Impact of the Reggio Emilia Approach through Short-Term Study Abroad and The Lenses of Lundy's Model: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence

Sandra Seipel and Victoria Seeger

Introduction

Undergraduate teacher candidates participated in a faculty-led, short-term study abroad to Reggio Emilia in Italy to further their knowledge about the educational philosophy used within the school setting and for the purpose of examining how philosophy might be applied in school settings in the United States. The faculty-led, short-term study abroad included two days of travel, two days of sightseeing, and four days of lecture, atelier experiences, visits to infant-toddler centers and preschools, and encounters with atelieristas, pedagogistas, and Reggio educators. Undergraduate teacher candidates (hereafter referred to as teacher candidates) met three times prior to travel to discuss philosophy and travel arrangements. Each teacher candidate was provided a journal to be used for note-taking and reflections while in Reggio Emilia. Teacher candidates used a thinking routine, Wish-Wonder-Wow, to provide structure for notes and reflections. While in Reggio Emilia, teacher candidates shared reflections nightly in a group format. This study examines 12 teacher candidates' perspectives from these study abroad experiences that occurred over a four-year period from 2016-2019. The researchers include a faculty member leading the study abroad for two of the years as well as another faculty member who has experienced the Reggio Emilia setting in Italy. At the time of the study, the teacher candidates who participated in the study abroad were student teaching or had graduated and were teachers with one to three of years of experience. Their responses to a survey (n=12) and focus group interviews (n=7) are viewed through the lenses of the four factors in Lundy's (2007) model of including children in decision-making and focused on space, voice, audience, and influence in reference to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 2002). Through this study, the researchers learned teacher candidates' thinking and philosophical struggles with classroom implementation. Survey and focus group data indicated that short-term study abroad enhanced teacher candidates' understanding and appreciation of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education. However, teacher candidates felt a lack of support and guidance as a new teacher in being able to incorporate the philosophical beliefs into their classrooms. This proved challenging to them, and the participants lacked confidence in implementing change within a school setting.

Reggio Emilia, Italy and the educational philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education in comparison to Lundy's Model of Child Participation provide a greater understanding of the context for this study. Teacher candidate thinking and philosophical struggles, provided through surveys and focus groups, express how adults view children. The comparison of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education and Lundy's (2007) Model of Child can be viewed in Table 1 (p. 7).

Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia, Italy is the home to the Municipal Infant-toddler Centres and Preschools that practice the Reggio Emilia Approach. Loris Malaguzzi is a prominent figure

in the history of the Reggio Emilia Approach, and the municipality of Reggio Emilia became the first municipality in Italy to open a school for children ages 3-6. The city government of Reggio Emilia collaborated with Loris Malaguzzi to approve the educational philosophy (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). In 2003, the Reggio Emilia municipality started the Istituzione of Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The initiative supported by the city of Reggio Emilia administration wanted to continue public services to families and strengthen the promotion of children's rights. As an international center, the Istituzione of Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres was able to provide trainings around the world to share the values and experiences of the Reggio Emilia Approach. In 2006, the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre opened. As a former cheese warehouse renovated to become a place of creativity and learning for all ages, Malaguzzi's ideas came to fruition (Reggio Children, 2022).

Lundy's Model of Participation. Laura Lundy, in 2007, presented a new way to view children and decision making specifically addressing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through four lenses which include space, voice, audience, and influence. The four lenses overlap while ensuring that children are recognized and understood as citizens and from a human rights perspective (Lundy, 2007). Article 12 directly expresses that parties will assure that children are able to express their views openly and will be heard. The model informs schools to improve practices in listening to children. Lundy (2007) stated that children's rights are dependent upon adults recognizing children as human beings and listening to their views.

Literature Review

Reggio Emilia Approach to Education. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education, states the philosophy is "immersed in history, surrounded by doctrines, politics, economic forces, scientific change, and human dramas" (Edwards, Gandini, and Foreman, 2012, pp. 36-37). According to Reggio Children, the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education Principles state that children have immense potential for learning and every child has rights and capabilities. Malaguzzi uses the metaphor of the Hundred Languages to share the creative processes children possess and languages that consist of expression and understanding. Children learn through a process of construction, and teachers are researchers that collect evidence and document learning. The spaces, both interior and exterior, are designed as extensions of each other, and great care is given to the intentionality of furniture, objects, materials, and spaces. In addition, professional learning is considered part of the working day and revolves around children and educational and cultural opportunities.

Short-Term Study Abroad. In what Engle (2012-2013) describes as interconnectedness, in order to expand understanding of what occurs culturally and globally, students benefit from traveling abroad to expand their perceptions of those places (Barnhart & Groth, 1987). Even a short-term study abroad experience has been found to be beneficial to students as suggested by Barnhart and Groth (1987); students who experienced a three-week travel abroad cited "life enhancement… cultural exposure" (p. 84) including appreciation for and insight into another culture. Short-term study abroad is defined by the Institute of International Education (2011) as being one to eight weeks in length.

Short-term study abroad likely precludes students developing some sort of relationships or friendships during the study abroad [with those in the country/culture being visited] and would not be beneficial for strengthening speaking and listening skills in another language (Dwyer, 2004). However, Engle and Engle (2003) investigated the quality of the study abroad experiences noting that short studies "can appeal to the widest possible student base by requiring relatively little in the way of prior linguistic and cultural preparation" (pp. 2-3) with over 65% of students who participated in study abroad doing so through summer or short-term experiences (Institute for International Education, 2021). Study abroad is important as it challenges our thinking and deepens our understanding of a culture. What is learned, in theory, transfers into practice as educators.

