

Thinking Differently about ‘Quality’ in British Columbia: Dialogue with the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Project

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Laurie Kocher, Iris Berger, Karen Isaac & Janet Mort

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is a faculty member at the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. Her research interests, writing and activities converge on issues of social justice and child care. Currently she co-directs the Investigating Quality Project and coordinates the Early Years Specialization at the University of Victoria.

Laurie Kocher is a frequent contributor to *Canadian Children*. She is a former coordinator of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Research at the University of British Columbia and is currently a kindergarten teacher in an International Baccalaureate public school where she hopes to marry the IB ideas with the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach. A doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, Laurie is exploring pedagogical documentation as a catalyst for teacher change.

Iris Berger has been an early childhood educator for the past 12 years. Currently, she is the coordinator of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Research at the University of British Columbia.

Karen Isaac is the Executive Director of the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society.

Janet Mort is a former Superintendent of Schools. She is a SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) award winner and doctoral candidate at the University of Victoria, where she is studying how integrated services in communities can better support young children’s developmental needs.

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Abstract

This article reports how a group of educators, researchers and Aboriginal leaders view the educational project of the internationally renowned municipal early childhood programs of Reggio Emilia in Italy as a source of inspiration for rethinking British Columbia’s early education policies. The authors argue that in order to work towards ‘quality’ early education, understandings and discussions within the province need to embrace critical dialogues concerning language, the image of the child, the image of the teacher, the relationship between learning and assessment, and community participation.

Introduction

During the last decade, early education¹ gained prominence as an important public policy agenda item in federal, provincial, regional and local discussions. More recently, various reports have been published that address early education policy in British Columbia (e.g., Kershaw, Irwin, Trafford & Hertzman, 2005; Elliot, 2006; Ministry of Children and Family Development & Ministry of Education [MCFD & ME], 2005). This article contributes an alternative analysis of early education policies and provides suggestions for the direction of policies in British Columbia. In particular, it explores the conditions that have made possible the success of the Reggio Emilia programs and outlines perspectives and practices from these programs that could be considered as sources of

inspiration to enhance early education in British Columbia. Although the focus of this article is British Columbia, those working in the area of early education policies within the context of other provinces in Canada might find the issues identified here of value.

This article emerged from discussions by the authors following a visit to the Reggio Emilia early childhood programs as part of a leadership study group organized by Reggio Children.² This was the first Canadian group that participated in the leadership study tour.³ Previous Canadian study groups have been primarily focused on the innovative pedagogical approaches of Reggio Emilia’s programs and geared toward educators, trainers, and researchers. The leadership study group came about in response to requests from educators, trainers, and

¹ Other valid terms include: Early Childhood Education/ECE, Early Childhood Education and Care/ECCE (OECD), Early Childhood Care for Development/ECCD (Consultative Group), and Early Childhood Development/ECD (UNESCO, World Bank, ADEA). Recent British Columbia government publications use the term early learning and child care.

² Reggio Children is “a mixed public-private company that the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, along with other interested subjects, decided to establish in 1994 to manage the pedagogical and cultural exchange initiatives that had already been taking place for many years between the municipal early childhood services and a large number of teachers and researchers from all over the world.” See <http://zerosei.comune.re.it/inter/reggiochildren.htm>

³ The participating working group was made up of representatives from the BC Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Children and Families, the University of British Columbia, the Human Early Learning Project (HELP), the University of Victoria, and the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society. The group was chaired by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw. Members of the group included Iris Berger, Lynne Holt, Karen Isaac, Susan Kennedy, Laurie Kocher, and Janet Mort. The visit and background work preparation of this article was made possible by the support of the School Leadership Centre at the University of British Columbia, and in particular the support and leadership provided by Mark Edwards.

researchers from around the world wanting to know what supportive policy foundations exist behind Reggio Emilia's successful pedagogical approaches.

