Data

The data analysis process consisted of taking the 21 interviews and coding them to develop themes that would provide responses to the two research questions. To triangulate the data, three separate groups were coded: program directors, teachers, and parents of students attending a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. An inductive method of coding was utilized as codes were obtained from the interview question (Saldana, 2016). Each step of the coding process was recorded and kept in a journal on an external flash drive to control for bias and to ensure validity in the data analysis process.

The first step of the data analysis process was to transcribe the interviews. The audio files were transcribed by scribie.com and were received through email as Microsoft

Word documents and PDF files. In the next step, the transcriptions were reviewed by hand and grouped based on common words and phrases that were found in each of the interviews. A total of 930 precodes were developed based on general or preliminary notes taken by me to identify common wording or phrases used. *Students can learn in a natural environment*, *small grouping*, *projects*, and *value* were examples of common words and phrases found during the process. Following precoding, the emerging words and phrases were condensed by me from 930 precodes into 55 codes based on similarity in subject area in the words and phrases. Examples of the codes that were created include the following: *Value in opinions* encompassed 36 words or phrases used by participants to refer to the value in opinions of children. *Portfolio of learning* was referred to by participants 35 different times in the 21 interviews. *Atelier* was referred to 32 different times by participants. *Willingness to learn* was referred to 19 different times by participants.

Following the process of precoding and coding, a Microsoft Word copy of the transcribed responses to the open-ended questions was inserted into Quirkos software to double-check for the codes developed in the first cycle of coding. The 55 codes (see Appendix F) were used as *quirks* or keywords or phrases in the software. The Quirkos software then organized all of the 21 participant interviews by quirks, separating each by color. In total, 647 quotes were collected from the 21 interviews and categorized using the 55 codes derived from the first cycle of coding. Any phrase or quote that was not highlighted and coded based on the 55 codes was either placed into one of the 55 codes

based on my sound understanding the context of the code or placed in its own category if it did not fit. A total of two categories were created with two quotes in each.

In the third cycle, subcategories were created based on common phrases and overlapping quotes. There were 11 subcategories determined and named based on my interpretation of the responses. Each subcategory consisted of two to seven of the original 55 codes that were developed in the first cycle (see Appendix G). The subcategories were then organized into themes, in which patterns of the phenomenon could be observed (Saldana, 2016). The four themes were determined based on the essence of the categories while also responding to the two research questions, which involved determining the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach, and examining the experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived as preparing children for primary and elementary school. The themes that were developed were beneficial approaches to learning, social and emotional benefits, acquisition of essential skills for school, and collaboration.

Analysis of Observational Data

Following the development of the four themes, virtual, general observations were held in which photographs of student and teacher work were observed along with school syllabi, newsletters, websites and webpages, and promotional videos to capture the essence of each program. In total, 22 artifacts were gathered from all three data collection sites. Examples of the artifacts include class newsletters in which activities were detailed by the teacher and future and past learning were shared. Websites were

used to gain information about the programs, from the mission statements to the curriculum guides. Promotional videos were also used to show day-in-the-life experiences to allow students to observe some of the activities and structures put into place to enable students to learn and develop within the Reggio Emilia-inspired program. The artifacts were then documented based on their connection with the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach (see Appendix B). Afterward, the artifacts were further categorized based on the 11 subcategories determined from the interview data.

From the 22 artifacts, 35 examples of the subcategories were found to provide evidence of each theme to triangulate the data. Keywords, phrases, and activities that illustrated the subcategories were determined by me based on the context of the artifact in relationship with the 11 subcategories. Classroom newsletters illustrated how students were able to use different modalities of learning, where activities such as singing and coloring were incorporated for students to have a better understanding of the material. Promotional videos also showed how the environment was used as a key part of instruction, where students were able to explore their surroundings and inquire about future learning. The virtual, general observation artifacts were used along with the interviews to support the four themes of this study.

Development of Themes

The inductive coded units were created to align with the two research questions, illustrating the experiences of each of the three participant groups. Saldana (2016) emphasized the importance of inductive coding, stating that through inductive coding, researchers are able to allow the process of coding to be emergent with a more data-

driven essence. In 21 total interviews, there were a total of 930 precodes that emerged from coding three different groups; however, 55 codes were developed based on similarity in the areas of words and phrases (see Appendix F). In the second cycle of coding, a total of 647 quotes were organized in the Quirkos software based on the 55 codes. A third cycle of coding was then implemented to determine subcategories based on common phrases and overlapping quotes determined from the Quirkos software to develop shared themes, where 11 subcategories captured the major components of the responses (see Appendix G). Saldana emphasized the importance of drawing out the abbreviated or truncated essence of the codes to develop themes. The later level coding process included the creation of the themes from each of the categories, in which the codes were sorted to answer both research questions.

Finally, four themes were developed based on the truncated essence of the codes in relationship with the two research questions: the beneficial approaches to learning, the social and emotional benefits, acquisition of essential skills for school, and collaboration. One of the themes that emerged in this study was *approaches to learning*, which included the subcategories of multiple styles of learning and authentic learning, which further addressed the codes of portfolio of learning, discovering, project work, questioning, and how to learn. Additional codes that emerged included shared learning, small groups, cross-curricular approach, provoking curiosity, atelier, competent children, and environment.

Verbatim quotes (in vivo coding) were used to act as textural descriptions, adding credibility to the results of this study. Saldana (2016) reported that in vivo coding can be

used by a researcher to grasp the essential points of a participant to further ground research. Verbatim quotes were included in the results based on their relevance to the themes. For example, a verbatim quote was included under Theme 1 of Research Question 1 ("beneficial approaches to learning"), in which Educator 4 stated,

> Our students are able to express themselves in all sorts of way. Some enjoy books and picture books, but others are not quite there. We have students that really take to music or art. We guide them through the classroom activities, but their interests can dictate how they choose to express their learning.

The use of the verbatim quotes provided a deeper understanding of each of the participants' points of view.

The responses from the 21 participants in this study showed the benefits they perceived in the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Responses by each of the participants confirmed similar results for the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach; however, one discrepancy that was found came from the parent group in the area of essential skills that would prepare their children for primary and elementary school. Two parents suggested that they did not feel that their children would have the academic skills needed to be successful when they initially began primary and elementary school. The two parents felt that their children had benefited from being able to learn in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program; however, they believed that their children would not be ready to demonstrate the skills sought by their teachers in the areas of literacy and mathematical practice. One school leader also voiced concern with students transitioning from the Reggio Emilia-inspired setting to a more

traditional setting in terms of standards-based instruction. The school leader stated that they felt that the structured approach of standards-based instruction would not allow students to continue the exploration of learning. Out of eight parent responses, 10 educator responses, and three school leader responses, these were the only discrepant responses.

Results

Sutton and Austin (2015) reviewed the principles of collection, analysis, and management of qualitative research to better share the process of data collection and presenting the information. Sutton and Austin stated the importance of representing participants' live experiences in a manner that is respectful to the participant and meaningful to the reader. The findings of this qualitative exploratory case study will be shared in a narrative format, organized based on the four overlying themes derived from the responses of the three groups of participants and the observations. The themes represent the abbreviated essence of the participants' responses. The first research question for this study determined the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach. Two themes that emerged from the data to answer the first research question were the beneficial approaches to learning which emphasized the perceived cognitive development benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach, and social and emotional benefits that focused on the perceived social and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. The second research question asked the experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived prepared children for primary and

elementary school. One theme that emerged from the data to answer the second research question was the acquisition of essential skills for school which considered the skills and competencies that students acquired while attending a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. The final theme that emerged from the data to answer the second research question of experiences that prepared children for primary and elementary school was collaboration.

Themes Addressing Research Question 1

This first research question was to determine the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. The following section will describe the two themes that were organized from the interview responses of all participants to answer the first research question.

Theme 1: Beneficial Approaches to Learning

One of the primary purposes of this study was to determine the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for early childhood-aged children. Results from the participants demonstrated specific beliefs in the cognitive benefits of the approach to children's development. The first theme, *beneficial approaches to learning*, emerged, detailing participant perceived cognitive benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. Participants emphasized how the Reggio Emilia approach provided students the ability to learn through different styles and modalities and through authentic ways to increase cognitive development that will lead to increased knowledge and problem-solving skills.

Learning styles and modalities. Many participants noted multiple styles of learning, where students were able to use different modalities in learning each day. Educator 7 explained how students were given different modalities to learning,

> When I'm developing my activities, I usually stop and think about which type of learner is this going to reach, what type of learner is this going to reach. My classroom changes by the activity so I can give my students chances to move, to sit, to explore, to play.

Students were able to draw from different modalities such as kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and tactile learning either independently or simultaneously to learn new information. Educator 3 detailed how different modalities of learning were used in the Reggio Emilia approach: "With toddlers, we want to set up the environment where they can get the read-alouds with picture books. But we also sing and dance." Educators developed activities to allow students to not only learn but express themselves using these modalities to express what they were learning. Educator 3 said,

> We allow for open-ended play. Some of my toddlers will come up to me with a picture of a bear, and it's like I can tell she was thinking about us reading *We're going on a Bear Hunt*. Then someone else builds their best bear out of play-doh.

In using a number of modalities, Educator 9 explained how students are able to develop cognitively.

> We have to think in terms of, how are we allowing our students to express themselves? I mean everyone says that they're providing students opportunities to learn kinesthetically, auditorily, and visually. If you are using the different

> modalities, it should be reflected in how students share their learning. I mean we know that cognitive development, cognitive processing is dependent on working all parts of the brain, not just one. So, we facilitate an environment where our students can express themselves through each modality and not just say we trying to reach auditory learners.