Lundy's Model Related to Study Abroad. There are parallels between how voice is interpreted by educators in the classroom and how learning from study abroad is applied by teacher candidates when they return. Lundy (2007) notes, the "initial goodwill can dissipate when the rhetoric needs to be put into practice, especially when the effect of this is to challenge the dominant thinking" (p. 931). Much of what is learned in Reggio Emilia—like interactions with children, questions we ask children, listening to children, and the ways we talk with them—will be challenging to implement in American public schools and early childhood facilities. Key to implementation is depth of understanding and thinking critically about the elements that are good for all children, especially student-led inquiry and teacher talk, and are clearly at the heart of Reggio Emilia tenets.

Transformative Learning Theory and Study Abroad. Strange and Gibson (2017) highlight research conducted on short-term and long-term study abroad and the effect of participant transformative learning. Well-planned programs can have positive impacts on student learning with facilitation and purposeful design and reflection. How can we see when those cultural experiences are not only valued but allowed to grow and thrive in a classroom and school? According to Mezirow (1994), transformative learning theory elucidates the process through which adult learners understand their experiences, the way influences shape these experiences, and how these two aspects together alter the learners' interpretation of their experiences. Individuals have assumptions about the world that create their view of the world through a lens different from other individuals. Mezirow (1994) argues that beliefs are ingrained in an individual's view, and a challenge to this thinking is disorienting. The steps in the process of transformation begin with the disorienting dilemma and continue with self-examination, sense of alienation, relating discontent to others, explaining options of new behavior, building confidence in new ways, planning a course of action, knowledge to implement plans, experimenting with new roles, and finally, reintegration. Mezirow (1994) refers to rational discourse as a way to communicate and resolve internal conflicts. Mezirow (1994) states, "Critical reflection and rational discourse are processes of adult learning…" (p. 222) and "Learning is defined as the social process of construing and appropriating a new and revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (p. 223).

Reflection Related to Study Abroad. Reflection becomes a theme when looking at theories related to learning. Related to Experiential Learning Theory, Kolb and Kolb (2006) view learning as a process rather than outcomes to be achieved. We can see how learners evolve and construct knowledge based on experiences, reflection, action, and adaptation. This can be

compared to transformative learning, also steeped in educational experiences that immerse students in situations where they are active, reflective, and possibly uncomfortable, but allowing inner growth and development of worldview (Strange & Gibson, 2017). Reflection allows students to move from observing experiences to actively processing and assessing learning, while developing intercultural competence (Engle & Engle, 2003). A shift in perspective is required by viewing the learning from various possibilities. Two theories of learning, Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1994) and Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), describe reflection as a critical aspect of making meaning of learning.

Lundy's Four Factors of Child Participation. There are connections to be made between Lundy's four factors impacting children and the Reggio Emilia philosophy. To involve children in decision making, Lundy (2007) identified four factors for consideration. The factors—space, voice, audience, and influence—provide children the opportunity for involvement in the decision-making process. Each factor establishes greater awareness that children are capable and have the right to express their views. It also becomes clear that we hold a great deal of power over students in our classrooms.

Space. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 2002) states that children have the right to express views freely, and the views of the child will be given consideration. The space where children can express views should be engaging and provide opportunity for involvement with the environment and materials. To ask children what matters to them and how they would like to interact with the environment is the first step in decision making for children. Including a diverse range of children to participate in the space is respectful to the learning differences of all children. Ivana Socini, children with special rights psychologist in Reggio Emilia, Italy, asserts that all children ask questions (Cox, 2017). To listen to the questions of children means educators can provide the best space to meet the needs of the children. Lundy (2007) suggests educators ask three questions to determine if the space provided to children is safe and inclusive and provides children the opportunity to express views.
- Have children's views been sought actively?
- Is there a "safe space" in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children affected by the decision can take part?

Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini & Nimmo, 2015), in discussing spaces where children interact with one another in meaningful ways, notes that to understand one another's space, "I have to get up and come over to your space in order to see what you see" (p. 44). In considering Malaguzzi's invitation, we would add to Lundy's questions: Are children given freedom and safety to move about spaces? Can they explore one another's spaces? In exploring one another's spaces, we foster student-to-student relationships and deeper understanding of how children see, consider, and respect one another's work and play. Active citizenship could be learned if children were provided various spaces focused on organic spaces that allowed participation and exploration (Percy-Smith, 2010; Mitra, 2008).

Johnston (2004) discusses classroom spaces through an evolutionary lens. While it is important for a community of learners to support one another, it is not enough. The relationships and the community need to evolve into one where the children can feel challenged and grow. Johnston

(2004) says, "Children must have the experience of such communities if they are to know what to aim for in constructing their own learning environments" (p. 65).

Voice. The capacity to express a mature view is not required for children to express themselves freely. Welty and Lundy (2013) posit that with guidance from adults, children are able to form ideas and voice views. In *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993), emphasizes that young children have a hundred ways of communicating and adults need to listen to hear the children. Malaguzzi notes, "[The child] chooses the one that fits the situation" (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 2015, p. 46); adults have to trust the child will find a way to communicate using the language that is appropriate or comfortable to them. The ways in which children express voice is apparent in various forms such as written word, art, music, or other media representations. According to Mitra (2008), facilitating children's voice in schools should "range from the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions; to allowing young people to collaborate with adults to address the problems in their schools, to youth taking the lead on seeking change" (pp. 221- 222).