Before proceeding, we wish to acknowledge the challenges associated with drawing lessons from other contexts. We feel excited to be able to explore the Reggio Emilia programs and consider them in relation to British Columbia's early education policies. However, we are aware of the challenges of 'transferability' of programs and policies (Grieshaber & Hatch, 2003; Johnson, 1999). Our intention is to make the contextual structures visible, and come to an informed understanding of how British Columbians might choose to look at our own early education system. Our emphasis is on the conditions that make Reggio Emilia early childhood programs successful, and consequently on the policy conditions that we need in British Columbia in order to create 'quality'⁴ early education spaces.

British Columbia's Early Education: The 'Quality' Dilemma

British Columbia recognizes the need for 'quality' early education as one of the primary issues within its policies. The primary strategy for *assuring* 'quality' early education in the province has been through regulations that set minimum standards for improving structural factors such as group size, adult-child ratios, and training levels of caregivers, as well as levels of literacy, numeracy, and school preparedness in young children.

'Quality' *improvement* approaches have focused on the development and use of measurements and instruments to assess 'quality'. This understanding of 'quality' is underlined in the use of the well-known instruments developed by Harms, Clifford and Cryer, the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) and ITERS (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale). The Canadian child care research literature includes many examples of studies that have defined 'quality' using these instruments and others like them (i.e., see Goelman, Forer, Kershaw,

Doherty, Lero, & LaGrange, 2006; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish, Elliot, & Totsika, 2006; Doherty, Forer, Lero, Goelman, & LaGrande, 2006).

Another initiative to improve quality has focused on the improvement of children's developmental outcomes, usually expressed in terms of school readiness. The identification of 'risks' and 'vulnerabilities', for the improvement of outcomes has been emphasized throughout the province (Kershaw, Irwin, Trafford & Hertzman, 2005). Within these discussions, there is an emphasis on standards and good practice guidelines, such as the NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997), which specifies practices believed to produce 'positive' developmental outcomes:

Those working in the area of early education policies within the context of other provinces in Canada might find the issues identified here of value.

The effect of child care on children's social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development depends in part on children's daily experiences in their child care program. This experience is often referred to as process quality with high-quality defined as a combination of nurturing relationships, protection of children's health and safety, and the availability of developmentally-appropriate, stimulating activities and experiences (Doherty et al., 2006, p. 297).

The primary concern is "that greater understanding of the contributors to quality will enable a more strategic approach to addressing the current concerns about the extent to which [child care programs] support and enhance children's development" (Doherty et al., 2006, p.297, p.300).

This article proposes that we might do well by broadening and deepening the province's understandings and discussions of quality, particularly the aspects that British Columbia (and North America in general) value when discussing quality. Universalist approaches might not necessarily create innovative and dynamic early education programs for British Columbia's young children. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) remind us that, "the concept of quality is about a search for definitive and universal criteria that will offer certainty and order, and a belief that such transcendental criteria can be found. It asks the question - how far does this product, this service or this activity conform to a universal, objective and predetermined standard? It has no place for complexity, values, diversity, subjectivity, indeterminacy and multiple perspectives" (p.108).

The next section outlines perspectives from the Reggio Emilia early childhood programs that we consider to have the potential to help us 'enhance' early education here in British Columbia. We believe that the following highlighted aspects of the Reggio Emilia project could enrich discussions within British Columbia as the province plans ways of attending to the rights of young children and their families and communities. In addition to our own impressions of and experiences with the Reggio Emilia early childhood programs, we draw on the interpretations of Reggio by scholars such as Gunilla Dahlberg, Carlina Rinaldi and Peter Moss.

A Vision for British Columbia: An Inspiration from Reggio Emilia's Early Childhood Programs

Local early childhood educators and theorists struggle to interpret and re-think the 'Reggio Emilia Approach' in the North American context. Some of the challenges stem from the fact that early childhood education, schooling and childhood are perceived differently in North America (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). For example, in North America, early childhood programs are

⁴ We use 'quality' in quotation marks as we acknowledge the complexities and nuances embedded in discussions of 'quality' early learning and child care. For a full discussion of these complexities and nuances, refer to Moss and Pence (1994); and Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999).

often viewed as preparation for school, while from a Reggio Emilia perspective children's educational experiences are valued in the here and now. In North America, language and literacy focus on children's writing and reading skills, but the programs in Reggio Emilia see children as having a 'hundred languages' of expression. The local language that is used to describe goals for programs for young children often uses the term children's needs. Reggio Emilia educators discuss the protection of children's rights, as opposed to needs, as the foundation of their approach. In North America, testing and standardized assessments are widely used and highly valued for improving children's outcomes, while in Reggio Emilia authentic assessment in the form of pedagogical documentation is used to open up new possibilities for learning (Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2001; Hendrick, 1997).

