

“What is a wheel?”

The Image of the Child: Traditional, Project Approach, and Reggio Emilia Perspectives

How does a teacher's image of children influence how children learn, the role of the teacher, and the curriculum? Three common perspectives are explored in this enlightening article.

Peggy L. Martalock

“I can feel smell inside me...going everywhere in my body...

it can't get out because my skin closes it up in my bones...
perfumes go up your nose and then into your brain...
your brain thinks and it helps your nose, you have to
suck in with your nose!”

“Everything has its own smell. You smell it and you recognize it because it has a different perfume.”

These preschool children were participating in an investigation, along with their teachers, about the complexities and nuances of the concept of smell. They also conceived the idea of trapping and collecting smells; an idea that seems to be fantastical and close to impossible, yet it became a “shared project for catching the uncatchable” (Balducci, 2009).

The children drew their ideas for elaborate and spectacular smell-catching machines that included pipes for good and bad smells, an antenna that beeps when it

detects a smell, and a robot with a cage for keeping the smells. The children's investigation of the intangible, mysterious, and illusive sense of smell eventually led to a construction with large, clear plastic cylinders. Some small holes were drilled to accommodate children's noses. Inside the cylinders, children put items to smell such as biscuits and coffee.

The cylinders, along with drawings and signs written by the children, were placed around the city in which the children lived as an invitation to the community to stop, smell, enjoy, and wonder about how the sense of smell speaks to us in all kinds of ways.

In reflecting on this investigation, what ideas did the teachers have about how young children learn and work together? What was their image of the child? The answers to these questions largely determined how and what children learned.

What Is the Image of the Child?

Image of the child is a phrase used by educators influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Gandini, 1997; Scheinfeld, Haigh, & Scheinfeld, 2008). It refers to what a person, or group of people, believe, understand, and assume about the role of children in education and society. This image includes how people think

What does *image of the child* mean?

Educators influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy use this phrase. It refers to what people believe, understand, and assume about the role of children in education and society. This image includes how people think about children's capabilities, development, motivations, purpose, and agency. Social, cultural, and historical experiences influence a person's image of the child.

about children’s capabilities, development, motivations, purpose, and agency. Social, cultural, and historical experiences influence a person’s image of the child.

Everyone develops an image of the child through their experiences as part of a community and culture, as well as through what they have been taught both in school and at home (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Lancy, 2008). People may not be consciously aware of the image they hold, or even recognize the beliefs and assumptions that are part of their image of the child.

Everyone develops an image of the child.

It is important for educators to reflect on their image of children because that perspective affects the decisions teachers make every day in their classrooms. Consider the example in Table 1 of how two teachers’ interpretations of a child’s motivation and capability can impact educational decisions.

Of course it is important for all children to learn letters and sounds. However, these two interpretations of the child’s behavior show different aspects of an image of the child. This image of the child is an important factor in how teachers implement theories of early childhood education in the classroom.

Three Perspectives Come Alive!

Current theories of early childhood education are in large part based on the work of Piaget (Gal-

Table 1. Contrasting Interpretations of a Child’s Motivation and Capability.

Two preschool teachers, Chad and Letitia, are playing a sound-letter matching game with a child. Evan struggles to make connections between letter sounds and the beginning letters of the names of objects on the table.

One teacher, Chad, interprets this as a lack of Evan’s motivation. Chad believes Evan needs more instruction and practice.

The second teacher, Letitia, notes that Evan was very carefully watching her body language. He was trying to read her subtle cues in order to pick the right answer. Evan is capable of very close observation. He noticed how Letitia tilted her head and moved forward ever so slightly when he moved his finger over the correct object. Letitia believes that Evan is very motivated to figure out how to make meaning about his interaction with his teachers.

agher & Reid, 1981), Vygotsky (1978), and Dewey (1925). Educators understand that children take an active and interested role in interacting with their environment and the people around them to make sense of and construct meaning about the way things work. This is generally viewed as a *constructivist* approach to education.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that a constructivist approach to teaching and learning is effective and relevant for creating meaningful and long-lasting educational experiences for children.

Several prominent theories and bodies of research view cognitive development from the constructivist, interactive perspective. That is, young children construct their knowledge and understanding of the world in the course of their own experiences, as well as from teachers, family members, peers, and older children. They also apparently are capable of and interested in abstract ideas, to a far greater degree than was previously believed.” (NAEYC, 2010, p. 14)



Subjects & Predicates

It is important for educators to reflect on their image of children because that perspective affects the decisions teachers make every day. Differing interpretations of a child’s motivation and capability impact educational decisions.