When considering the voice of children, educators may consider if the information provided to children is in an appropriate format and children are able to communicate their learning to an adult that has taken time to observe the child and appropriately choose the best means of response for the child (Tan, 2019; Welty & Lundy, 2013). The voice of a child, according to Clark (2007) "can be made visible or hidden by the lenses adults use to view them and their lives" (p. 76). Real listening, according to Rinaldi (2004), means adults suspend judgment and prejudice and create a relationship with the child to understand the viewpoint.

Fulfillment of adult agendas in schools creates a passive environment, rather than an active one, that promotes engagement by children and teachers. A school culture based on respect, care, dialogue, openness, and reciprocity involves a realignment of the roles of teachers and students to develop democratic relationships (Fielding & Moss, 2012; Percy-Smith, 2010).

Denton (2015) discusses how language "permeates every aspect of teaching and learning" (p. 1) helping us to nurture children, an inherent part of teaching. The language that we use in our classrooms—what we say to children and how we say it—even for something as simple as transitioning from one space to another can "send very different messages" (p. 2) to our students (Denton, 2015). When we use language such as "have to," (e.g., "We *have to* work on math now.") those words imply negative feelings that we, as teachers, may have toward what is being taught, perhaps a content that we, ourselves, do not feel comfortable teaching or have negative feelings toward. When we raise our voice, we give children a clear message about who controls the classroom, or at least who wants to be the authority (Denton, 2015).

Audience. When given the right to an audience, the child is able to use their voice to express views and is provided an opportunity to communicate views with adults. When educators listen to children, there is a responsibility to understand their perspectives, provide a process for communication, and allow the children's voices to influence decision making (Welty & Lundy, 2013). Rinaldi (2004) challenges educators to listen to the questions of children, noting, "They are requesting the courage to find a collection of possible answers. This attitude of the child means that the child is a real researcher" (p. 2). Adults and children are researchers in a question

to understand the meaning of life. As human beings, we are all researchers of the meaning of life, "Yet it is possible to destroy this attitude of the child with our quick answers and our certainty" (Rinaldi, 2004, p. 2).

Dahlberg (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) asks the question, "Do the teachers have the courage to be open to experimenting with the children?" (p. 226). To make meaning and take responsibility for actions, all citizens take part in a democratic process to examine the complexity of issues instead of minimizing the complexity. Cooperative learning experiences provide opportunities for all citizens to engage in meaningful dialogue and take risks, without controlling the views of others (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012).

Influence. A child's voice is heard with an audience. An audience provides the child with a worldview of being heard. According to Welty and Lundy (2013), children have a right to know their views were acted upon and considered when making decisions. When listening to children, the child's perspective can be understood, and according to Clark (2007), a child's abilities "can be made visible or hidden by the lenses adults use to view them and their lives" (p.76). The role of an educator is to be active and intentional, helping children make choices as the educator listens and notices. This intentionality is critical because the language we use helps mold and shape identities, but our words also have the capacity to narrow or broaden identities (Denton, 2015). It is during this time that the voice of the child is heard and is taken into account when decisions are made.

Denton (2015) discusses how language "helps us understand how we think, work, and play" (p. 5). Our words have the power and ability to make students feel good about themselves when used in simplistic and ritualistic ways (e.g., "Good job!"), but are more important and impactful when the specificity of words we use help children navigate how to get better at something they are doing. Too often we do the heavy lifting for our students instead of letting them negotiate or use their own words to work and play with peers. We use strategies in the classroom that indicate who will be the leader rather than trusting children are capable of making those decisions. Johnston (2004) reminds us, "If we want to change our words, we need to change our views" (p. 84).

All of our work with children, however, becomes meaningless if what the children are doing is unproductive in their eyes. When that occurs, it may also impact the language that is used by children and by teachers (Johnston, 2004). Unless the activities hold meaning for the children and are "relevant to their immediate lives and goals, they will easily help us shift back into unproductive language" (Johnston, 2004, p. 84). Without a carefully nurtured community of learners, engagement in the learning and the community is compromised.

Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 2015) notes that teachers must introduce conflict in order for children to navigate confrontations and uncertainty. And, teachers are largely uncomfortable with conflict in our classrooms. We do the negotiation for the children, or influence how the decisions are made to end the conflict instead of trusting that children will figure out how to navigate toward resolution. Malaguzzi takes this further and discusses the risk involved when we do not allow children to experience disequilibrium in their experiences with others by saying, "We have to keep the child in a situation of permanent uncertainty, and this is

the maximum security he can have" (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 2015, p. 47). Dahlberg (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) asserts that democratic practice established in a school setting provides all citizens, regardless of age, to participate in conversations regarding important issues and could be explained as "a specific attitude about life" (p. 226).

Table 1 is a summary of the points made in the narrative and includes a comparison of Lundy's (2007) Four Factors of Child Participation and the tenets that are critical to the Reggio Emilia approach to learning.