Why this difference? What are the values and beliefs that underpin 'quality' early childhood education in Reggio Emilia? What can British Columbia learn about priorities for early education? We explore these questions by outlining some of the aspects that we believe create a 'different' kind of education for young children, an education that is internationally recognized for its respect to children.

Language De-Construction and Re-Construction

What has captured our attention and interest is the coherence and clarity of language and thought that the different stakeholders in Reggio Emilia use when discussing their programs for the young children. A lot of thought is given to the articulation of ideas and concepts related to children, families, and education. Words are always linked to action and change. Reggio Emilia's citizens have created a new vocabulary within which children, childhood, learning, educating, communicating, and managing are described, discussed, and reflected upon. This language is neither a scientific language, nor a developmental language.

Rather, it is a language that reflects what children, educators, parents, and the community collectively value for children in their town. We saw in Reggio Emilia a commitment on the part of the community to engage in dialogue, to discuss in depth and to debate the education of the community's children.⁵

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Topics of discussion include questions such as: Who is the child? What image of childhood do we want to promote? What is education? What constitutes an educational experience? How does education relate to the past, present and future? Who is responsible for the education of young children? How can we collaborate to maintain a high quality educational system that embraces differences and diversity? What is family participation? How do we welcome families into the educational system? Who will support and guide the teachers? How do young children learn? What evidence do we see that children do learn in our programs? In Reggio Emilia, these questions are reflected upon by *all* stakeholders, including children and parents, in a meaningful and inspiring way.

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An example of the importance placed on language can be found in Rinaldi's (2006a) book, *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*. She describes how, at the beginning of the early childhood educational project, a discussion started with regard to what term should be attached to the preschools of Reggio Emilia: Should they be called 'municipal schools of early childhood,' or 'schools for early childhood'? A decision was made to say each school is *of* (belonging to) children, and therefore the schools are called 'Scuole comunali dell'infanzia'. Again, the question is not simply one of language - in the Reggio Emilia context language leads to and informs action. Another example of the importance of language lies in the terminology that has been chosen to refer to those who work with children. 'Practitioner' is a word that is not favored by educators in Reggio Emilia, because it implies that teachers (educators) assume responsibility only for the classroom practice without consideration of an underlying theory of education.

In British Columbia, we need to begin to pay attention to the language we use and consequently its implications that often times might be disrespectful to the children we are trying to embrace. We rarely specify the meanings of terms that we use in early childhood education - terms such as 'quality,' 'standards,' 'outcomes,' 'at risk,' 'school readiness,' 'vulnerability,' 'early literacy,' and many others. Who defines these terms? What is assumed by these terms? How are children contributing to these definitions? How are parents contributing to the construction of language? What image of childhood are we constructing through these terms? Reggio Emilia starts from a very different place than mainstream North American approaches: rather than believing that knowledge originates from the answers, the people of Reggio Emilia believe that knowledge comes from the questions asked, questions that are essential to ensuring that programs have 'authentic roots' and reflect the values and realities of the people.

⁵ Reggio Emilia's early childhood programs originated right after WWII with a desire to reconstruct the community. See historical background.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) remind us that, “the creation of a crisis in thinking and a struggle over meaning can produce opportunities, opening up the possibility of viewing children, early childhood institutions and early childhood pedagogy in new ways” (p. 122). We need this “crisis in thinking” in British Columbia to open up discussions of policy, training, practice, and research in relation to ‘quality’.