Table 2. Attributes of Three Early Childhood Perspectives

	Image of the Child	Role of the Teacher	Curriculum
Reggio Emilia Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competent • Powerful • Knowledgeable • Motivated to communicate and engage in society • Actively co-constructs knowledge with peers and adults • Interested in and capable of exploring complex and abstract ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and recognize children’s interests and ideas • Uncover children’s theories • Interpret and reflect on possible meanings and big ideas related to interests • Challenge and support children to extend and deepen their understandings • Facilitate shared understandings among children and teachers • Be a learner and a researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited possibilities • Planned yet flexible, based on children’s responses and interactions • Include on-going explorations and projects based on children’s interests • Materials and activities are designed to challenge and communicate children’s thinking processes and understandings • Emphasis on processes of thinking and communicating
Project Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curious • Active hands-on learners • Concrete thinkers • Motivated to find answers to their questions • Gain knowledge through interactions with adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize children’s interests and questions • Develop concrete, hands-on learning activities based on children’s interests • Guide children in finding answers • Incorporate project work into existing curriculum frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on children’s interests about concrete and tangible subjects • Follows a 3-phase model of project development • Activities designed to answer children’s questions and show what they have learned • Emphasis on process to accomplish a final product
Traditional Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passively receive knowledge • Interested in simple ideas and activities • Needy (“meet the needs of the child”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan themes and units for the school year • Develop activities and provide materials relating to themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on pre-determined themes • Activities are designed to be fun and focus on making a product

Note: Derived from Fraser & Gestwicki (2002), Helm & Katz (2011), Scheinfeld, Haigh, & Scheinfeld (2008)

Translating constructivist theory into the early childhood classroom and integrating it with instruction and curriculum guidelines may have as much to do with examining and understanding what educators *believe* about children (the image of the child) as it does with understanding theory or curriculum standards.

The image of the child is embedded in three common approaches to early

childhood education: a traditional model, the Project Approach, and the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Some of the primary attributes of each approach are compiled in Table 2.

Traditional Model

In the traditional model, early childhood teachers typically use themes or thematic units to organize and plan the curriculum. Themes are chosen by the teacher, or provided by

a set curriculum, and represent what some educators believe are important for children to learn. Common examples include the seasons, transportation, and community helpers.

A teacher may pre-plan an entire year, scheduling a new unit every other week or so. When it is time for the transportation unit, the teacher typically takes out the transportation box. Books about cars, trucks, and airplanes are put on the bookshelf,



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the dramatic play area is transformed into a school bus and gas station, and pictures of people traveling are put on bulletin boards. Activities for the week usually include singing "The Wheels on the Bus," painting paper fire trucks, learning "B" is for bus, and putting together railroad tracks and roads in the block area.

This model represents a mostly teacher-driven educational experience for children. In this case, the child just shows up and participates in whatever is made available.

The traditional model appears to represent an image of the child as a passive receiver of information. The teacher holds the information and provides it to the children through decisions made solely by the teacher. The teacher believes and/or assumes that he or she knows what children are interested in, what they need to learn, and how to teach it to them. Children are in a passive and needy position. Their thoughts or ideas

need not be taken seriously when planning curriculum or activities.

The traditional model does not support an active and engaged image of the child, a child who constructs knowledge through the *process* of interacting with people and ideas (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

Project-Based Approaches

Project-based approaches are rooted in the interests of the children, not in what might interest children in general, but in the specific interests of the particular children in a classroom (Helm & Katz, 2011; Katz & Chard, 1989). The teacher's goal is to uncover or recognize through close observation, listening, and talking with the children what might be of particular interest to them.

These approaches represent an image of the child as motivated, engaged in making sense of the world, and full of ideas and thoughts that are worth exploring and taking seriously.

The Project Approach and the Reggio Emilia philosophy are two specific frameworks for integrating projects into the curriculum. They have several things in common but there appear to be some beliefs and assumptions about the image of the child that differ slightly between the approaches.

The Project Approach

Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years (Helm & Katz, 2001) defines and outlines a specific structure for implementing a project-based approach in early childhood classrooms. The Project Approach is "an in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about" (Helm & Katz, 2011, p. 2).

Guidelines are provided for choosing appropriate topics. "The topic should be more concrete than abstract" (Helm & Katz, 2011, p. 17). Children should have some familiarity with the topic. The topic should allow for direct experience, including field trips, site visits, or available experts. Typical topics of project work include vehicles, plants, bugs, small animals, or community jobs such as firefighter or mail carrier (Helm & Katz, 2011).