During the virtual observation at one Reggio Emilia site, different modalities and styles of learning were evident through a newsletter artifact in which the educator highlighted how children were practicing letter recognition skills by singing the alphabet in the correct order. The activity allowed children to practice letter recognition in a method that was enjoyable for students who liked to express their understanding through singing. The newsletter also showed described a line tracing activity in which students were able to use Q-tips to trace letters with paint to extend the letter recognition activity. Another participant suggested that students were able to hone their understanding because they were given different styles of learning that could complement their personal style of learning that had not, yet, been determined by the student. Parent 8 shared that she was surprised that her child knew every word to a song that he had sung in class: "He's just not a singer, but he's walking around the house in full song. I was like, where did you learn that song? He's like… class. So, the things they're doing is definitely reaching home." Many participants echoed the sentiment from Parent 8 in which they felt that the different modalities of learning extended to practices found outside the center.

Through the different styles of learning, students in Reggio Emilia-inspired settings were able to focus their attention on discovering information. Educator 9 discussed how her students felt as if they had discovered concepts like addition and subtraction through their play: “My students really think they came up with adding to or taking away. They’re able to learn in a way that fosters discovery so much that it is essentially in everything we do.” A key component of the Reggio Emilia approach deals with metacognition or a child’s ability to think about what they are thinking about. Parent 5 stated that her child was accustomed to asking questions for understanding: “My child always asks why or what or how. I’m just at a point now where I’ll say what I have to say and answer the why at the same time.” In asking questions, children were able to attribute the learning to his or her own, personal needs. School Leader 1 supported the cognitive benefits of discovery and thinking: “The beautiful thing about Reggio is in observing the children, it helps us to learn what the children are thinking or how their mind is perceiving, and what they're interested in and what they want to learn.” By discovering information rather than having it (information) told, students were able to build their capacity for learning and cognitive growth. There was just as much emphasis placed on how students learned as there was on what students learned. As students utilized multiple styles of learning and different modalities, discovering information and posing questions, students were also able to express themselves in a manner in which participants explained led to cognitive development.

Project work, working with the Atelierista, or the studio teacher who works with students in the Atelier and the overall spirit of the studio pushed students to connect to

their learning that went beyond questions and answers. Children were elevated to a level in which they had to create or exemplify their learning through writing, art, and building. Project work in the Reggio Emilia setting allowed for children to go deeper into their understanding of whatever they were working on. Educator 2 explained the benefits of project working and working in the Atelier benefited students: "I had one student who wanted to learn about dragonflies… The depth at which he was able to go went far beyond anything you'd think a four-year-old could do. He actually wrote a nonfiction book with pictures and descriptions of dragonflies and shared with the class."

Authentic learning. Another major component of the Reggio Emilia approach that participants noted led to cognitive benefits was in the practice of authentic learning. Children were able to take the world around them, the environment, to use as a foundation for learning. School Leader 2 explained some of the experiences that students had and cognitive benefits. "We have a creek, we have full... There's a full farm there with gardens and greenhouses, there's a full area with a work bench and an entire kind of play kitchen."

By utilizing the land and the environment, learning was less rigid for children and had extended boundaries that went beyond the classroom. The approach to instruction, also, was not so defined. Children did not simply work on math, or work on writing, or work on reading. Cross-curricular practices were common in the classroom. Educator 4 stated, "Children don't have to be confined to this is reading time or this is math time. Children in Reggio can learn math and reading at the same time through an activity that they had a hand in determining." Like with the utilization of multiple styles of learning

and multiple modalities of learning, children were able to make connections with areas of their cognitive strengths and with areas of cognitive weaknesses. School Leader 3 expressed the importance of cross-curricular practices and the benefits to cognitive development. "When you're talking about comparing objects or something like that, at the same time, a child's doing so many different things along with that... It ties into so many of the different areas of development." The Reggio Emilia approach incorporates a system of interweaving curricular practices to enhance children's ability to make connections with their learning and academic areas such as mathematics, literacy, and sciences.

Authentic learning was personal to children and developed a sense of inquiry. All three groups of participants stated that it was common for children to approach them inquiring about a specific topic that they had discovered. Educator 4 spoke highly of the importance of authentic learning stating,

> I'll be honest, it's not always easy reaching every child, which is why it is so important to find their interests and making learning authentic for each child. What benefit will learning "x" bring the child. If we can't answer that then why bother?

By their excitement for learning, children proved to be more engaged. Parent 4 spoke about his background with neuroscience and the importance of children having excitement for learning. He also connected the science with how he observed his own child as he learned through the Reggio Emilia approach. "They (kids) do something that they were into and their brain would light up like a Christmas tree." Parent 4 realized

how his own son would show excitement for learning when he was able to learn about something in which he was interested.

Children were able to express their cognitive development in the Reggio Emilia-inspired setting by their academic output. In the virtual observation, it was noted through a program brochure that students would receive top tier instruction that met their individualized needs, through project-based approaches to allow the students to capitalize on their inquisitive natures. Each group of participants shared their experiences working with children in the Reggio Emilia-inspired setting, explaining the perceived cognitive benefits.

Theme 2: Social and Emotional Benefits

The second theme: social and emotional benefits, addressed the perceived social and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. The social and emotional benefits address children's self-value and student connections, detailing how participants perceived the social and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. Participants suggested that the social and emotional benefits led to students' ability to have an increased understanding of self-worth, emotional regulation, and socialization with peers, families, and educators.

Children's self-value. A major principle of the Reggio Emilia approach as detailed in Chapter 2 is the image of the child. The participants in this study explained how the image of the child was conveyed in the Reggio Emilia-inspired settings, and how it led to the emotional development of the child. Educator 3 stated, "Even at a year old, the image of the child is what we do in Reggio. We work to build their social

development in the classroom." Children in the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs were viewed as competent and valued. Educator 8 added, "One of our mantras, if you would, that my students know is that "Every problem has a solution." When there's a disagreement, and there are… I mean they're two and three. We see it as a chance to learn how to work together, or how to take a break from each other for a while." Children were not positioned in a way that would make them feel inadequate; rather, children examined problems as possible solutions and were positioned to solve any problem or task. Educator 4 added: "We want our students to learn to be able to problem-solve for themselves. Our students are fully capable of solving their own problems and building that confidence in themselves."

By equipping children with the idea that they have value and that they are competent, the participants shared that it is very common for children who attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired program to have a strong sense of self-identity. Artifacts viewed at one of the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs indicated children's self-identity through parent and family comments in which numerous families had commented directly to the idea that they felt their children had grown in terms of confidence by attending the program. Children's feeling of self-value led to emotional development as Parent 1 stated: "They're (students) capable of dealing with these things. And when teachers have that confidence in the child, it seems to me that it helps a lot." School Leader 1 added: "Well, I think probably when I think of emotions, particularly with Reggio, there's the notion that children are capable... They've gained an understanding of... And they believe in themselves. And they're better prepared to regulate." Many participants suggested that

the Reggio Emilia approach emphasized students' sense of self-value leading to greater emotional development.

Student connections. Along with children's value of self and understanding of their own competence, children were also able to connect with their peers. Participants stated the importance of social interaction in the Reggio Emilia-inspired setting, stating that children were constantly working together in a number of different types of environments for different purposes. Educator 2 stated, "My children are comfortable working with each other. They learn from each other as much, if not more than they learn from me." Through this interaction, children were able to develop relationships. Parent 5 noted

> Both of my kids attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired program. I realized that they were so much more capable in interacting with other children in school and in sports, on a team. That's a lot of what the Reggio Emilia-inspired program does.

By socializing in a context that was both academically focused and non-academically focused, children were able to develop socially.

Parent 4 declared that his child had seemed to become more sensitive to the needs of others based on the relationships formed in the Reggio Emilia setting. "He's also kind of sensitive in a sense, whatever, and he's pretty good at getting along with kids." This sentiment was echoed by another participant, Educator 8 who stated:

> Our children really learn to care about each other. They work together, they play together, they learn together. They treat each other like family. Parents are always setting up play dates and things like that because our children are so close.

Working together is a major component of the Reggio Emilia approach in which children interact with their peers as well as the environment, including the teacher and the family. This interaction and the attention given to the needs of others leads to not only social and emotional development, but also leads to moral development as identified by Educator 10:

> We tell them (students) how they did such an amazing job and how their work inspired us and made us feel. Reggio Emilia goes beyond just social development, it also teaches children morals and treating others how we want to be treated.

Participants added that when children are able to interact with their peers in the Reggio Emilia-inspired setting, they are able to build a culture within the classroom that is democratic. School Leader 2 shared Parent 10's feelings about morality stating,

> It's through their democracy and the sense of learning things through play, you know? A sense of fairness... Any good teacher is gonna teach a sense of fairness. I think again, that's a difficult thing to do, but it comes with a sense of morality.

Children learn how to share their opinions and thoughts with their peers even if they have differences in opinions. The social skills translate beyond the classroom as Parent 2 reflected on a moment in which her child illustrated that children's voices were important.

> We were at a birthday party and my son didn't really know anybody there outside of the child whose birthday it was. My son is incredibly shy and has always been. But as the party continued, he gradually started trying to join the group. The parents were trying to make me feel better and asked the other children to play with my son even though he was being stand-offish. I don't know what made this happen, but one of the parents pulled out some paint and canvases… well, they weren't really canvases, they were like picture frames for the kids to paint. And I watched as my son started to get closer. He loves painting and drawing and anything art. He started painting with the other kids and when they saw how good he was, he was sharing his paintings and even started showing them how to paint a tree or something like that. But in all of that, I was able to see how he was much more comfortable socializing with the other kids and even willing to kind of teach others. That's something that his teachers talk about all the time, but I just don't get to see because he's so shy normally.