Critical Dialogue Concerning the Image of the Child

In Reggio Emilia, citizens speak of the centrality of childhood (to the Italian culture) and the rights of children. A 1999 OECD report about Italian early childhood education and care policy states, “What seems to have remained constant amidst the newly negotiated roles of adults is the intrinsic value of children in twentieth century Italy” (OECD, 2001, p. 2). In 1968, the Italian government passed Law 444 providing national funds for early childhood programs and proclaiming the right of Italian children to early childhood education. “The 1968 Law marked Italy’s changing cultural interpretation of ECEC as a response to children’s needs and rights rather than solely as a form of assistance for working mothers” (OECD, 2001, p.15). Children are viewed as citizens with rights from the moment that they are born, not merely as citizens of the future (Rinaldi, 2006b, February).

In Reggio Emilia, educators, parents, city officials, commissioners of education, and members of the community all discuss children as possessors of rights, respected and valued for their unique identities. They talk about children as interpreters of reality, children who are competent at formulating hypotheses, building theories, and imagining metaphors as possibilities for understanding reality.

The language used by the Italian government describes early childhood programs as an *educational right of young children and their families*. This stands

in stark contrast with our use of language in British Columbia — language that attempts to separate ‘early learning’ and ‘child care,’ implying that the first is an educational opportunity while the latter is a service for working parents. We would be well advised to embrace a broader notion of *education*, to include aspects of learning and care for young children, based on children’s rights and the rights of families. This will, of course, involve us in discussions to specify those rights in our own contexts.

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In British Columbia, we tend to see children as having ‘needs’ and ‘vulnerabilities,’ mostly defined through developmental lenses. Children are seen as having emotional needs, social needs, language needs, cognitive needs, and physical needs.⁶ However, from the Italian perspective, the child is full of rights, capabilities, potential, and possibilities. These two contrasting views have produced very different educational programs. The programs rest on different values. The Reggio Emilia programs have many of the features that are part of North American definitions of ‘quality.’ In British Columbia, we continue to struggle with the question of how to ‘reach’ or ‘accomplish’ ‘quality’ early education.

Among the many lessons we can learn from Reggio Emilia is the need to reconsider our assumptions about children and childhood, and the purposes and goals of early education. Once we have considered those issues, we will be in a better position to understand how to design our early education approaches and systems to ensure that they reflect our values and visions.

Critical Dialogue Concerning the Image of the Early Childhood Educator

In Reggio Emilia, educators are recognized as researchers, not only knowledgeable about pedagogical theories but also, and more importantly, as builders, or constructors of educational theory. Teachers are empowered to act as researchers.

There is perhaps no better reason to continue our examination of the Reggio Emilia approach than the fact that it presents an image of the teacher as one who enjoys learning as much as teaching, who appreciates questions as well as answers, and who views alternative points of view as opportunities for discussion and observation. The Reggio Emilia approach to professional development provides dramatic illustration of the benefits of enlarging the focus from what works best for children to consider what it is that teachers need to inform, improve, and inspire their practice. (New, 1994, p. 35)

Any serious initiative to improve early education in British Columbia must include recognition of the need for more and better education and professional development opportunities for our early childhood education workforce, accompanied by significant improvements in wages and working conditions. The content and philosophical approach underlying the education of our early childhood educators needs thoughtful analysis and reconsideration. In their pre-service education and in-service professional development early childhood educators should be encouraged to reflect on language, on assumptions about children and childhood, and to gain the skills needed to establish productive, respectful collaborative relationships with all stakeholders. A minimum of 3 years of post-secondary education is required if these issues are to be introduced to pre-service educators. Additional education is essential if the goal is to provide candidates with the knowledge and skills

⁶ See Dahlberg and Moss (2005); Moss and Petrie (2002); Rinaldi (2005) for an analysis of the image of the child.

required to begin working as reflective researchers, work in partnership with parents, and work with diverse children and families. In the Reggio Emilia programs, some of the most important competencies of the teachers include:

- their perceptive understanding and awareness of the implications of what they are observing;
- their ability to hypothesize regarding what is appropriate and helpful to each child's learning;
- their ability and inclination to constantly examine and reexamine their assumptions, understandings, and knowledge;
- their ability to recognize when and how to improvise, to propose, to encourage and to engage in the experience of the child's search for meaning.