The subject must be worth the time spent on the investigation in order to "[relate] to the overall goals of children's education" and "[accomplish] specific outcomes, such as those listed in most standards for early childhood education" (Helm & Beneke, 2003). Implementing the Project Approach follows three distinct phases.

The first phase is finding out what the children already know about a topic and what they *want* to know about that topic (Helm & Katz, 2011). Teachers engage in a series of discussions with the children, sometimes creating a web to help organize

the thoughts and ideas and reveal areas of the topic to be explored.

These activities typically result in a list of questions the children have about the topic. Questions are primarily concrete and direct, with the goal that children will be able to find answers to these questions from outside resources. *The image of the child is of a person full of thoughts and ideas as well as motivated to engage in learning more about a topic.*

The second phase consists of investigating the topic through field trips, expert visitors, books, activities, and experiments designed to guide the children in researching answers to their questions. “The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions about a topic” (Helm & Katz, 2011, p. 7).

During this phase, children represent what they are learning as they draw, write, construct, engage in dramatic play, and through other experiences. If interest in the topic continues to be strong and/or if more questions arise during the research phase, the cycle is repeated.

In the final and third phase, there is a culminating event to mark the close of the investigation. Often this includes some large-scale group construction made by the children, such as a cardboard airplane or a book they made that integrates and shares what they have learned during the course of the project. *This represents a strong and capable image of the child, engaged as a researcher, taking initiative, and representing knowledge in various ways.*

The Reggio Emilia Philosophy

The Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education originated in the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia after World War II (Ed-

wards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Since then, ideas and principles from the Reggio Emilia philosophy have spread worldwide and currently influence many early childhood programs in the U.S. (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2008).

This philosophy is not a method or a defined curriculum, but a set of guiding principles that relate to every aspect of creating a culture of learning and teaching (Gandini, 1997). The Reggio Emilia philosophy explicitly includes the image of the child as a basic principle. Teachers must actively reflect on and make explicit their own image of the child in order to productively integrate principles of the Reggio Emilia philosophy into their teaching and learning with children.

Educators and scholars of Reggio Emilia directly confront the role of the image of the child in creating a culture of education and make explicit the image that they promote. These two statements clarify the image of the child.

The cornerstone of our experience, based on practice, theory and research, is the *image of the children as rich, strong, and powerful*. The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as unique subjects with rights rather than simple needs. They have potential, plasticity, the desire to grow, curiosity, the ability to be amazed, and the desire to relate to other people and to communicate. (Rinaldi, 2002, p. 19)

A rich child is not an empty vessel waiting to be filled, but is one born equipped to engage actively and immediately in learning. As such, young children must be treated with seriousness, recognizing that their

ideas are worth listening to and exploring with them. (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002, p. 20)

From this perspective, the child is part of a process of co-constructing knowledge and shared understanding with both peers and adults. The ability to construct *shared understandings* is an important part of the process of knowledge construction (Malaguzzi, 1993).

In other words, children may work together to reach a consensus about an idea, topic, or goal that may or may not be rooted in a real or tangible subject. For instance, a group of children may be interested in the idea of fairies and work together to define the characteristics of a fairy by drawing, painting, pretending, and discussing fairies until they come to some agreed-upon definitions.

Another example from Schafer (2002) involves 4- and 5-year-old children working out their ideas about the concept of gravity. The children discuss, with the teacher, whether or not gravity is inside or outside of the body, and if it is outside of the body, how does it make the body “stay down” (p. 189). The intention is not that the children come to an exact or entirely accurate understanding of gravity, but rather that they engage together, along with the teacher, in an ongoing *process* of sharing ideas and building common understandings.

Here, the *image of the child is not only motivated and engaged in learning about concrete, tangible subjects but also capable of constructing shared understandings about abstract and intangible ideas.*

Projects in the Reggio Emilia philosophy progress through cycles of *documentation, reflection, and action* (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). Teachers

reflect on documentation they have gathered and generate ideas and hypotheses about the work and interests of the children.

Children are often directly included in planning for the classroom. Activities, materials, challenges, and problems are developed that engage both teachers and children. These may serve to focus, or expand, thinking and understanding of the topic of investigation.

This general cycle—documentation, reflection, and action—continues throughout the project. A project may end in a culminating event or construction that reveals and celebrates the work of the children and teachers.

The following transportation-related projects are explored as they might unfold from the perspectives of the traditional, Project Approach, and Reggio Emilia philosophy. Each reveals underlying images of the child.