Children learn the importance of themselves within the Reggio Emilia approach as the image of the child is a key principle. From their understanding of their own value, children can understand that there is value in others as well, building connections and relationships with their peers, teachers, and families. Also, by demonstrating that children have a voice and that all opinions have value, the participants explained how they perceived children were able to benefit socially and emotionally.

Themes Addressing Research Question 2

The second research question asked which experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that parents of children enrolled in Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, teachers working in Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, and school leaders of Reggio Emilia-inspired programs had perceived to prepare children for primary and elementary school. The results of the in-depth interviews were categorized and put into two themes to respond to the second research question. In the following section, the two themes are described in detail to respond to the question of which experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach prepared children for primary and elementary school.

Theme 1: Acquisition of Essential Skills for School

The second research question examined the specific experiences that were perceived to prepare children for primary and elementary schooling. The first theme that addressed the experiences of the Reggio Emilia approach was the *acquisition of essential skills for schools*. Looking at areas such as questioning, higher-level thinking and reflection on student learning, the theme acquisition of essential skills for school focuses on the academic, social, and emotional skills that students develop in the Reggio Emilia setting that translates to primary and elementary school.

Questioning and higher-level thinking. Participants referred to children's ability to question and inquire, leading to higher-level thinking skills that were needed for primary and elementary school. Educator 7 stated, "I feel that my students are ready for kindergarten. A lot of them, in terms of higher-level thinking, are more advanced, I think based on some of other children I know." Through questioning, children developed a

greater sense of curiosity which led to children having interests in a wide range of topics. Educator 1 emphasized the importance of children's interest and exposure to different subjects on primary and elementary school success stating, "Our students don't actually sit down and have to learn like their ABCs or something like that. We let them choose what they want to learn, and it makes them want to learn more and more."

With more in-depth questions and a continuous flow of questions from children, there is a greater quest for answers. According to the virtual observation, one of the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs emphasized the incorporation of inquiry into their materials regarding the program. They shared how the learning was individualized to not only meet each child's needs; however, the actual content is developed with the child's interests in mind. The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes higher-level thinking through problem-solving. Children are positioned to be critical thinkers and critical problem solvers which transitions to multiple contexts in primary and elementary school. School Leader 1 stated: "So I think that theories and problem-solving are probably two of the biggest ones (skills) that will help them (students) down the road in elementary school." Students are challenged to think critically in the Reggio Emilia approach, and thinking critically extends to students being able to use higher levels of cognitive thinking in the primary and elementary school settings.

The training that teachers have in the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs bridges the gap to what children are developmentally prepared for through the Reggio Emilia approach and what to expect regarding traditional primary and elementary schooling. Parent 5 stated,

> I don't have to really worry about how my child is going to do with the transition. Sure, transitioning from preschool to kindergarten can be a big learning curve, I really do trust the approach and it's worked out for all of my children who went to the Reggio Emilia-inspired program before.

Nevertheless, the focus is on what is developmentally appropriate for children. Children are positioned to explore and participate in learning that is going to stimulate their cognitive, social, and emotional growth. One of the programs detailed developmental appropriateness through a promotional video that highlighted some of the interactions with instruction that students would receive in the Reggio Emilia approach, detailing how children would be able to increase cognitive, social, and emotional development to be prepared for their local elementary schools.

Reflection on student learning. The second area in which participants felt was an essential skill for school regarded reflection on student learning. Anecdotal records and documentation were key practices of the Reggio Emilia approach. Children were being assessed for skills and development through various methods. School Leader 2 spoke to assessments and reflection on student learning: "We do, do assessments and we don't". Educator 10 continued, "We do assess our students learning, but it's not with paper and pencil, generally. We keep a lot of documentation on how our students progress. A lot of it is anecdotal records." The Reggio Emilia approach prepares children to continue to perform and showcase their learning while being monitored for progress and informally assessed. Children are positioned so they can be comfortable working with a teacher in a one-on-one setting or in a small group sharing what they

learned for monitoring data. Educator 4 shared the process of progress monitoring and how it prepares children for primary and elementary school.

> Our approach to teaching and learning is to work alongside families. I am constantly in communication with my families to let them know how their children are doing. Sometimes I'm talking to them about instruction and how their children are developing academically. Other times, we are talking about behavior and what their child is working on. In order to have the data I need to have these conversations; it takes a lot of preplanning time where I'm assessing or monitoring my students. I don't see our students struggling with being assessed or sharing their learning. It's a core belief in Reggio.

A key to success for primary and elementary children is parent involvement (Cancemi, 2011; Gardner & Jones, 2016). The participants in this study shared their beliefs on how the Reggio Emilia approach fostered an environment in which families were encouraged to partner with the school for the wellbeing of the child. Parent 8 stated,

> My child's teachers communicate with me every week about what my child is working on and how I can help support him. I do think this is something that I am going to miss when he gets to first grade. I don't think they do that, but I always know what he's doing.

In this instance, the skill that prepared children pertained to the culture that was created in the Reggio Emilia approach which families participated in the learning of their child. Educator 8 emphasized the importance of a strong connection between school and home.

"School and home are completely connected. Our parents are always welcome into our classrooms. In fact, it's kind of a mandate."

Student engagement and inquiry. Along with questioning and higher-level thinking and reflection on student learning, student engagement and the emphasis on inquiry were the final elements of the theme, acquisition of essential skills for school. Through inquiry and different modalities of learning as mentioned in Theme 1 of the first research question, the Reggio Emilia approach creates excitement for learning. Parent 1 stated concerns; however, she felt that her son was still prepared given his excitement for learning. "Only thing that sometimes I ever do worry about is I know they (students)... Having to sit for long periods of time… But teaching to them in a way that interests them."

Children can grasp a variety of topics that are taught in primary and elementary school because they are exposed to a wide range of material based on the Reggio Emilia approach. Children's excitement through the process of being able to inquire about topics as well as enjoyment for being able to express their learning creates a foundation of learning that can continue to be built upon. School Leader 3 spoke about the foundations of learning being continued in primary and elementary schooling:

> If they (students) can meet new concepts and be open to learning and have the disposition to be curious about it, to make inquiries, to try to figure out, to search for those meanings… then we feel like they're fine.

All participants stated that the importance of the Reggio Emilia approach in that it led to students being exposed to several experiences and topics that would translate to the primary and elementary level.

Through projects and long-term activities, children learn a sense of delayed gratification. Educator 9 shared, "Our students work on long-term projects, so they develop an understanding of delayed gratification naturally. They can't finish a long-term project in a day, they know that they may have to work on it when they have time." Similar to Educator 9, Parent 1 mentioned that his child was able to keep his attention on specific learning topics for an extended period of time: "One day, he has a big imagination, he was pretending that he was moving outside on the trampoline… He kept working on it until it was like where he had his vision. He worked until he got it there." Many participants felt that students being engaged in a topic or focused on a specific skill for an extended period helped prepare children for weekly lessons in the primary and elementary school environments.

Theme 2: Collaboration

The second theme that connected with the second research question of what perceived experiences of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach prepared children for primary and elementary school was collaboration. Collaboration was defined as students' ability to work with other students, their families, and their teachers to accomplish their academic goals. Two subcategories that made up collaboration were student, teacher, and parent collaboration and shared learning.

Student/teacher/parent collaboration. As stated in Theme 1 of research question two, family and school connections are essential in the Reggio Emilia approach. Educator 2 discussed the role of family and school connections and how they led to preparing students for primary and elementary school,

> From the first day of school beyond the last day, I am in communication with my families. We know that when families are involved, our students take their learning home and continue it. It's almost like homework that our 3's and 4-year olds assign to themselves.

Nonetheless, the levels of collaboration achieved in the Reggio Emilia approach proved to prepare children for primary and elementary school as revealed by School Leader 3: "What we're trying to do is give them (parents) the tools that they need, that they can take on from here on out."

Collaboration in the Reggio Emilia approach does extend beyond the classroom. Children can learn in different collaborative environments from social learning as detailed by Educator 4.

> If you were to walk into my classroom, you'd see children in different parts of the classroom, some working by themselves, but a lot of others working with their peers. I say work, but it could very well be shared play.

Along with social learning, small group instruction is a common practice that finds children interacting with one another to accomplish a learning goal or intention. Educator 10 stated that her children were comfortable working together to complete an activity that required the students to build a simple machine: car launchers. Students

used their own prior knowledge to work with students who were not as knowledgeable. Students were positioned as both the student and the teacher as they showed their expertise in their own learning in which they shared with their peers. School Leader 3 discussed how students were given the opportunity to learn socially in the Reggio Emilia approach: "We believe that learning is socially embedded, we create contexts that purposefully orient children to each other... Because we work in small groups, we design our plans to support small group work."

Through the collaborative efforts of the teacher in the Reggio Emilia approach, children can connect with their learning as much as their peers. This enhances students' ability to work in small groups in the primary and elementary settings. Shared play is expected as well. In a virtual observation held at one Reggio Emilia-inspired program, the program's pamphlet emphasized small group learning and social interaction and connection which detailed how children would develop skills to work collaboratively with their peers.

Shared learning. Finally, through students learning to collaborate with their peers in the Reggio Emilia approach, students were also familiar with using a host of resources. In the virtual observation, one program shared its number of resources through a promotional video that showcased the environment that children would learn from and on with their peers. All resources were available for students to learn from in a model that focused on open play. School Leader 2 continued the importance of collaboration and the use of resources preparing children for primary and secondary schooling stating, "They (students) feel a sense of ownership about what they can...

Everything's there for them to use, so they'll catch crayfish or they'll catch little pollywogs, you know, like tadpoles, and they'll go fishing, they'll go... They'll build stuff." which connects with the evidence found in the virtual observation.