Table 1

Comparison of Lundy's (2007) Four Factors of Child Participation and The Reggio Emilia Approach to Education (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 1993)

Space	Voice	Audience	Influence
Engaging environment	Adult guidance	Adult listening	Adult listening
Opportunity for involvement with the environment	Adult listening	Children's opportunity to communicate with adults	Understanding child's perspective
Opportunity for involvement with materials	Adults suspend judgment	Adults understand child perspective	Adults support and guide child choice
Freedom of choice in how children interact with the environment	Respect of child's thinking	Children have opportunity for cooperative learning	Intentionality
Respectful to learning differences	Open dialogue with children	Democratic process	Opportunities for child negotiation
Safety of environment and materials	Reciprocity	Dialogue with children	Meaningful intentional environment and materials
Relationships of shared spaces	Language to nurture children	Allow risk taking	
Allow exploration		Open to views of children	
Allow participation			

Settings

There are two settings from the study to be considered. The first is the university setting where the teacher candidates attended educator preparation courses. The second setting is Reggio Emilia, Italy, which includes the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre and the Preschools, and Infant-toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

Northwest Missouri State University. Northwest Missouri State University is a moderately selective institution in the Midwest that has an enrollment of approximately 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The mission of the professional education unit at the university is to prepare teachers for educational excellence. The School of Education provides a successful learning community that includes early childhood, educational leadership, elementary education, middle school education, special education, and superintendency with undergraduate and graduate programs. Within the School of Education, there are approximately 800 undergraduate students and approximately 200 graduate students. There are also approximately 466 students in secondary education programs supported by the School of Education faculty.

Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia is a city of approximately 170,000 in north central Italy. A strong commitment to the outdoors is evident in the city, with more than 31 parks and 141 kilometers of bike paths. Reggio Emilia, a city of Roman origin, is rich in history, culture, and tradition.

Cobblestone streets and piazzas (plazas) are located close to the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre where study abroad presentations and lectures exhibits and collaborative experiences take place. The Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, opened in 2006, includes a coffee shop and bookstore that are open to the public in addition to meeting spaces, a documentation research facility, and exhibits. The faculty-led study abroad experience is coordinated with the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre. Study abroad teacher candidates are housed within walking distance of the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre to experience the history and culture of the city. The Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia began when a 1971 law was instituted that ensured assistance for families and that infant-toddler centres were a right of working families. The Municipality of Reggio Emilia was the first municipality in Italy to commit and open centres in 1970, before the law was instituted. The centres promote and defend the rights and potential of all children, teachers, and families.

Research Participants

Between 2016-2019, 32 undergraduate teacher candidates participated in the Reggio Emilia, Italy Study Abroad from Northwest Missouri State University. The researchers invited these participants, through email, to take part in the research study which included surveys and focus groups. Responses were received from 19 past participants: seven participated in focus groups and 12 completed the online survey. The participants included 19 female undergraduate education majors from Northwest Missouri State University. At the time of this study, 17 of the

former participants were teachers with one to three years of experience teaching in Midwest public preschool through third grade classrooms. The remaining two former participants were student teaching in their final semester of the undergraduate program. The teachers were teaching in Midwest public preschool through third grade classrooms.

Methodology

The research was framed through the lenses provided by Lundy (2007) with the purpose of learning to what extent participants (a student teacher and classroom teachers at the time of the study) in study abroad had skills and abilities to mitigate for children's capacities to make decisions, allowing them to have control in the classroom and reduce focus on complying. While Lundy's (2007) study discussed professional learning related to the concerns expressed in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 2002), the researchers examined how study abroad, a form of professional learning, contributed to a teacher's capacity to develop philosophical views and actions with children parallel to what was learned during the study abroad.

The study abroad experiences took place during spring semesters 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Participants in the seven-day study abroad experience were undergraduate students of the educator preparation program at a four-year regional university in the Midwest. The research was conducted for the purpose of evaluating the study abroad experience using a case study model.

Case study was appropriate in accurately and descriptively capturing the participants' responses to survey questions and subsequent focus group questions. Qualitative design allowed for in-depth research of study abroad and possible influences on classroom behaviors, interactions, and language with children as research participants became teachers in an educational setting (Yin, 2003) in the United States. The researchers analyzed a collection of artifacts (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 1998) in the form of data generated from surveys and focus group transcripts to gain insight into participants' behaviors as educators, post study abroad. Researchers initially conducted email surveys with the participants. Initial analyses of the surveys—separately by both researchers—resulted in discovery of themes in the participants' responses and allowed glimpses into how the classroom teachers applied the tenets of the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education in their own classrooms, now as teachers. These themes informed the questions crafted for the focus group sessions. The researchers utilized focus group sessions with research participants to further probe for clarification, elaboration, and reflection about the study abroad experience.

Research Questions.
- How does participation in the Reggio Emilia, Italy study abroad experience as an undergraduate teacher candidate at a four-year university influence the teaching practices of first- through third-year teachers in their own classrooms after the study abroad experience?
- How was Lundy's model evidenced in the participants' thinking, experiences, and classroom practices post-study abroad?
- How are participants using space, voice, audience, and influence based on their study abroad experience?

Survey and Focus Groups. The email survey was conducted using a link to a Google form and included 11 questions (see Appendix A). The survey data received from 12 participants (*n*=12) were coded using four interrelated elements of space, voice, audience, and influence as described by Lundy (2007). The teachers were then asked to participate in further investigation with the researchers in two focus groups conducted in the online environment due to teacher locations. Seven participants completed the focus groups with the researchers which included seven questions (see Appendix B). The focus group data collected were coded for the elements of space, voice, audience, and influence.

Limitations of the Study. As with any study, there are limitations to discuss. For this study, these include the duration of the study abroad experience, the number of participants in the study, and inability of the researchers to observe the participants in their current schools as they attempted to infuse their instructional practices with the tenets of Reggio Emilia. Although there is evidence that short-term study abroad has many benefits, immersion into the Reggio Emilia philosophy pre-trip and during study abroad was brief.