Illustrations of the Three Approaches

Traditional Model

Bill and Janessa follow a **traditional** model to organize and plan for their preschool classroom. At the beginning of the year they decide on the major themes that will guide planning throughout the year. One of the themes is transportation, so they plan a unit on community vehicles that include busses, ambulances, and fire trucks. Before the children arrive, Bill and Janessa put up pictures of these vehicles on a bulletin board, they stock the bookshelf with related picture books, and they prepare a dramatic play area with fire hats, a play medical kit, and arrange chairs to make a bus.

Typical learning activities: Bill and Janessa teach the children the



Subjects & Predicates

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song “Wheels on the Bus” and read a picture book about a city bus. After meeting time children go to tables and are given large pieces of paper that say “B is for Bus,” with a picture of a bus to color. After children color their buses, teachers assist them with brads, to attach wheels to the bus that will turn when pushed. The buses are put up on a bulletin board.

Image of the child: This reflects an image of the child that passively receives information from the teachers and needs to be given an activity that ends with a product.

Further explorations: After a day or two of activities about busses, Bill and Janessa read a story to the children about firefighters and their jobs at the fire station. The activity for the morning is to make a fire hat out of construction paper. The children are helped to write their names on a gold star and glue it onto the hat. The children can wear the hats around the classroom and pretend to be firefighters.

On the last day of the week, Bill and Janessa tell the children

about ambulances and play a circle game where the children take turns choosing a friend to help by pretending to drive them around the circle to the hospital.

Next week the bulletin boards, books, and activities will focus on trains and airplanes. Bill and Janessa provided some fun activities, books, and songs and the children were expected to participate in whatever the teachers had planned.

Assessment: If most of the children remember that bus starts with B and can say something about what firefighters or paramedics do, these teachers consider their unit to have been successful.

Project Approach

Sheila and Joan teach in a preschool that incorporates the **Project Approach** into the curriculum. Sheila, her assistant Joan, and their class of 4- and 5-year-olds often pass by a fire station on their weekly walks. The children are always excited to see fire trucks. Sheila and Joan think

that fire trucks would make a good topic for a project. At meeting time, they talk with the children about fire trucks. Children have a lot to say about how big they are, their color and shininess, the sirens, how fast they go, and about going to fires.

At the next meeting time, they discuss fire trucks again and begin to make a web together of all the things children know about fire trucks: fire trucks are red, some have ladders, they carry a lot of equipment, firefighters wash the trucks and keep them clean. Then Sheila and Joan talk with the children about what questions they have or what they wonder about fire trucks. They make a list of questions, for example: Is it scary to ride on a fire truck? What do all of the buttons and controls do? Where is the siren?

Typical learning activities: Sheila and Joan ask the children if they would like to visit the fire station and the children are very excited about this idea. They begin to plan for the visit by reviewing their list of questions. Sheila and Joan want children to take an active part in asking questions and gathering information. In the classroom, children practice asking questions before they head out to the fire station. Sheila and Joan tell the children that they are real investigators and will bring back real information. At the fire station, children ask their questions and draw pictures of the fire truck to help them remember.

Image of the child: Sheila and Joan support an image of the child as active and motivated to seek answers and increase their understanding.

Further explorations: Sheila and Joan notice that the children often pretend to be fire fighters driving a fire truck. They ask the children if they would like to make a fire truck

for the classroom. This is an activity that will enable many children to participate in various ways, yet create a group product together. The children are excited about this idea.

Sheila and Joan brainstorm with children about what items they will need for this part of the project. A parent donates a couple of large cardboard boxes and other materials are gathered that might be used for lights, buttons, hoses, and other parts. Over the next few days, the children make decisions about how to construct the fire truck. They paint the outside, choose the right size lights, decide how many can ride inside at a time, and make sure as many details are included as possible.

Sheila and Joan suggest that children share what they have learned about fire trucks with their families. Each child is asked to tell something she or he knows about fire trucks, for example: Fire trucks are bright yellow so people can easily see them. Sheila and Joan write down these comments in a book. Some children write one or two words that they know, such as siren or hose, and some children draw pictures of a fire truck for the book. The book becomes the culminating product of the fire truck project.

Assessment: Sheila and Joan facilitated a project that enabled children to research information about fire trucks. The children actively participated and took initiative in making decisions throughout the course of the project. However, the focus of the project remained bounded by the concrete and tangible subject of the fire truck. The children learned new vocabulary and made decisions together about building the cardboard fire truck. The teachers made numerous connections to learning guidelines and standards.