Students, being positioned as teachers, were able to showcase their learning to their class. Parent 3 felt that this was important in terms of preparation for primary and elementary school:

> In the Reggio Emilia-inspired program, my child was able to share their learning and learn from other children. I think that's important when we start kindergarten because it prepares children to be accountable for their learning at an early age.

The Reggio Emilia approach to learning allows students to take ownership in their learning and even though primary and elementary schooling is mandated by state standards, children continue the approach of having ownership of their learning based on the Reggio Emilia approach.

Evidence of Trustworthiness (Qualitative and Mixed Methods)

It was important to ensure trustworthiness to allow for confidence in the data (Connelly, 2016). I used several different measures to ensure the quality of this study, focusing on credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Virtual, general observations of the data collection sites were used to establish credibility. Following the interviews with each participant, virtual, general observations were held for the safety of each program site and the researcher because of COVID-19. The virtual, general observations allowed each program to visually share how they were

able to practice the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Elements such as teachers' plans were used to illustrate daily activities that provided children the opportunity to work on project work. Atelier spaces were available for students to think, design, and create. Work was posted at children's eye level to emphasize the importance of the child and the programs were warm and welcoming to parental involvement. Each observation was recorded using Appendix B, through anecdotal records to ensure the data was coming from a credible Reggio Emilia-inspired program.

Dependability

Dependability was established by the use of member-checking in which each participant was emailed a copy of their interview transcript to verify that each transcript was accurate. Each step of the process of data collection was recorded to remove unrecognized research biases while identifying errors. Every participant was allowed to provide their transcript and the findings of the research. Participants also had the ability to withdraw any of their responses following their review of the transcript; however, all participants were satisfied with their responses and agreed to have their interview used for this study.

Confirmability

Like with dependability, member checking and recording the entire data collection process ensured confirmability in this study. The added statement regarding the limitations also provided confirmability to the study as it provided neutrality of the study (Connelly, 2016). Discrepancies in responses were also considered and added to the results portion of this study.

Transferability

Transferability was established through the detailed description of the data collection process as well as the location and participant information of the study in which readers could be able to replicate or extend this current study (Connelly, 2016). As described in Chapter 4, the reflections of this study provide readers the opportunity to transfer the data from this study into future studies on the same, or similar topics.

Summary

The 21 participants in three different groups: parents of children attending a Reggio Emilia inspired program, teachers, and school leaders were interviewed to help determine the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach, and to determine the experiences of the approach that prepared children for primary and elementary schooling. The participants shed light on this study by answering in-depth interview questions that pertained to the lived-experiences of having a child or working with children who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. From the interview responses, four themes emerged that aligned with the two research questions for this study.

Results from the participant responses as well as a virtual, general observation yielded two themes that elaborated on the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach. Results from the first research question conveyed that there were beneficial approaches to learning which included multiple styles and modalities of learning along with authentic learning for students that led to perceived cognitive development. Following, the second theme referred to social and

emotional benefits including children's self-value and student connections that all emphasized the perceived social and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The first theme that emerged from the second research question was the acquisition of essential skills for school. This theme addressed questioning and higher-level thinking of students participating in the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. Reflection on student learning was also reported as preparing children for primary and elementary schooling along with student engagement and inquiry. The final theme mentioned in Chapter 4 regarded collaboration which included the collaboration of students, teacher, and parent communication and shared learning.

Chapter 4 provided insight on the data collection, data analysis process, and evidence of trustworthiness; however, Chapter 5 will go into greater detail, interpreting the findings, explaining limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, implications of the results of this study, and the conclusion of this entire study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the participant-perceived benefits of Reggio Emilia as a curricular approach in privately funded voluntary prekindergarten early childhood programs in a southeastern state. Current studies suggest that more traditional approaches to early childhood education can lead to regression in academic achievement for students who attended an early childhood program (Lipsey et al., 2015). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning places great emphasis on the image of the child, using components of the environment, parent and teacher relationships, and educational practices to allow students to express themselves in a plethora of ways.

The first research question focused on the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach. Parents, teachers, and school leaders reported that students were exposed to beneficial approaches to learning that could increase cognitive development as well as emotional development. Parents, teachers, and school leaders also suggested that the Reggio Emilia approach had social and emotional benefits that positively influenced both social and emotional development.

The findings from the second research question indicated which experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived as preparing children for primary and elementary schooling. Parents, teachers, and school leaders felt that students who attended Reggio Emilia-inspired programs would acquire essential skills for school such as questioning, higher level thinking, and reflecting on learning. Participants also emphasized collaboration as an essential theme

that proved to be an experience that prepared children for primary and elementary schooling.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of the study contribute to the field of early childhood education by illustrating particular practices that can lead to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children, extending into the primary and elementary settings. The findings of this study represent the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders who worked at or had children attending a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. Parents, teachers, and school leaders identified their lived experiences that they perceived to be beneficial for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. Components of the key principles of the social-constructivist Reggio Emilia approach were expressed through the responses of the participants and were suggested as important factors in the development of early-childhood-aged students.

Research Question 1: Findings Related to Past Literature

Findings from Research Question 1 showed the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived with the Reggio Emilia approach. Other research has supported the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach. Wood and Hedges (2016) investigated how children being able to express themselves through multiple modalities could lead to cognitive benefits. Through the approach, children were able to express themselves while also developing their ability to communicate and collaborate. Wood and Hedges looked at the developmental and educational psychology and contemporary policy

frameworks of early childhood education curriculum, suggesting the need for working theories offering guidance as to how the curriculum could be used to better support the development of children. Through this study, parent, teacher, and school leader participants were able to share their lived experiences of working at or having a child attend a Reggio Emilia-inspired program. They were able to provide details concerning the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that were associated with the approach. Parent, teacher, and school leader participants highlighted different learning modalities as an area that led to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children, as emphasized by Wood and Hedges.

Hong et al. (2017) also reviewed the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach for children with and without disabilities. The findings of Hong et al. illustrated that children were able to develop friendships, learn, and express compassion while cooperating, collaborating, and communicating. However, within past research, the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders were not considered in analyzing the perceived cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Research Question 2: Findings Related to Past Literature

Key findings from Research Question 2 illustrated the experiences within the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that parents, teachers, and school leaders perceived as preparing children for primary and elementary schooling. Abdelfattah (2015) reviewed one private Reggio Emilia-inspired program and one public Reggio Emilia-inspired program in San Francisco, finding that the Reggio Emilia approach was developmentally

and culturally appropriate for students. Abdelfattah placed a heavy emphasis on the training and development of teachers and did not focus on how students who attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs transitioned to the primary and elementary settings.

Hočevar et al. (2013) and McNally and Slutsky (2017) continued research in this area; these researchers, however, suggested that the Reggio Emilia approach was not grounded with a set curriculum, which could result in students being ill prepared for primary and elementary school content standards. Andrews (2012) did not conduct a study directly related to Reggio Emilia; however in the a quantitative casual-comparative study Andrews looked at factors of early childhood curriculum models that prepared students for kindergarten, while Harris (2018) conducted a phenomenological study investigating parents' experiences when choosing Reggio Emilia. Andrews suggested that future researchers analyze different curricular approaches to measure their effectiveness on a larger scale. Harris called for future research to look more closely at how children from a Reggio Emilia-inspired program transitioned to kindergarten.

The findings from my study go beyond the research completed by Abdelfattah (2015), in that I reviewed the experiences of parents and school leaders along with the role and experiences of teachers. Further, the findings for Research Question 2 highlight key elements of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that are perceived to be beneficial for students that are transferable to the primary and elementary school setting.

Findings Related to Conceptual Framework

The Reggio Emilia curricular approach is grounded in the theory of social constructivism, in which the environment plays a key part in the growth and development

of the child. The concepts of multiple intelligences and flexible curriculum were also used to establish the conceptual framework for this study. The theories of social constructivism, multiple intelligences, and flexible curriculum were related to the topic being studied because each provides a foundation for Reggio Emilia (Bruner, 1977; Edwards et al., 2012; Gardner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivist, multiple intelligence, and flexible curriculum theories were used to help explain the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach and the perceived experiences of children's transitions to primary and elementary school.

The importance of relationships among children, educators, families, and the community is one of the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach (McNally & Slutzky, 2017). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism emphasized the environment and the people within the environment as key factors in the development of children. Vygotsky (1978) stated that children need an environment in which there are strong connections or relationships among children and the adults within the community, which may lead to the growth and development of children. In the Reggio Emilia approach, connections linking home, school, and community are driving factors whereby children are able to develop a greater sense of self-identity and understanding of different perspectives (Biermeier, 2015, McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Data collected from this study indicated that participants felt that the interactions that children were able to have among their peers, teachers, parents, and community led to social and emotional benefits while also assisting them in transitioning to primary and elementary school.

The hundred languages of children and flexible planning and project work are two additional principles of the Reggio Emilia approach that connect with the conceptual framework for this study (Bond, 2015; McNally & Slutsky, 2017). Gardner (1983) contended that creativity is at the core of development for children, and Bruner (1977) stated the importance of giving students a voice in their learning as a means of promoting more engagement and greater possibility for cognitive development. Sabet and Kiaee (2016) recognized that reading comprehension skills and cognitive development increase in children when they are engaged through multiple intelligences in learning activities that focus on interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. Puryear (2016) illustrated how creativity and multiple intelligences link to increased metacognition in children. Further, McCormick and Twitchell (2017) stated the benefits of having children take the position of problem solvers through project-based instruction and providing students the opportunity to design their learning. The reported literature findings illustrated the importance of students experiencing multiple learning modalities and a curriculum that is based on the interests and needs of the students as factors that lead to cognitive, social, and emotional development. The findings of this study illustrate that through application of the concepts of multiple intelligences and flexible curriculum, students were able to develop a greater sense of self-value and were able to share and learn from their peers, leading to social and emotional development.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation to trustworthiness in this study that was addressed in Chapter 1 regarded the absence of systematic procedures in a qualitative, exploratory case study

(Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) suggested the importance of developing methodological considerations to clarify and ground research. As the sole researcher in this study, I reflected on the methodology for collecting, analyzing, and sharing the data while ensuring alignment between the research questions and the literature review, leading to a more systematic approach to the methodology as articulated in Chapters 3 and 4.