Results and Findings

The results and findings will be discussed through five specific lenses: 1) intentionality, 2) space, 3) voice, 4) audience, and 5) influence.

Intentionality. The word "intentional" or a form of the word is used extensively in participant responses. As a matter of fact, a review of the transcripts from the focus groups reveals that the word "intentional" or a derivative (e.g., "intentionally," "intentionality") is used 41 times by the research participants. Within the survey responses, the word "intentional" or a derivative, is used 12 times by research participants. These words are used to describe the ways in which teachers speak to and question the children, the materials that children have access to, and how children explore their spaces. The table below demonstrates a sampling of the participants' use of the word "intentional" or a derivative. It was clear that the study abroad teacher candidates noticed and had deep appreciation for how Reggio Emilia teachers approach their work with children.

Table 2

Examples of Research Participants' Use of "Intentional" or a Derivative in Survey and Interviews

How the teacher functions within the classroom	"...the Reggio way is to take a step back and become the facilitator and, with *intentionality*, let the child guide the learning."
	"I think it goes back to seeing her [the teacher] *intentionally* listen, to know what the child was doing during that time and not just listening for an answer."
	"And as soon as the child started doing something that could possibly have some sort of learning and *intentional* use, she would start recording them."

Careful selection of materials for the students	"They [the teachers] set up *intentional* materials so that they would fit the languages of the students and the students could kind of choose those languages to show their learning and interact with their environment."

"This challenged my thinking, because children were learning so much through play and *intentional* stations, but there were not traditional stations for reading, toys, math, etc... The environment was also made up of materials found around the house and throughout the community."

Projects should be based in [sic] the children's interests. Materials should always be *intentional*.

I believed that I needed to facilitate projects, but they believed that children should facilitate it through *intentional* materials.

"...that's actually one of the big takeaways that I had that I still think about all the time is that whatever you put out, you put out *intentionally* because you watch the kids play, you watch how they interact with your materials, and then you put the materials out in an *intentional* way so that they're going to learn something in specific." |
| Children drive the learning | "They're *intentionally* doing that with what the child wants to learn…they're not going off of standards because they have to, they're literally going off of what the child wants to use to learn different concepts, and they *intentionally* do that."

"...they're not going off of standards because they have to, they're literally going off of what the child wants to use to learn different concepts and they [teachers] *intentionally* do that." |
| What participants do differently post-Reggio | "I talk about their [teachers at Reggio] importance of integration through projects based on interests and having a minimalist yet *intentional* environment."

"I want children to always begin by exploring through materials that I have *intentionally* provided." |

It is important to note the following before discussing Lundy's four factors. The factors of Space and Voice were evident in the responses participants provided on the initial surveys. It was only through the focus group interviews that the researchers were able to dig deeper with them to also learn their thinking about Influence and Audience. The researchers found another interesting shift in survey responses worthy of note. On the initial questions (#1-6) in the survey (see Appendix A), the participants used Reggio language and wrote their thoughts about observations through lenses of what they learned during study abroad. However, when the survey questions

(#7-10) (see Appendix A) shifted to what they had been able to incorporate into their classrooms, discussions notably changed to language that surrounds classrooms in the United States—standards, assessment, curriculum, outcomes—and their responsibilities to answer to their schools and districts. Reggio Emilia makes it perfectly clear that the tenets and philosophical beliefs espoused there cannot be easily transported back to the United States and implemented in the form observed in Italy. But, survey responses demonstrated a lack of feeling equipped to do so at a school-changing level.

Space. Consistent responses in the surveys represented by the participants included noticing a school culture that is inherently observable and permeates the Reggio setting. They noticed differences between this culture and United States schools and easily contrasted the two settings.

The classroom settings were very different and much larger in Italy. Classrooms had different areas for students to explore and learn and the rooms each looked different. Some had stairs, second levels that peered over a learning environment, windows that looked outside to the outdoor play area, and lots of space for the children to move around and explore. My classroom is surrounded by white-painted cinder blocks with no windows looking outside or additional levels. All of the classrooms at my current school are the same shape and size and all have similar designs.

One participant poignantly described a moment where the study abroad participants and children in the Reggio setting were "allowed" to climb a tree noting, "We were allowed to climb on anything throughout Reggio. This stuck out to me because that is uncommon in the U.S.A." In addition to cultural differences related to classroom settings and natural elements, participants identified the noticeable impact of providing space for children to take risks and to view mistakes as learning opportunities.

The participants are clearly making efforts to incorporate the natural elements they learned about at Reggio by focusing on "a minimalist yet intentional environment" and "focus[ed] on natural lighting and how I can bring nature into the classroom" post-study abroad. Using the outdoors to influence the indoors was evidenced by one response: "The flow from outdoors to indoors made me reconsider the way I can use my space to flow as well."

Voice. A focus on the rights of a child was a significant factor in participant thinking with responses such as, "Learning about child[ren]'s rights really resonated with me," and "My eyes were opened to what can be and how to respect and truly appreciate children." One participant expressed, "Now that I teach kindergarten, I find myself coming back to the view of a child instead of a student often." Another stated, "Having a new found [sic] perception of how education differs throughout the world ignited a curiosity in me to dive into educational research and practices to benefit me and my students the most."