Reggio Approach

David and Mariah co-teach a class of 4- and 5-year-olds in a preschool that integrates principles of the **Reggio Emilia** approach. They notice that the small cars and trucks in the classroom are very popular with children. David and Mariah take pictures of how children use the cars and trucks. They write down some of the conversations and arguments between the children that arise because everyone wants to play with them at the same time.

David and Mariah reflect together and wonder what it is about cars and trucks that make them so interesting to children. They invite children to choose a car or truck that they like and using inkpads, make tracks on large pieces of paper.

While the children are working, the teachers prompt discussion with comments such as, “Tell me about your car.” or “What do you like about that car?” David and Mariah write down the children’s responses and notice that nearly every child included a comment about the wheels or about how the car moved. David and Mariah hypothesize that it might be the wheels and the quality of movement that make the cars and trucks so interesting. They wonder what the children know about wheels. This becomes the beginning of a project about wheels.

Typical learning experiences: David and Mariah decide to invite children to go on a wheel hunt around the school. They ask children to point out any wheels that they see. David and Mariah think this will identify some conceptions of what children think is a wheel.

The children point out objects that include wheels on a picture of a truck, circle shapes, and round

three-dimensional objects. David and Mariah ask the children to explain their choices. Some disagreements emerge among the children. Some say that if it is round it is a wheel and some say that it needs to “go around” to be a wheel.

David and Mariah take pictures of these *wheels* and write down the reasons the children gave about what makes something a wheel. Later, during a meeting time, they show the pictures of the wheels and pose this question: Is there a difference between a circle shape and a wheel?

Through on-going debate and discussion, moderated by the teachers, the children come to the following consensus about wheels: Wheels are round. Wheels go around. Wheels move. Wheels roll. Wheels make it go. Wheels might have something that goes through the middle of them.

The children have created a working definition of a wheel. In this case, correct answers may be a part of the work but more important is,

the opportunity to think hard, argue, gather data, reconsider, graphically represent their ideas, and co-construct meaning...[about a shared interest]. The accuracy of the children’s understanding is less important than the fact that existing schemes [lead] to more complex schemes, and eventually to a well-defined theory that [can] be articulated and defended. (Schafer, 2002, p. 191)

Image of the child: David and Mariah’s image of the child supports *children as active, capable, and motivated to articulate and debate ideas in a process of co-constructing a shared understanding* with others.

Further explorations: David and Mariah provide an opportunity for the children to experiment with the idea that a wheel has a hole in the middle that something goes through. They gather materials including wooden and plastic spools (with holes in the middle and also with holes that are off-center), metal rings, straws, and dowels. They challenge children to build something with these materials that will roll.

Children notice that if a straw or dowel is placed in a hole that is off center, it rolls in a circle instead of a straight line. Over the course of a few days, the children work and try many different ideas. One problem keeps surfacing: the wheels keep coming off the ends of the dowels as they roll. During this time the children also keep experimenting with different objects to determine if they can be called a wheel. For instance, a small group of children have a recycled CD and are considering if it is a wheel or not. One child tries to roll it on its thin edge and it falls over. So, because it does not go around and roll, they declare it *not a wheel*.

Then another child picks up the CD and deftly sends it rolling across the floor on its thin edge. They all exclaim, “It is a wheel!” and “It has a hole in the middle!”

In another group, a child is making the claim that it can only be called a wheel when it is actually turning around, otherwise it is not a wheel, only a circle. The children are running into a real-world problem of how to create a definition that is concise enough to be understood yet not so restrictive that it becomes useless.

Assessment: For David and Mariah and the children in their classroom, there is no one final product to culminate the project.

David and Mariah send documentation of the children’s work home to families throughout the project. The exploration about wheels continued to evolve. After several weeks the children’s interests moved into other areas that were perhaps related to or inspired by the work with wheels, including steering wheels, ramps, traveling, and maps.

David and Mariah can also use the documentation to assess various aspects of children’s learning and development, such as the abilities to communicate ideas and listen to others, engage in contrast and comparison activities, and experiment with the physical properties of motion.

* * *

Research reveals that children learn by actively engaging with the world around them. Through interactions with adults, peers, and the objects in their environment, children are constantly in the process of making meaning about the world. Projects and project work are part of the discourse of early childhood education as a means of incorporating active and engaged learning opportunities in the classroom. As can be seen from the examples, project work can encompass a wide range of possibilities depending on the approach and the underlying image of the child.