The second limitation to trustworthiness that was addressed in Chapter 1 was the assumption that educators and parents understood the components of the Reggio Emilia approach as well as developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education leading to cognitive, social, and emotional development. To address the second limitation, I developed three different sets of interview questions that would provide greater context for cognitive, social, and emotional development. Given that parents and families had less knowledge of the practices that led to cognitive, social, and emotional development, questions were designed to elicit information on the experiences and skills of the students of the parent group. Educators were given questions that were more aligned to practices that led to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of their students.

The third limitation to trustworthiness that was addressed in Chapter 1 regarded the issue of external validity or generalizability as noted by King et al. (1994). I used a qualitative, exploratory case study approach to ensure reliability. Data were collected from three different Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Patterns and themes emerged from the responses of parent, teacher, and school leader participants, illustrating the

cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that they perceived students receiving as they attended the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs.

Recommendations

The results of this study indicated the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders concerning the impact of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early-childhood-aged children. The participants listed factors such as developing a democratic classroom that emphasized a sense of respect within an engaging environment as strategies that led to cognitive, social, and emotional development. The findings also indicated specific experiences within the approach that prepared children for primary and elementary school, such as sharing learning and working in small groups to complete projects. Parent 5 and Leader 3 expressed concern for the implementation of standards and how children who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired program could have difficulty in transitioning from a more open curricular approach to a traditional approach in primary and elementary school with a focus on standards-based education. Leader 3 stated,

> Then, there's the transition of going into an elementary school with the standards and things like that, that they have. The standards for kindergarten, in particular, are interesting because they're written very broadly, which I think, that's a good thing, but you could be in an elementary school where Teacher A expects all the children to write their address and all the names of everybody in their family and count to 500 the first week of school; where Teacher B says, "Yeah, we're not gonna get that till May," so you never know.

Cancemi (2011) reviewed the experiences of students who participated in a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach and the International Baccalaureate program's Early Years Program. Cancemi's research findings demonstrated that a more traditional curriculum is developed to meet achievable outcomes as demonstrated through standards. Conversely, Reggio Emilia involves projects and inquiry-based learning that provide children a deeper understanding of a given topic or area of learning. As a result of the differences in the outcomes of the approaches, Cancemi suggested possible limitations for children transitioning from the Reggio Emilia approach to primary and elementary schools.

Based on the findings of this current study, a recommendation for future research is to investigate the assessment and progress monitoring data of students who attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool. By reviewing the assessment and progress monitoring data of students who attended Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools, researchers may analyze scores to determine how students from standards-free Reggio Emilia-inspired programs perform in more traditional, standards-based primary and elementary schools.

An additional recommendation for future research is to investigate the perceptions of students who attended Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. This study reviewed the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders. Students who actually learned in a Reggio Emilia-inspired setting were not able to share their perceptions of how the approach developed them cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and which experiences they felt prepared them for primary and elementary schooling.

Implications

The findings of this current study indicate the lived experiences of parents with children attending Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, as well as the lived experiences of teachers and school leaders in these programs. The results illustrate participants' perceptions concerning the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children resulting from the Reggio Emilia approach, as well as components of the approach that translate into primary and elementary school. There are a number of benefits for students who attend preschool programs (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016; Delaney, 2018; Thompson, 2018); however, despite these benefits and funding for preschool programming, the initial benefits have been shown to fade quickly for students (Lipsey et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018; Whitehurst, 2018).

The findings of this study may contribute to social change by providing early childhood practitioners with information on practices found in the Reggio Emilia curricular approach that can be implemented in voluntary prekindergarten programs that may lead to long-term academic and social-emotional success for children. Lipsey et al. (2015) suggested the importance of high-quality programs to ensure that students are cognitively, socially, and emotionally prepared for learning in primary and elementary settings. The results of this current study may provide local stakeholders key information about the Reggio Emilia approach to integrate in their voluntary prekindergarten programs to better serve their students, using components of the approach to potentially increase opportunities for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Conclusion

Many developmental milestones occur during the early stages of a child's life. Early childhood centers and preschools have provided early childhood-age children an environment to learn and grow since the 19th century (Wilinski, 2017). Since the beginning of preschool programming, research has shown the benefits that preschools can provide children. Approaches such as Bank Street, Head Start, High Scope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf have become common, offering children different philosophical approaches to instruction (Keskin, 2015). With increased funding comes increased measures of assessing the quality of instruction (Child Trend Data Bank, 2014). Students are pushed to perform on standardized assessments, and in this push, preschools have been caught in the position of having to choose whether to use practices that are developmentally appropriate or practices that will prepare students for the standards-based instruction and assessments. Lipsey et al. (2015) cited the importance of early childhood education but found that preschool programming is not producing the proposed outcomes.

This study examined one of the social constructivist, preschool options that still seeks to develop the whole child. The cognitive, social, and emotional benefits to the students are presented based on the points of view of parents of children who attend a Reggio Emilia-inspired program, teachers who work in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program, and school leaders of Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Further, this study found that there are elements of the social constructivist approach that transfer to the primary and elementary school setting. Children need to be prepared for life. Reggio

Emilia has shown to provide children an increased sense of self while also teaching children how to live in a democratic environment in which all voices are heard and valued (Shabazian, 2016). Educators and lawmakers need to look beyond the standards and truly develop the whole child. The reported findings of this study illustrate a curricular approach that stakeholders believed reached the whole child, developing children cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and even more, prepared students to be successful beyond preschool.

References

Abdelfattah, M. (2015). Realizing a progressive pedagogy: A comparative case study of two Reggio Emilia preschools in San Francisco. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *3*(12), 1074-1086. doi:10.13189/2015.031217

Allen, M. (2017). *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods* (Vol. 4). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. doi:10.4135/9781483381411

Andrews, B. (2012). *Effectiveness of preschool in preparing students for kindergarten: A comparison of early childhood curriculum models* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3542060)

Annells, M. (2006). Triangulation of qualitative approaches: Hermeneutical phenomenology and grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *56*(1), 55–61. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03979.x

Ansari, A. (2018). The persistence of preschool effects from early childhood through adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *110*(7), 952-973. doi:10.1037/edu0000255

Armbruster, B. B. (1989). Metacognition in creativity. In J. A. Glorver, R. R. Ronning, & C. R. Reynolds (Eds.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 177-182). New York, NY: Plenum.

Ashbrook, P. (2019). Discovering their sense of the world. *Science & Children*, *56*(5), 18-19. doi:1.2505/4/sc19_056_05_18

Babbie, E. R. (2010). *The practice of social research* (12th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage.

Baker, F. S. (2015). Reflections on the Reggio Emilia approach as inspiration for early childhood teacher education in Abu Dhabi, UAE. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, *185*(6), 982-995. doi:10.1080/30004430.2014.974036

Balfour, B. J. V. (2018). "Wounded memory," post-war gender conflict and narrative identity: Reinterpreting Reggio Emilia schools' origin stories. *History of Education*, *47*(6), 727-740. doi:10.1080/0046760X.2018.1465130

Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *51*(2), 269-290.

Barbot, B. (2019). Measuring creativity change and development. *American Psychological Association*, *13*(2), 203-210. doi:10.1037aca00002343

Barnett, W. S., & Friedman-Krauss, A. H. (2016). *State(s) of Head Start*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Biermeier, M. A. (2015). Inspired by Reggio Emilia: Emergent curriculum in relationship-driven learning environments. *YC: Young Children*, *70*(5), 72-79.

Birhan, W. (2018). Analysis of preschool curriculum in East Gojjam Zone: Implication to quality early childhood education. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *13*(14), 557-563.

Bond, V. L. (2015). Sounds to share: The state of music education in three Reggio Emilia inspired North American preschools. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *62*(4), 462-484. doi:10.1177/00224294114555017

Bond, V. L. (2016). Finding one's place: A case study of a music atelierista. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 32*(2), 150-164. doi:10.1080/02568543.2017.1416005

Borisova, I., Pisani, L., Dowd, A. J., & Lin, H. C. (2017). Effective interventions to strengthen early language and literacy skills in low-income countries: Comparison of a family-focused approach and pre-primary programme in Ethiopia. *Early Child Development, 187*(3-4), 655-671. oi:10.1080/03004430.2016.1255607

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input. Retrieved from http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/m)_e_tool)_series_indepth_interviews.pdf?docID=6301

Boyd, D., & Bath, C. (2017). Capturing student perspectives through a "Reggio" lens. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 29*(2).

Brear, M. (2018). Process and outcomes of recursive, dialogic member checking approach: A project ethnography. *Qualitative Health Research*, *29*(7), 944-957. doi:10.1177/1049732318812448

Breslin, M., & Buchanan, R. (2008). On the case study method of research and teaching in design. *Design Issues, 24*(1), 36-40. doi:10.1162/desi.2008.24.1.36

Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T., … Bhutta, Z. A. (2017). Nurturing care: Promoting early childhood development. *Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale, 380*(10064), 91-102. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3

Brown, C. P. (2015). Conforming to reform: Teaching pre-kindergarten in a neoliberal early education system. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *13*(3), 236-251. http://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X14538602

Brummelman, E., & Thomaes, S. (2017). How children construct views of themselves: A social-developmental perspective. *Child Development*, *88*(6), 1763-1773.