Exploration led by children was noted repeatedly with statements such as, "Let children form their own opinions of the world," and "Value each individual character and challenge all learning." Participants spoke of seeing children as individuals with special rights, valuing each child, and allowing involvement in learning. One passionate response indicated, "We limit children and often try to pour them into a mold." Participants shared thoughts about the teacher

facilitating learning instead of trying to fix everything for children. One student entered the study abroad experience thinking this type of learning would not work. The participant's response after spending time in Reggio schools and classrooms was, "I was, of course, proven wrong." Viewing what they experience day-to-day as opportunities instead of problems resonated with the participants, as stated by one participant,

> Being in a public school setting where academics are the key focus, I rely on my knowledge of early childhood from this trip to remind me to take a step back and remember what is truly important during these early stages is building passion in learning, building foundational learning skills through play, and nurturing the whole child and family.

Grappling with preconceived notions of education, participants responded with realizations that changes can be made, and a shift in mindset can occur. One response conveys opportunity to make changes instead of viewing problems: "I am a realistic person, but I now know that accomplishing the Reggio approach in the U.S. is not impossible, it just takes more imagination." And another response shows intentionality and seeking to transition from viewing this as an opportunity rather than a problem to be solved: "I work to include their voice, ideas, and interests into the classroom and the way I respond." Responses elicited understanding that children should be provided a safe space to express their views openly with encouragement from teachers instead of a one-sided environment that does not prompt views from children (Lundy, 2007). Children should have "a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views" (Lundy, 2007, p. 937).

Audience. A participant remembered an observation at Reggio Emilia when children were building an airport, and it was too big for the classroom, so the teacher allowed them to move into the hall area. The teacher was a guide but did not intervene and allowed the children to work together to ask questions, access books, and build the airport. Children were able to leave their creation to show parents and continue building the next day. Cavazzoni (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) explained that many adults that enter a Reggio Approach classroom do not understand the belief of the educational projects. In Reggio settings, the teachers view families as partners in learning and have a right to know and seek to understand the processes taking place.

Disagreements are part of the democratic process and help in establishing respectful participation among all citizens. This idea resonates in the participant response, "Listening and helping each other doesn't come naturally in our society. We're not focused on betterment of teams, but individual success." Another participant stated, "It caused me to reflect on my beliefs and how I can change some of the set ways we do things." Lundy (2007) presents the challenge that adults must not only listen to children but also ensure their views are acted upon. Acting upon a child's thinking was expressed by one participant who stated, "...reflection time with others in the experience allows for deeper thought and exploring new ways to do things."

Positive relationships with families are cultivated, and families take an active role in the learning process in the Reggio Emilia setting. The relationship with families was addressed as being a cultural issue and that the U.S. should involve families more because "...this affects how children view school." Respect for a child was also attributed to culture and society and "...ideas and feelings aren't respected in our society." Giacopini (2007) establishes the need to be transparent and welcoming; communication is key to building respectful exchanges about differing ideas,

taking risks, and making sense of experiences.

Influence. Listening to children with purpose requires the adult to change perspective from one of being the over-protector of children and giving the appearance of listening to viewing children as capable of deep thought and actively listening with intention (Lundy, 2007). Participant responses indicate that their views of children changed with "we have so much influence" and "I was in awe at what students were accomplishing and coming up with at those young ages…". Intentionality was evident in participant responses—not only with materials but questioning—and lack of intervening in activities. "Children were learning so much through play and intentional stations... [teachers] were passionate about their work." Lundy (2007) states that children should be empowered and supported instead of restricted. Participants consistently affirmed that children are capable and that "teacher mindset...is believing that every child is capable." In addition, participants expressed concern with implementation of Reggio tenets in the U.S. because children in the states have been conditioned to expect instructions from the teacher.

Discussion

The participants in this study clearly wrestled with a philosophy that aligns with their own beliefs, developmentally appropriate practices with children, and what they value in early childhood education. In addition, participants struggled to find balance between their beliefs and respecting what is valued by colleagues and administrators in their school settings in the United States which directly relates to how Lundy (2007) describes space as an "opportunity for involvement" (p. 933) where expression of views is respected and encouraged. Article 13 of the United Nations Convention states, "Freedom of expression for children is rarely talked about, but it is an important indicator of the degree to which children are treated as rights holders" (Child Rights International Network, 2018). Article 13 further establishes that play is an integral part of a child's development and provides the ability of the child to express themselves and navigate social experiences (Child Rights International Network, 2018). One participant noted, "... the amount of stress that the kids in our society are under at five [years old]…". Participants expressed a feeling of uncertainty wrestling with their own philosophical beliefs and knowing that the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education cannot be replicated in the United States, but rather can be used as inspiration to develop opportunities of learning for children and adults.

Many of the participants' responses on surveys and focus group questions indicated a lack of confidence, skill, and experience with how to navigate changing philosophical beliefs in American schools. Participants indicated that it seemed 'too big' and, of course, they value and want to keep their jobs. While recognizing the significant differences in teaching methodology, the majority of teacher candidates reported a struggle with the U.S. educational system's focus on test scores, strict schedules, and little capacity for flexibility. Many teacher candidates indicated a lack of understanding in how to navigate change. As one teacher candidate stated, "...people won't listen because I'm young." According to Fullan (1993), a common theme of teachers entering the teaching field is to make a difference in the lives of students, but the reality dissipates to the difficulties of teaching that includes social pressures, values, and frustration.

The realities are conflicting: If it can be done in one country, can it not be done in another? This is evident in participant responses as they noted that even data collection looks different in the

observed schools than it does in their classrooms. Beliefs were challenged, and as one participant stated, "...these rights were valued whole-heartedly and showed they [teachers] challenged children and saw them as a complete human—not as a small child."