From Assessment and Evaluation to Meaning Making

Reggio Emilia has chosen to create 'quality' programs by focusing on its pedagogical project. To focus merely on the creation of regulations and standards of quality for evaluating early education programs would be too narrow a strategy in the pursuit of quality (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Quality systems require more than the application of standards. The citizens of Reggio Emilia have devoted thought and time to the creation of successful, vibrant, and dynamic programs with a global reputation for excellence. Pedagogical documentation has been key in achieving this excellence.

In addition, pedagogical documentation, as opposed to developmental assessments, provides new ways of supporting children's learning. It offers a flexible approach in which teachers make initial hypotheses about classroom activities but these are subject to modifications and changes of direction as the activities unfold. This approach to teaching and learning with young children offers an alternative to models with predetermined outcomes and standardized assessments. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) explain that

through documentation "the child is no longer understood as lacking or incomplete but, as they say in Reggio Emilia, intelligent: intelligent, that is, as a person capable of making meaning of the world from his or her own experiences, not as a person who scores more than so many points on an IQ test" (p. 102).

Meaning making also offers alternative ways of responding to and celebrating the diversity that characterizes British Columbia's children and families. "Meaning making requires very precise, demanding and public conditions that create an interactive and dialogic process in which prejudices, self-interest and unacknowledged assumptions, with the distortions and limited vision that they produce, will be confronted and challenged" (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 108).

Meaningful Community Participation

The capacity within the Reggio Emilia educational culture to recognize and respond, not only to teachers, but to all stakeholders as valuable contributors to the project is an essential and distinguishing characteristic of Reggio Emilia. Viewing these contributors as 'bringers of knowledge' is one of the foundational elements that holds together the various sectors of the system.

We should reconsider the tendency among North American educators to view parents from a deficit perspective, as receivers of our 'expert' ideas and knowledge about what their children need, as interfering with or counteracting our own work with their children. Reform of the British Columbia approach to early education should involve parents and communities as valued co-participants. British Columbia has yet to create formal structures to negotiate these possibilities. When these structures are put in place, they should be designed with the assumption that parents are competent individuals, able to participate meaningfully in all aspects from governance to delivery of services for children and families. We need to

work on the concept of 'listening,' which Reggio Emilia has embraced as a critically important element of their project (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006a).

We cannot assume that this will be an easy task. As Carlina Rinaldi (2006a) explains, in Reggio Emilia "it has not been easy, there have been extremely difficult moments, but it has been a marvelous training ground for democracy. Learning the value of divergence (differing opinions), of the construction of consent (agreement), of negotiation was a long, complex exercise which is not finished" (p.155). In our opinion, early childhood educators in British Columbia are ready for this challenge.

Structures that Embrace Stability and Multiple Perspectives

The Reggio Emilia schools are supported by a range of strong structures that are critical to their longevity and success. These structures have acquired a significant role in the life of the community and, most importantly, reflect the most important values and beliefs of the community. The structures that have been created around Reggio Emilia programs highly support the values and beliefs about children and the pedagogical project that Reggio has chosen to embrace. Those structures clearly provide the conditions of possibility for successful, high 'quality' programs.

Related to the notion of participation and the commonality of language underlying the Reggio Emilia system is a deep respect for a plurality of ideas and viewpoints along with willingness to discuss opposing points of view. New perspectives are valued as new knowledge. "Schools see themselves as a plurality of individuals, adults and children, all of whom are recognized as bringers of knowledge, all involved in one public space for growth and learning and the construction of a new culture linking generations, people, and linking groups of different origin" (The Charter of the City and Childhood Councils, 2002, p.

29). It is acknowledged that the kind of participation and collaboration with the best results are those that accommodate and welcome many different personal contributions. Yet, cooperation does not mean sacrificing one's individuality; rather the goal is to seek solutions collectively. The respect shown to differences is reflected in the organization, professional development, and communication patterns among stakeholders. Systems are created to allow many opportunities for exchange of ideas, concerns, and reflection.