Bruner, J. (1973). *Going Beyond the Information Given*. New York, NY: Norton.

Bruner, J. (1977). *The process of education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burger, K. (2015). Effective early childhood care and education: Successful approaches and didactic strategies for fostering child development. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *23* (5), 743-760. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.882076

Cagliari, P., Castagnetti, M. Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C., Vecchi, V., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2016). *Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993* (Contesting early childhood). New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Cahan, E. D. (1989). Past caring: A history of U.S. preschool care and education for the poor, 1820-1965. *National Center for Children in Poverty*, 3-36.

Cahan, S., & Cohen, N. (1989). Age versus schooling effects on intelligence development. *Child Development*, *60*(5), 1239-1249. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1130797.

Campbell, T., Gambaro, L., & Stewart, K. (2018). 'Universal' early education: Who benefits? Patterns in take-up of the entitlement to free early education among

three-year-olds in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(3), 515-538. doi:10.1002/berj.3445

Cancemi, J. (2011). A dialogue between the Reggio Emilia experience and the IB primary years programme. *International Schools Journal*, *XXXI*(1).

Carey, S., Zaitchik, D., & Bascandziev, I. (2015). Theories of development: In dialog with Jean Piaget. *Developmental Review*, *38*, 36-54. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2015.07.003

Çetin, A. (2020). Examining project-based stem training in a primary school. *International Online Journal of Education & Teaching*, *7*(3), 811-825.

Christakis, E. (2016). *The importance of being little: What preschoolers really need from grownups*. New York, NY: Viking.

Clements, D. H., Fuson, K. C., & Sarama, J. (2017). What is developmentally appropriate teaching? *National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*, *24*(3).

Cohen, J., Onunaku, N., Clothier, S., & Poppe, J. (2005). Helping young children succeed: Strategies to promote early childhood social and emotional development. *National Conference of State Legislatures*.

Connelly, L. M. (2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *MedSurg Nursing*, *25*(6), 435-436.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. (3rd ed.). Ontario, Canada: Pembroke.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

DeBruin-Parecki, A., & Slutzky, C. (2016). Exploring pre-k age 4 learning standards and their role in early childhood education: Research and policy implications. *ETS Research Reports Series*, (1), 1-52, doi:10.1002/ets.2.12099

Delaney, K. K. (2018). Looking away: An analysis of early childhood teaching and learning experiences framed through a quality metric. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *19*(2), 167-186. doi:10.117/1463949118778023

Del Boca, D., Biroli, P., Heckman, J., Heckman, L. P., Kuperman, S., Moktan, S., Pronzato, C., Koh, Y. K., & Ziff, A. (2017). Evaluation of the Reggio approach to early education. *Centre for Economic Policy Research*.

Early childhood program enrollment: Indicators of child and youth well-being. (2014). *Child Trends Data Bank*. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/08_Early_Childhood_Program_Enrollment.pdf.

Edwards, C., & Gandini, L. (2015). Teacher research in Reggio Emilia: Essence of a dynamic, evolving role. *Voices of Practitioners: Teacher research in Early Childhood Education*, *10*, 89-103.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach: Advanced reflections*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (2012). *The hundred languages of children* (3rd ed.). Santa Barbara CA: Praeger.

Edwards, S. (2017). Play-based learning and intentional teaching: Forever different? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *42*(2), 4-11, doi:10.23965/AJEC.42.2.01

Elliott, E. M. (2005). Changing perspectives in early childhood education: Recasting the Reggio Emilia approach. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, *25*(1), 153-163. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1090102050250208

Emmel, N. (2013). Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781473913882

Fernández-Santín, M., & Feliu-Torruella, M. (2020). Developing critical thinking in early childhood through the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. *Thinking Skills & Creativity*, *37*. doi:10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100686

Firlick, R. (1994). Promoting development through constructing appropriate environments: Preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. *Daycare and early education*, *22*(1), 12-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02361422

Firlik, R. (1994). Reggio Emilia, Italy preschools: The synergies of theory and practice.

Forman, G., & Fyfe, B. (1998). Negotiated learning through design, documentation and discourse. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children*: The Reggio Emilia approach-advanced reflections (pp. 239–260). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

Fyfe, B. [STARNET: Early Childhood]. (2016). Reggio inspired: Welcome to Maplewood Richmond Heights! [Video #164]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/ZgX9UPM-bxY

Gardner, A. F., & Jones, B. D. (2016). Examining the Reggio Emilia approach: Keys to understanding why it motivates students. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, *14*(3), 602-625, doi:10.14204/ejrep.40.16046

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (1991). *The unschooled mind: How children think and how schools should teach*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (1997). Multiple Intelligences as a Partner in School Improvement. *Educational Leadership, 55*(1), 20-21.

Gardner, H. (2019). A conversation with Howard Gardner. *Art Education*, *72*(3), 55-58. doi:10.1080/00043125.2019.1603514

Hall, T. (2017). Architecting the 'third teacher': Solid foundations for the participatory and principled design of schools and (built) learning environments. *European Journal of Education*, *52*(3), 318-326. doi:10.1111/ejed.12224

Hanna, W. (2014). A Reggio-inspired music atelier: Opening the door between visual arts and music. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *42*(4), 287-294. doi:10.1007/s10643-013-0610-9

Hans, K. (2019). A personal journey through Reggio Emilia. *Early Childhood Education*, *46*(1).

Hargreaves, E. (2019). Feeling less than other people: Attainment scores as symbols of children's worth. *FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education, 6*(1), 53-66. doi:http://doi.org/exp.waldenulibrary.org/10.15730/forum.2019.61.1.53

Harris, H. A. (2019). *Parental choice and perceived benefits of Reggio Emilia inspired programs* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (10937746)

Harvard Education. (2017, May 3). Howard Gardner – Multiple intelligences: The theory, its applications [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/MBlp9abjDGM

Heimer, L., & Winokur, J. (2015). Preparing teachers of young children: How an interdisciplinary curriculum approach is understood, supported, and enacted among students and faculty. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, *36*, 289-308. doi:10.1080/109001027.2015.1100144

Hesterman, S. (2017). 'Time flies in California': multiliteracies bridging local diversity and global connectedness through a Reggio-inspired approach. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 25*(3), 357-373. doi:10.1080/14681366.2016.1264453

Hickey, K. (2019). Adapting the Reggio Emilia approach in libraries. *The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, *17*(3). doi:10.5860/cal.17.3.13

Hočevar, A., Šebart, M. K., & Štefanc, D. (2013). Curriculum planning and the concept of participation in the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *21*(4), 476-488. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2013.845437

Hong, S. B., Shaffer, L., & Han, J. (2017). Reggio Emilia inspired learning groups: Relationships, communication, cognition, and play. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *45*, 629-639. doi:10.1007/s10643-016-0811-0

Hulley, S. B., Cummings, S. R., Browner, W. S., Grady, D. G., & Newman, T. B. (2013). *Designing clinical research*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Jia, R., Lang, S. N., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2016). A developmental examination of the psychometric properties and predictive utility of a revised psychological self-

concept measure for preschool-age children. *Psychological Assessment, 28*(2), 226-238. doi:10.1037/a0039403

Jimenez-Eliaeson, T. (2017). The transdisciplinary atelier. *Planning for Higher Education, 45*(2), 39-53.

Kadam, P. & Bhalerao, S. (2010). Sample size calculation. *Int J Ayurveda Res, 1*(1), 55-57. doi:10.4103/0974-7788.59946

Karwowski, M., Gralewski, J., & Szumski, G. (2015). Teachers' effect on students' creative self-beliefs is moderated by students' gender. *Learning & Individual Differences, 44*, 1-8. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2015.10.001

Keskin, B. (2015). Recent coverage of early childhood education approaches in open access early childhood journals. *Early Child Development and Care, 186*(11), 1722-1736. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1126833

Kim, B. S., & Darling, L. F. (2009). Monet, Malaguzzi, and the constructive conversations of preschoolers in a Reggio-inspired classroom. Early Childhood Education Journal, 37(2), 137-145. doi:10.1007/s10643-009-0323-2

King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Chichester, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kokotsaki, D., Menzies, V., & Wiggins, A. (2016). Project-based learning: A review of the literature. *Improving Schools, 19*(3), 267-277. doi:10.1177/1365480216659733

Kristen-Antonow, S., Sodian, B., Perst, H., & Licata, M. (2015). A longitudinal study of the emerging self from 9 months to the age of 4 years. *Frontiers in Psychology: Developmental Psychology*. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00789

Lai, N. K., Ang, T. F., Por, L. Y., & Liew, C. S. (2018). The impact of play on child development – a literature review. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 26*(5), 625-643. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2018.1522479

Lanphear, J., & Vandermaas-Peeler, M. (2017). Inquiry and intersubjectivity in a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 31*(4). doi:10.1080/02568543.201731348412

Lawson, L. M. (2018). *European alternative preschool philosophies, styles, and emergent literacy skill development* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (10842211).

Leggett, N. (2017). Early childhood creativity: Challenging educators in their role to intentionally develop creative thinking in children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45*(6), 845-853. doi:10.1007/s10643-016-0836-4

Legislative Analyst's Office (2017). *Overview of Federal Funding for K-2 and Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved from http://www.lao.ca.gov/handouts/education/2017/Overview-of-Federal-Funding-for-K-12-and-Early-Childhood-Education-030217.pdf

Lewin-Benham, A. (2010). *Infants & toddlers at work: Using Reggio-inspired materials to support brain development*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lim, S., & Cho, M. (2019). Parents' use of mobile documentation in a Reggio Emilia inspired school. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 47*(4). doi:10.1007/S10643-019-00945-5

Lippard, C. N., Lamm, M. H., Tank, K. M., & Choi, J. Y. (2019). Pre-engineering thinking and the engineering habits of mind in preschool classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *47*(2), 187-198.