Conclusions

It is important to return to a quote from Lundy (2007) used at the beginning of this manuscript: "Initial goodwill can dissipate when the rhetoric needs to be put into practice, especially when the effect of this is to challenge dominant thinking" (p. 931). The research participants have knowledge about and demonstrated understanding of what would be best for their students, especially related to developmentally appropriate practices and respecting voice, space, audience, and influence for children's education. However, their study abroad experiences marginally assisted them in *how* to navigate the implementation of a Reggio Emilia Approach to Education. The research helped to understand that the participants have knowledge about Reggio Emilia philosophy, but their toolbox is half full related to challenges they faced with American education that is so focused on standards-driven instruction and assessment of student learning for the purpose of raising scores. How can we best equip early-experience teachers to take what they have learned, and now value, back to American schools for others to learn from so that their toolbox is full?

Empirical findings provide evidence that engaging in a study abroad experience can meaningfully impact the participant with new knowledge and ideas to make a positive impact on society (Dwyer, 2004). These findings refer to study abroad experiences as deep versus surface-level learning and how the learning and competencies would not have taken place at a deeper level if participation in study abroad would not have occurred. Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou (2012) posit that study abroad participants struggle to make lasting change due to the lack of preparation and assistance to re-enter their community with new ideas. In addition, universities typically use the number of study abroad participants as evidence of success, when in actuality, the success should be based on the evidence of participant learning and how participants can incorporate their learning into real-world changes.

Undergraduate Research. At the heart of graduating well-informed and confident teacher candidates could be increased opportunities for research about philosophies adding to theories candidates are exposed to during undergraduate coursework. A stronger approach would be guided action research with an instructor and skilled classroom teacher open to implementing a new strategy or resource in their classroom. This would give teacher candidates opportunities to see how classroom research informs educators' teaching and student learning, observe how action research steps are implemented, experience methods of collecting data, and try their hand at analyzing multiple data sources prior to entering the classroom. Addressing the teacher as a researcher, Schutz and Hoffman (2017) discuss the role of action research as a powerful tool in providing educators a voice in their work "...as a critical mechanism for empowering teachers and marginalized communities to investigate social issues, devise fresh understandings, and develop new plans of action" (p. 10). Their work also speaks to the communities of practice that develop so that educators can discuss their practice within the community, and then, through "a common language and theory to make the complexity of teaching practice visible to others" (Schutz & Hoffman, 2017, p. 11). Perhaps by co-researching with university instructors and then

"practicing" again during student teaching with a cooperating teacher, teacher candidates can feel confident in demonstrating teaching practices they believe in to others.

Professional Challenges. Current practices of educator preparation programs do not always equip teacher candidates with the confidence to respectfully discuss philosophical beliefs with colleagues. Mock interviews and completing teacher applications are commonplace, but how to approach others when your beliefs may be different is not. Candid discussions on how to respectfully effect change could benefit teacher candidates and give them confidence in their abilities. The first participants that were a part of this research were seemingly ill-equipped to have these kinds of productive discussions with colleagues. Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou (2012) offer evidence that study abroad coordinators must assist participants' learning to develop knowledge and skills that will shift perspective and behavior to change assumptions. This would provide guidance to respond to differences and commonalities within the new context and through the lens of study abroad.

Structured Reflection during Study Abroad. Reflection in teaching is complex and has been studied for at least four decades when it became a common component of teacher preparation programs (Birmingham, 2004). Birmingham (2004) tells us that "a reflective teacher learns from past experiences and comes into a situation with expectations and anticipations, but not with a rigid mental rule book" (p. 317). They further explain that reflection "can only thrive in a supportive community" (Birmingham, 2004, p. 322). The students found this community of support during study abroad, but the support for the principles of Reggio Emilia were not prevalent after they returned home. Instead, they found themselves student teaching within American school settings where few, if any, university supervisors were familiar with the tenets of Reggio. The Reggio Emilia Approach to Education is based on collaboration to give voice to ideas, freedom to reflect, and to acknowledge that children are knowledge-makers. With these ideas in place, communication is essential to provide support to study abroad participants, to educate others in the education field, and to promote the experiences and knowledge gained from the study abroad experience.

Setting Re-Entry Goals. Study abroad participants experience teaching and learning beliefs that are surface indications of cultural values and beliefs that require continued engagement, reflection, and learning (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Maximizing learning for study abroad participants includes establishing re-entry goals prior to the experience. The re-entry goals can be used to guide the experience for the participant, promote engagement with the facilitator to support and challenge the participant, and to formatively assess the participant's efforts to meet the goals. In addition to goal setting, participants can collect artifacts to support goals and ensure that future implementation is accessible and attainable.

Considering the critical nature of reflection in teaching, and actions resulting from reflection, the study abroad experience at Reggio Emilia can be strengthened.

References

Barnhart, R. S. & Groth, L. (1987). The assessment of college student growth resulting from an international course and study experience. *College Student Journal, 21*, 78-85.

Birmingham, C. (2004). Phronesis: A model for pedagogical reflection. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(4), 313-324. https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487104266725

Child Rights International Network. (2018). *Article 13: Freedom of expression.* CRIN. https://archive.crin.org/en/home/rights/convention/text-convention.html

Christie, M., Carey, M., Robertson, A., & Grainger, P. (2015). Putting transformative learning theory into practice. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 55*(1), 9-30.