British Columbia could begin to reflect on the development of structures that would support an educational system for young children and families. These structures should not be imposed by governments, but rather shared by communities' stakeholders. Early education could be created as a project that each community owns as their own, in which a multitude of perspectives are heard and valued.

Valuing Communities' Ways of Knowing - The First Nations / Aboriginal Community

The Reggio Emilia Approach fits well with how First Nations/Aboriginal communities want to develop systems of education and supports for young children. The Reggio Emilia experience confirms First Nations/Aboriginal understandings of the importance of looking within our families, communities and cultures to find our own visions for young children (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2002). The long-term success of this way of educating young children shows Canadian policy/decision-makers its validity.

While some degree of consensus is slowly emerging among policymakers and those who provide services to young children and their families, there is still considerable debate about the role of government in early education. This means that there are still opportunities for Aboriginal communities to inform and influence the discussion, drawing upon the strength of their traditional and

holistic understanding of child-rearing as a shared family and communal responsibility. It is also very timely for Aboriginal leadership, communities and families to come together to define their own visions for children, develop their own community early childhood plans and design their own services (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2002).

The Reggio Emilia experience confirms First Nations / Aboriginal understandings of the importance of looking within our families, communities and cultures to find our own visions for young children

Today First Nations/Aboriginal communities want to return to the traditional concept that caring for young children is a sacred communal responsibility (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2002). All First Nations/Aboriginal children have a right to nurturing care, support and learning opportunities that meet their needs, develop their gifts and help them to reach their full potential, within the context of First Nations/Aboriginal extended family systems and cultural traditions (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2002). Much can be learned from the example of the citizens of Reggio Emilia who built a system that is focused on improving the quality of young children's lives, rather than simply promoting school readiness and preparation for the labour market.

First Nations/Aboriginal families, communities and leaders consistently identify cultural and linguistic continuity as the primary goal of early education (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2002). This is defined as the most important goal because the history of relations with non-Aboriginal society has been defined

by oppression, deception and the theft of lands and resources, the dismantling of political, economic and family systems, the imposition of foreign structures and systems, the introduction of alcohol and the resulting alcohol abuse, and public policies that caused the loss of cultural traditions and languages (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004).

An effective early education approach for First Nations and other Aboriginal Peoples must necessarily address these realities. Although early education programs are limited in their ability to eliminate child poverty, programs have to be responsive to the realities and impacts of poverty and they must ensure the continuation and revival of Aboriginal languages and identity as urgent priorities. There must also be parallel strategies focused on the elimination of child poverty through a combination of social and economic policies and initiatives. Successful First Nations/Aboriginal early education approaches will draw upon the enduring strengths of cultural traditions and family systems in designing programs that are appropriately responsive to their particular realities (Aboriginal ECD Roundtable, 2004).

Strong support for, and investment in, community-based ECD research controlled by First Nations/Aboriginal communities is an essential element of an improved system of early education. Currently, there are limited research resources and the research that is being done is undertaken by outside researchers, on research agendas determined outside the First Nations/Aboriginal communities.

The possibilities for change illustrated by the success of the Reggio Emilia approach to early education are intriguing, encouraging, and exciting. First Nations/Aboriginal communities hope to find innovative collaborators within the existing early childhood and child care system to support this vision for change. Considering the vision will require a financial commitment from all levels of

government as well as support from the private business sector and the non-profit organizations of civil society. It will be expensive to work with First Nations/Aboriginal families and communities to plan and deliver high quality locally developed early education. The investment required to support young children and their families must be a priority. Financial support is needed to enable the application of the lessons learned from Reggio Emilia and thereby enrich and strengthen the research and service-development processes that are currently underway in First Nations/Aboriginal communities.

The concept of the *pedagogista* is particularly exciting for First Nations/Aboriginal communities. First Nations/Aboriginal communities propose collaboration with a British Columbia university or college to create a post-secondary education program for First Nations/Aboriginal pedagogical consultants (Aboriginal ECD Roundtable, 2004). This training could serve as the catalyst for the development of new early education programming approaches incorporating lessons learned from Reggio Emilia.