Lipsey, M., Farran, D., & Hofer, K. (2015). *A randomized control trial of a statewide voluntary prekindergarten program on children's skills and behaviors through third grade* (Research Report). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, Peabody Research Institute. Retrieved from https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/research/pri/VPKthrough3rd_final_withcover.pdf

Lipsey, M. W., Farran, D. C., & Durkin, K. (2018). Effects of the Tennessee prekindergarten program on children's achievement and behavior through third grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *45*, 155-176. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.03.005

Loes, C. N., & Pascarella, E. T. (2015). The benefits of good teaching extend beyond course achievement. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(2), 1-13. doi:10.14434/josot1.v15i2.13167

Lourenço, O. M. (2015). Developmental stages, Piagetian stages in particular: A critical review. *New Ideas in Psychology*, *40*(B), 123-137, doi:10.1016/j.newideapsych.2015.08.002

Malaguzzi, L. (1998). *History, ideas, and philosophy*. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman. (Eds.). The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach. Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing.

McCormick, K. K., & Twitchell, G. (2017). A preschool investigation: The skyscraper project. *Teaching Children Mathematics*, *23*(6), 340-348.

McNally, S., & Slutsky, R. (2018). Teacher-child relationships make all the difference: Constructing quality interactions in early childhood settings. *Early Child Development & Care*, *188*(5), 508-523. doi:10.1080/03004430.2017.1417854

McNally S. A., & Slutsky, R. (2017). Key elements of the Reggio Emilia approach and how they are interconnected to create the highly regarded system of early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, *187*(12), 1925-1937. doi:10.1080/03004430.2016.1197920

Mills, A. J., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2010). *Encyclopedia of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781412957397

Mitchiner, J., Batamula, C., & Kite, B. J. (2018). Hundred languages of deaf children: Exploring the Reggio Emilia approach in deaf education. *American Annals of the Deaf*, *163*(3), 294-327. doi:10.1353/aad.2018.0021

Montag, J. L., Jones, M. N., & Smith, L. B. (2018). Quantity and diversity: Simulating early word learning environments. *Cognitive Science*, *42*, 375-412. doi:10.1111/cogs.12592

Moss, P. (2016). Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia: Provocation and hope for a renewed public education. *Improving Schools*, *19*(2). doi:10.1177/1365480216651521

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. doi:https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658

New, R. S. (2007). Reggio Emilia as cultural activity theory in practice. *Theory Into Practice*, *46*(1), 5-13. doi:10.1080/00405840709336543

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.reggioalliance.org.

Nutbrown, C. (2006). *Threats of thinking: Young children learning and the role of early education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

O'Connor, A., Nolan, A., Bergmeier, H., Hooley, M., Olsson, C., Cann, W., Williams-Smith, J., & Skouteris, H. (2017). Early childhood education and care educators supporting parent-child relationships: A systematic literature review. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, *37*(4), 400-422. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrar.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1233169

Öztürk, S. D. (2016). Is learning only a cognitive process? Or does it occur in a sociocultural environment: "Constructivism" in the eyes of preschool teachers. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *4*(4). doi:10.11114/jets.v4i4.1268

Paananen, M., & Lipponen, L. (2018). Pedagogical documentation as a lens for examining equality in early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, *188*(2), 77-87. doi:10.1080/03004430.2016.1241777

Palinkas, L. A., Green, C. A., Duan, N., Horwitz, S. M., Wisdon, J. P., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administrative Policy Mental Health, 42*(5), 533-544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Palmer, J. A. (2001). *Fifty modern thinkers on education: From Piaget to the present*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Panciroli, C., & Macuada, A. (2017). The space as an educational and a didactic tool of interpretation: The example of the atelier of "the child and the city." *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattic, 12*(1), 131-140.

Parker, E., Keily, T., Atchison, B., & Mullen, J. (2019). Trends in pre-k education funding in 2017-18. *Education Commission of the States*.

Parnell, W. (2012). Investigating the Reggio Emilia study tour experience: From conversation to insights. *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research, 14*(1), 1-18. doi:https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1077

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. (M. Cook, Trans.). New York, NY: International Universities Press (Original work published in 1936).

Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (2000). *The psychology of the child*. (H. Weaver, Trans.). New York, NY: Basic Books (Original work published in 1966).

Puryear, J. S. (2016). Inside the creative sifter: Recognizing metacognition in creativity development. *The Journal of Creative Behavior, 50*(4), 321-332. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1002/jocb.80

Quirkos. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.quirkos.com/index.html.

Rees, P., Booth, R., & Jones, A. (2016). The emergence of neuroscientific evidence on brain plasticity: Implications for educational practice. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *33*(1), 8-19.

Reggio Children (2012). *One city, many children: Reggio Emilia, a history of the present*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.

Richardson, J. C. (2015). Attachment styles of adult children and long-term care options for their dependent elder parents (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (Accession No. 3718772).

Rinaldi, C. (2016). In C. P. Edwards, L. Gandini & G. Forman (Eds.). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation* (3rd ed.). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Rovegno, I. (1992). Learning a new curricular approach: Mechanisms of knowledge acquisition in preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *8*(3), 253-264. doi:https://doi.org/10/1016/0742-051X(92)90024-W

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sabet, M. K., & Kiaee, M. M. (2016). The relationship between multiple intelligences and reading comprehension of EFL learners across genders. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *4*(1), 74-82.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Santín M. F., & Torruella, M. F. (2017). Reggio Emilia: An essential tool to develop critical thinking in early childhood. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, *6*(1), 50-56. doi:10.7821/near.2017.1.207

Shabazian, A. N. (2016). The role of documentation in fostering learning. *YC: Young Children*, *71*(3), 73-79.

Shirvanian, N., & Michael, T. (2017). Implementation of attachment theory into early childhood settings. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *16*(2), 97-115.

Smith, S. C. (2014). Parental engagement in a Reggio Emilia-inspired head start program. *Early Childhood Research & Practice, 16*(1).

Smith-Gilman, S. (2015). Culture matters: The arts, the classroom environment, and a pedagogy of Entewate' Nikonri: Sake: A study in a first nations pre-school. *Canadian Review of Art Education: Research & Issues*, *42*(2), 53-68.

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stewart, A. (2014). Case study. In Mills, J. & Birks, M. Qualitative methodology (pp. 145-160). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781473920163

Stowell, D. (2014). *Waldorf kindergarten and Reggio-inspired kindergarten: Documenting value and effectiveness of two arts-based approaches* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (3642031).

Stroh, P. B. (1995). *Child-centered emergent curriculum* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (9602169).

Stuckey, H. L. (2015). The second step in data analysis: Coding qualitative research data. *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes, 3*(1). doi:10.4103/2321-0656.140875

Sutton, J. & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3). doi:10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456

Swann, A. C. (2008). Children, objects, and relations: Constructivist foundations in the Reggio Emilia approach. *Studies in Art Education*, *50*(1), 36-50. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2008.11518754

Thompson, O. (2018). Head Start's long-run impact: Evidence from the program's introduction. *Journal of Human Resources, 53*(4), 1100-1139. doi:10.3368/jhr.53.4.0216-7735R1

Van Bergen, P., & Parsell, M. (2019). Comparing radical, social, and psychological constructivism in Australian higher education: A psych-philosophical perspective. *Australian Educational Researcher (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)*, *46*(1), 41-58. doi:10.1007/s13384-018-0285-8

Vatalaro, A., Szente, J., & Levin, J. (2015). Transformative learning of pre-service teachers during study abroad in Reggio Emilia, Italy: A case study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(2), 42-55. doi:10.14434/josot1.v15i2.12911

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, *42*(1), 7-97.

Walsh, B. A. & Petty, K. (2007). Frequency of six early childhood education approaches: A 10-year content analysis of early childhood education journal. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *34*(5), 301-305. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643006-0080-4

White, A., & Walker, S. (2018). Enhancing social-emotional development through evidence-based resources. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *43*(4), 4-12. doi:10.23965/AJEC.43.4.01

Whitehurst, G. J. (2018). Commentary: The positive impacts of public pre-k fade quickly, and sometimes reverse: What does this portend for future research and policy?. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *45*, 183-187. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.02.016

Whitmore, K. F., Angleton, C., Pruitt, J., & Miller-Crumes, S. (2019). Putting a focus on social emotional and embodied learning with the visual learning analysis (VLA). *Early childhood Education Journal*, *47*(5). doi:10.1007/S106-43-019-00955-3

Wien, C. A., van Benschop, S., & Papageorgiou, A. (2018). The relationship between documentation and design of the environment in a Reggio-inspired school: Two sides of a coin. *The Quarterly Periodical of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance*, *25*(1).

Wiersma, W., & Jurs, S. G. (2008). *Research methods in education: An Introduction* (9th ed.). Pearson.

Wilinski, B. (2017). *When pre-k comes to school: Policy, partnerships, and the early childhood education workforce*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Williams, B. J. (2019). The spillover benefits of expanding access to preschool. *Economics of Education Review*, *70*, 127-143. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.04.002

Wood, E., & Hedges, H. (2016). Curriculum in early childhood education: Critical questions about content, coherence, and control. *Curriculum Journal*, *27*(3), 387-405. doi:10.1080/09585176.2015.1129981

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2014). Case study research: Design and methods (4th ed.)[Pdf file]. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from http://www.madeiraedu.pt/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Fgm4GJWVTRs%3D&tabid=3004

Yin, R. K. (2016) *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Yonezu, M. (2018). History of the reception of Montessori Education in Japan. *Espacio, Tiempo y Educatión*, *5*(2), 77-100. doi:10.14516/ete.227

Zainal, Z. (2007). Case study as a research method. *The Asian Journal of Humanities*, *5*(1).