No matter where early childhood teachers are on a continuum—from a traditional model, to a project-based curriculum, or a philosophy such as the Reggio Emilia approach—they will benefit from reflecting on their own image of the child.

All good teachers want young children to be strong, motivated, and engaged learners in the classroom. A teacher’s image of the child may support, or inadvertently

detract, from this goal. Questions to ask oneself include:

- Are children seen as recipients of information and a teacher's job is to *give* them the right information?
- Are children viewed as curious and interested in important things and the teacher's job is to support them as active researchers, finding out the right answers?
- Are children considered to be capable of engaging in a process of thinking and re-thinking together about important ideas that result in a shared construction of knowledge?
- Or is the view of the child a combination of these things? If so, how do teachers negotiate this in the classroom?

The culture in the United States of standardized learning outcomes may seem to place constraints on early childhood education that limit expanding or shifting concepts of knowledge and the image of the child. Yet this should not prevent teachers from uncovering and reflecting on these important ideas. The Project Approach maintains a focus on inquiry and investigation rooted in concrete and tangible subjects. The Reggio Emilia philosophy goes a step further and includes abstract ideas and the process of co-constructing theories as an important aspect of learning and teaching.

Each approach provides avenues to demonstrate learning outcomes, but it is up to early childhood teachers to determine how to reach those outcomes. Reflecting deeply on the meaning of knowledge, the value of the *process* of constructing shared understandings, and how the image of the child influences these

ideas will give teachers insight into the decisions they make every day in their classrooms.

Early childhood educators are urged to seek ways to incorporate, integrate, and value a full range of possibilities in their classrooms. Teachers can create an atmosphere where they can recognize the strength and depth of children's knowledge, their desire to communicate, and their ability to engage in learning and thinking together.

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About the Author

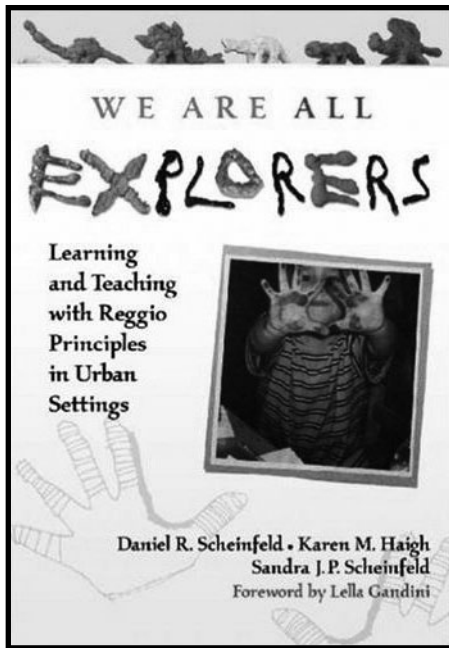
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Extend

These Ideas With a Professional Book

Connect Three Perspectives on Children With a Professional Book

By Michelle Cutler-Ervin



We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching With Reggio Principles in Urban Settings

By Daniel R. Scheinfeld, Karen M. Haigh, and Sandra J.P. Scheinfeld. Foreword by Lella Gandini. (2008). 191 pp. \$29.95 New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

These authors' combined knowledge and understanding guide the reader through the Chicago Commons Child Development Program's application of Reggio Emilia principles. Their book is organized into three sections spanning the program's decade-long journey. Chapters 2 through 8 focus on the teaching-learning process: emergent curriculum, the learning environment, and classroom management. Chapters 9 through 11 examine the application of Reggio principles in three contexts: parent relationships, professional development, and program organization. The final chapter is a reflection of the experience, concluding with suggestions for educational leaders planning to introduce Reggio ideas to teachers.

This book acts as a translator for educators interested in implementing the Reggio Approach in the United States. The use of rich conversations between and among the teachers and children help the reader gain an understanding of children's interests and meaning. Children's

thinking and learning is made visible as well through the teacher as "co-constructor."

The authors provide a well-articulated plan in the classroom management chapter for teachers to introduce a new group of children to the processes of the Reggio Approach. The plan also details how to facilitate co-learning with emergent, collaborative curriculum planning.

The reader is invited to co-construct knowledge. Each chapter ends with thought-provoking questions that focus on key issues such as collaboration, relationships, concept development, implementation, and documentation. The process may be a challenge for readers who struggle with self-driven study.

This book would be an excellent tool for pre-service and in-field educators, administrators, and professional development leaders. It would be advantageous to use for workshops or by groups of educators wanting to learn more about the Reggio Approach.

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