Respect for First Nations/Aboriginal world views, values, authority and jurisdiction, and collaboration among the elected and service-delivery leadership within British Columbia's political, economic, health, education, social service and early childhood sectors are essential to the development and creation of a comprehensive, holistic, and equitable system (Blackstock et al., 2004). A strong commitment to, and investment in, research, education, training and professional development will ensure that programs for First Nations/Aboriginal children can be informed by the lessons that the people of Reggio Emilia have learned over more than 50 years of reflection and innovation.

Moving Through Multiple Paths

This article outlined how the Reggio Emilia experience might provide lessons

for the creation of an early education system in British Columbia that is solidly grounded in the values and realities of communities and is respectful of and meaningful for young children. Reggio Emilia's successes at articulating and delivering an alternative approach to early education gives British Columbia policy makers confidence that a new early education project, inspired by Reggio Emilia, might succeed in the province.

*...we propose that British
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Early education in British Columbia can change from being a site of social and cultural reproduction to become a site of social and cultural transformation. Our own conversations with children, parents, and early childhood educators suggest that all groups are open to exploring new approaches. There are many impressive initiatives that can be used as starting points, both in Canada (e.g., Ball, 2004a, 2004b; Ball, Definney & Pence, 1999; Ball, J. & Pence, A.R. (2006). Supporting Indigenous Children's Development: Community-University Partnerships. Vancouver: UBC Press; Pence, A., & Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (2006). The Investigating Quality Project: Challenges and possibilities for Canada. *Interaction*, 20(3), 11-13; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Elliot, & Berikoff, in press) and internationally (MacNaughton, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Swadener, 2000; Swadener & Wachira, 2003). While these initiatives have not had wide visibility in British Columbia and Canada, they serve as starting points for a new and exciting journey.

The change that is required in British Columbia's early education field will be a complex task that will involve time and careful consideration. Who will be involved in the change? How will change be created? Many educational researchers are turning their attention to the growing prominence of the view that communities need to be active partners in a change process. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) state unequivocally and elaborate on the position that "the full solution lies outside the schools as well as within" (p.13) and that "school reform should not be separated from wider urban reform" (p.12). Change cannot be mandated from above because the people involved in the change must be motivated and committed, skilled, and have the capacity to make discretionary judgments about local issues based on immediate priorities (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Lasting macro-change, involving major policy and funding issues, involves staggering complexities. It is essential that we not confuse changes in symbols with changes in substance.

Many of the political and policy-making bodies are concerned with symbols; they want to appear to be doing something bold and new. Political time lines are often at variance with timelines for educational reform. This difference often results in vague goals, unrealistic schedules [and] a preoccupation with symbols of reform (new legislation, task forces, commissions, and the like). (Fullan & Miles, 1992 p. 746)

We also wish to note that the transformation suggested in this article requires, in the words of Moss and Petrie (2002), "rethinking - thinking differently - about policy, provision and practice for children".

This construction foregrounds: a child who is competent and rich, a co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture, a social agent and a citizen with rights, and a member of a social group; the childhood that children are living now; a holistic rather than an atomized, approach towards the child and the provisions made

for children; the importance of a rich network of relationships (with other children and adults) and of an ethical concept of relationships which respects the alterity of the Other; and public provision for children being sites for ethical and democratic practice (p. 165).

This rethinking of policies and practices can never be final and fixed. Rather, it needs to include a “continuous rethinking and provisionality, as new understandings arise in new social circumstances” (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 166). And it is this constant rethinking in response to local circumstances that situates Reggio Emilia programs outside of the mainstream. So, we cannot ‘do’ Reggio, but we can begin to ‘think differently’ about our own ways of doing and thinking about early education.

To end, people in Reggio Emilia have understood ‘quality’ early childhood education within a framework of ethics, as opposed to a framework of technicality. ‘Quality’ for Reggio Emilia has not been about “establishing conformity to predetermined standards” [or] providing “an objective statement of fact based on a technology of measurement” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.88). Rather than being understood as techniques or strategies for implementing standards, we propose that British Columbia’s journey toward quality be a continuous process of ethical negotiation among all participants, from children to politicians.

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