Zimmer, M. (2018). Addressing conceptual gaps in big data research ethics: An application of contextual integrity. *Social Media + Society*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118768300

Zorec, M. B. (2015). Children's participation in Slovene preschools: The teachers' viewpoints and practice. *European Education, 47*(2), 154-168. doi:10.1080/10564934.2015.1039878

Appendix A: Reggio Emilia-Inspired Program Invitation to Participate

The initial letter distributed to school leaders at the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs who practice the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, in which the perceived acknowledge benefits are evident.

Dear Program Director,

My name is Brandon Gantt, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral study that I am conducting titled: Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education under the supervision of Dr. Amy White. I would like to provide you with more information about this project for your consideration.

The purpose of the study is to determine the perceived benefits of the Reggio Emilia curricular approach on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

The study involves observing your program and completing a one-on-one interview with you, Program Director, teachers, and parents of students who attend your program. Please find each set of interview questions attached to this email along with the observation form.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw your program from the study at any time. Participants' identities along with your program will be kept confidential with no identifiable names recorded. Participants may also withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would welcome your program to participate in my doctoral study, please contact me for possible days to come observe your program and speak with you about communicating with teachers and parents regarding their participation as well.

Sincerely,
Brandon H. Gantt, Ed.D. Student in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment at Walden University

Appendix B: Reggio Emilia-Inspired Program General Observation Checklist

The anecdotal checklist used during observation to determine the implementation of the key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Anecdotal Records

Date: _____

The image of the child:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

Relationships between children, educators, families, and community

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

The environment as the third educator:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

The hundred languages of children:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

Educational observation and documentation:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

The atelier: A make-space:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

Flexible planning and project work:

Artifacts Observed:

Comments/Summary of Observation:

Appendix C: Interview Questions for School Leader Participants

Interview Questions:

Basic Information:

What certification(s) do you currently possess?
How many years have you been a school leader?
How many years have you been a school leader in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program?

Background Information:

- What training did you receive to prepare you to be a school leader in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program?
- What development opportunities do you receive to keep you up-to-date with best practices involving the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning?
- Why did you choose a Reggio Emilia-inspired program?

Perceived Benefits

Cognitive Development

- What components of your Reggio Emilia-inspired program lead to cognitive development in children?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?
    - Why are your examples evidence that students are developing cognitively?
- What is your process for developing your teachers to cognitively develop students?
- How do you communicate the cognitive developments of students to their families?
- What cognitive experiences will students have in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?

Social Development

- What components of your Reggio Emilia-inspired program lead to social development in children?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?
    - Why are your examples evidence that students are developing cognitively?
- What is your process for developing your teachers to socially develop students?
- How do you communicate the social developments of students to their families?

- What social experiences will students have in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?

Emotional Development

- What components of your Reggio Emilia-inspired program lead to emotional development in children?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?
    - Why are your examples evidence that students are developing emotionally?
- What is your process for developing your teachers to emotionally develop students?
- How do you communicate the emotional developments of students to their families?
- What emotional experiences will students have in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Educator Participants

Interview Questions:

Basic Information:

What certification do you currently possess?
How many years have you taught?
How many years have you taught in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program?
What age/grade levels have you taught?

Background Information:

- What training did you receive to prepare you for teaching in a Reggio Emilia-inspired program?
- What development opportunities do you receive to keep you up-to-date with best practices involving the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning?
- Why did you choose a Reggio Emilia-inspired Program?

Perceived Benefits

Cognitive Development

- What components of your instruction, within the Reggio Emilia setting, lead to the development of a child's verbal comprehension (or the ability to express knowledge and concepts)?
- What opportunities do you provide your students to develop their working memory and processing ability?
- How would you say your teaching practice develops students cognitively?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?
    - Why are your examples evidence that students are developing cognitively?

Social Development

- How do you teach your students to respond to negative responses and delayed gratification?
- What opportunities do you provide students to share and play in class?
- How does your teaching incorporate problem solving when students have a disagreement with a peer?
- How does being at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program contributed to your students' socialization?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?

Emotional Development

- How does your instruction in the Reggio Emilia setting assist students in working on tasks for an extended period of time?
- What opportunities do you provide in the classroom setting for students to communicate his or her feelings?
- How do your students show that he or she understand the feelings of his or her peers?
    - Can you provide examples?
- How has being at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program contributed to your students' emotional awareness and self-confidence?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?

Preparation for Primary & Elementary Schooling

- What components of your classroom lead to social and emotional development in children?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?
    - Why are your examples evidence that students develop social and emotionally?
- What cognitive experiences have your students had that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?
- What social experiences have your students had that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?
- What emotional experiences have your students had that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Parent Participants

Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach on Early Childhood Education

Interview Questions:

Basic Information:
Parent Gender:
Parent Age:
Marital Status:
Education Achieved:
Current Occupation:
Number of Children attending or attended a Reggio Emilia-inspired Program:

Background Information:

- At what age did your child begin attend a Reggio Emilia-inspired Program?
- What is your background in Early Childhood Education?
- Why did you choose a Reggio Emilia-inspired Program?

Perceived Benefits

Cognitive Development

- What is the process in which your child shifts attention from one resource or activity to another?
- How would you say that your child views his or herself as a reader?
- How well would you say that your child is with completing multi-step directions?
    - Can you provide examples?
- How has being at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program contributed to your child's ability to process information and problem solve?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?

Social Development

- How does your child respond to negative responses and delayed gratification?
    - Can you provide an example of a situation?
- How does your child respond to other children with regards to sharing and play?
- How does your child resolve problems with peers?
- How has being at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program contributed to your child's socialization?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?

Emotional Development

- What is your child's process for working on tasks for an extended period of time?
- How does your child communicate his or her feelings?
- How does your child show that he or she understand the feelings of his or her peers?
    - Can you provide examples?
- How has being at a Reggio Emilia-inspired program contributed to your child's emotional awareness and self-confidence?
    - What examples can you provide as evidence?

Preparation for Primary & Elementary Schooling

- What elementary school will your child potentially attend?
- What cognitive experiences has your child had in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?
- What social experiences has your child had in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?
- What emotional experiences has your child had in the Reggio Emilia-inspired program that will translate positively in elementary school and beyond?

Appendix F: Codes

The 55 codes were developed based on similarity in subject area from the 930 precodes using common words and phrases.

Codes based on Common Words & Phrases	**Frequency from all interviews**
Value in opinions	36
Portfolio of learning	35
Authentic learning	34
Provoking curiosity	34
Atelier	32
Children are valued	31
Small groups	31
Discovering	29
Sharing	29
Environment	28
Social Learning	28
Problem-solving strategies	27
Project work	27
Self-identity	27
Collaborative learning	23
Outdoor learning	23
Shared learning	22
Competent Children	19
Willingness to learn	19
Children's voice	18
Democratic classroom	18
Questioning	18
Small teachers	18
Building Relationships	17
Confidence building	17
Engagement	17
Focus	17
Children are capable	16
Excitement to learn	16
Spirit of the studio	16
Parent-teacher relationship	15

Anecdotal records	14
Cross-curricular approach	14
Documentation	14
How to learn	14
Natural learning	14
Sensitivity to the needs of others	14
Social Interaction	14
Recognition for work	13
Resources	12
Showcases	12
Connections (home and school)	11
No standards	9
Sense of respect	9
Support children	8
Authentic documentation	7
Culture	7
Moral development	7
Disposition to learn	6
Reasonable expectations	6
Higher level thinking	5
Difficult transitions (to elementary)	4
Hypothesis checking	3
Dimensions in development	2
Extended learning	2

Appendix G: Subcategories

The 11 subcategories were determined and named based on my interpretation of the quotes of the 55 codes.

Subcategories based on Common Words & Phrases	**Frequency from all interviews**	**Number of Quotations**
Student Voice		
Value in opinions	36	29
Children's voice	18	12
Democratic classroom	18	11
Culture	7	6
Sense of respect	9	5
Student/Teacher/Parent Collaboration		
Small groups	31	24
Sharing	29	19
Social Learning	28	20
Collaborative learning	23	16
Shared learning	22	16
Small teachers	18	11
Parent-teacher relationship	15	12
Multiple Styles of Learning		
Portfolio of learning	35	27
Discovering	29	17
Project work	27	16
Questioning	18	11
How to learn	14	8
Authentic Learning		
Authentic learning	34	25
Engagement	17	10
Excitement to learn	16	11
Cross-curricular approach	14	9
Questioning & Higher-Level Thinking		
Provoking curiosity	34	22
Problem-solving strategies	27	17
Reasonable expectations	6	3

Higher level thinking	5	3
Hypothesis checking	3	2
Extended learning	2	2
Sharing Learning		
Atelier	32	27
Spirit of the studio	16	11
Recognition for work	13	8
Resources	12	7
Showcases	12	8
Children's Self Value		
Children are valued	31	26
Self-identity	27	21
Competent Children	19	11
Confidence building	17	12
Children are capable	16	12
Cross-curricular approach	14	8
Support children	8	5
Environment		
Environment	28	17
Outdoor learning	23	11
Reflection on Student Learning		
Anecdotal records	14	10
Documentation	14	10
Connections (home and school)	11	8
Authentic documentation	7	4
Student Engagement & Inquiry		
Willingness to learn	19	11
Focus	17	11
Excitement to learn	16	12
Disposition to learn	6	4
Dimensions in development	2	1
Student Connection		
Building Relationships	17	12
Sensitivity to the needs of others	14	8
Social Interaction	14	6
Moral development	7	2
Transition Troubles		
No standards	9	2

Difficult transitions (to elementary)	4	2