Clark, A. (2007). A hundred ways of listening: Gathering children's perspectives of their early child environment. *Young Children*, *62*(3), 76-81.

Cox, L. (2017). A story of the possible: Individuals with special rights in the Reggio Emilia context (part II). *The International Educator*, retrieved: https://www.tieonline.com/article/2131/a-story-of-the-possible-individuals-with-special-rights-in-the-reggio-emilia-context-part-ii-

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research: Choosing among five traditions.* Sage Publications.

Cushner, K. (2007). The role of experience in the making of internationally-minded teachers. *Education Quarterly*, *34*(1), 27-39.

Denton, P. (2015). *The power of our words: Teacher language that helps children learn* (2nd ed.). Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.

Dwyer, M. M. (2004). More is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 10*, 151-163. https://dx.doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v10i1.139

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. St. Louis University.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Nimmo, J. (2015). *Loris Malaguzzi and the teachers: Dialogues on collaboration and conflict among children, Reggio Emilia 1990.* Zea Books.

Engle, L. (2012-2013). The rewards of qualitative assessment appropriate to study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 22*, 111-126. https://dx.doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v22il.321

Engle, L. & Engle, J. (2003). Study abroad levels: Toward a classification of program types. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 9*, 1-20. https://dx.doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v9i1.113

Fielding, M., and Moss, P. (2012). *Radical education and the common school: A democratic alternative*. Routledge.

Fullan, M. G. (1993). Why teachers must become change agents. *Educational Leadership, 50*(6), 12-17.

Giacopini, E. (2007). Observation, documentation, and interpretation as strategies for knowledge. *Innovations*, *14*(3), 1-8.

Institute of International Education. (2011). Duration of U.S. Study Abroad, 2000/01-2009/10. *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. https://www.iie.org/opendoors

Johnston, P. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children's learning*. Stenhouse Publishers.

Kolb, A. Y. & Kolb, D. A. (2006). Learning styles and learning spaces: A review of multidisciplinary application of experiential learning theory in higher education. In R. R. Sims & S. J. Sims (Eds.), *Learning styles and learning spaces*. Nova Science Publishers,

Inc.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Prentice Hall.

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 927-942. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033

Mezirow, J. (1994). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

Mitra, D. (2008). Balancing power in communities of practice: An examination of increasing student voice through school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Journal of Educational Change*. *9*, 221-242. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-007-9061-7

Percy-Smith, B. (2010). Councils, consultations and community: Rethinking the space for children and young people's participation. *Children's Geographies*, *8*(2), 107-122. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733281003691368

Reggio Children (2022). Timeline. https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/timeline-en/

Rinaldi, C. (2004). The relationship between documentation and assessment. *The Quarterly Periodical of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance*, *11*(1), 1-4.

Schutz, K. M., & Hoffman, J. V. (2017). "I practice teaching": Our professional identities as literacy teachers through action research. *The Reading Teacher, 71*(1), 7-12. https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1592

Strange, H. & Gibson, H. J. (2017). An investigation of experiential and transformative learning in study abroad programs. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 29*(1), 85-100. https://dx.doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v29i1.387

Tan, P. (2019). Listening to young children: A mosaic approach - Research perspectives from two children and dinosaurs. *Simon Fraser University Educational Review, 12*(2), 64-78. https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i2.932

United Nations General Assembly (2002). *A world fit for children.* UN/A/RES/S-27/2. Geneva: United Nations. https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

Vande Berg, M., Paige, R., & Lou, K. (2012). *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Welty, E. & Lundy, L. (2013). A children's rights-based approach to involving children in decision making. *Journal of Science Communication*, *12*(03). https://doi.org/10.22323/2.12030302

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (3rd Ed.)*. Sage Publications.

Appendix A

Study Abroad Survey Questions

1. What do you remember most about the study abroad experience? (What stories do you tell? What do you share with others? What details can you share?)
2. What did you observe at the Loris Malaguzzi International Center and participating schools that *challenged* your thinking about teaching?
3. What did you observe at the Loris Malaguzzi International Center and participating schools that *changed* your thinking about teaching?

4. What differences did you observe between participating schools in Italy and schools in the United States where you conducted practicum and field experience?
5. Upon returning from Reggio Emilia, Italy, what experiences had an impact on you personally?
6. How were your educational beliefs challenged by the study abroad experience?
7. How did Reggio Emilia, Italy Study Abroad influence your teaching?
8. To what extent does study abroad impact your pedagogical or curricular decisions?
9. What new knowledge, skills, awareness did you gain?
10. Did your worldview change as a result of study abroad? If so, how?
11. What other observations or comments would you like to share about Reggio Emilia Study Abroad?

Appendix B

Study Abroad Focus Group Questions

1. Did you observe teachers encouraging children to express their own views? What did you see and/or hear?
2. Did you observe teachers listening to children? What did you see and/or hear?
3. Did you see children exploring without teacher prompting? What did you see and/or hear?
4. Did you see children taking part in meaningful exchanges with other children? What did you see and/or hear?
5. What indication was there that the teacher created learning opportunities through environment and materials?
6. What differences did you observe between Reggio Emilia participating schools and where you teach now?
7. What advice would you offer current study abroad participants to help them gain as much knowledge as possible?

Sandra Seipel (sseipel@nwmissouri.edu) is an associate professor in the School of Education, Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, MO.

Victoria Seeger (vseeger@nwmissouri.edu) is a retired associate professor, now adjunct professor, in the School of Education, Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, MO. She lives in Lawrence, KS.