An Investigation of the Re-imagining of Early Childhood Education in South Australia

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A Research Report by

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Government of South Australia
Department for Education

University of South Australia | School of Education

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ISBN 9 78192 204 6253

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Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to acknowledge and thank all those who participated in this project, including the South Australian Department for Education, Catholic Education South Austraila, the early learning centre at an independent school, site leaders, educators and teachers, children and parents. Their generous contributions, which involved considerable time and commitment, made it possible. The researchers are most grateful for their participation. They would also like to thank Professor Barbara Comber for her mentoring role within the project.

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Thank you to our funding partners for their support

The Department for Education
Catholic Education South Australia
The University of South Australia

Publication assistance

Our thanks to Erica Sharplin for editorial and report design assistance.

Cover art work

Special thanks to Amelia for the beautiful artwork on the cover of this report.

Contents

Executive summary **1**
Introduction 1
Significance of the research 2
Methodology 2
Findings 3
Recommendations 4
Conclusion 7

SECTION 1: Introduction **8**
Review of the literature 9
Conceptual framework 13
Project design 13
Site and participant selection 14
Methods 14
Conclusion 19

SECTION 2: Case studies **20**
Introduction 20

Westside Primary School 21
Context 21
Data collection 22
Perspectives used to inform practice 23
Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy 26
How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy 32
Summary 33

City Centre Childcare Centre and Preschool 35
Context 35
Data collection 36
Perspectives used to inform practice 36
Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy 37
How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy 46
Summary 48

Memorial Early Learning Centre 49
Context 49
Data collection methods 49
Perspectives used to inform practice 50
Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy 53
How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy 59
Summary 61

East Catholic School 62
Context 62
Data collection 62
Perspectives used to inform pedagogy 63
Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy 65

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy 73
Summary 74

Coastal Catholic School 76
Context 76
Data collection 76
Perspectives used to inform pedagogy 77
Illustratlons of re-imagined pedagogy 78
How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy 88
Summary 89

Conclusion of case summaries 89

SECTION 3: Cross-case analysis of challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education in South Australia
Introduction 91
Challenges to re-imagining early childhood education 91
Supports to re-imagining early childhood education 97
Conclusion 104

SECTION 4: Conclusion 106

SECTION 5: Recommendations 108

SECTION 6: References 112

APPENDIX A: Provocations 117

Overarching provocations 117
Provocations from case studies 118

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the findings from two pilot research projects focused on investigating the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia. The two parallel pilot research projects explored the same research questions with different groups of participants. The first project focused on understanding the perspectives of leaders (sector and site) and was funded through a 2017 seed grant from the University of South Australia. The second focused on the perspectives of teachers, parents/ carers and children and was funded by the South Australian Department for Education and Catholic Education South Australia. The pilot research represents phase one of a larger four phased research program developed in partnership with The Department for Education, Catholic Education South Australia and the University of South Australia:

- Phase 1: Establishment of relationships and pilot research projects
- Phase 2: Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant Proposal and subsequent research
- Phase 3: Early Childhood Summit
- Phase 4: Implementation of recommendations and research on impact

The aims of the pilot research were to:

- develop initial understandings of how early childhood is being re-imagined and reconceptualised in South Australia
- trial research methods for exploring the perspectives of leaders, educators, children and families, in the process developing research tools/ methods for engaging with leaders, educators, children and families
- identify additional areas of research expertise needed to develop a strong team for the larger following stage of the project.

This report presents the findings from phase one of the research program. The findings contribute to the following outcomes to provide:

- an understanding about how educators are re-imagining early childhood education through the development of a, "local South Australian approach that has traces of the Reggio Emilia principles" (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 13)
- an understanding of the challenges that educators have encountered and the supports they are accessing in reconceptualising the pedagogy they employ
- an understanding of the impact of reconceptualised practice on children and families
- recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

This report was developed in partnership with key stakeholders, and is intended to strengthen relationships to enable further collaboration between key sectors in early childhood education. The report has also been designed to be a resource comprising examples and provocations to support early childhood educators.

Significance of the research

Growing concerns about the experiences of children and their families in early childhood education contexts around the world have contributed to a global search for exemplars of pedagogy and practice. The Italian Reggio Emilia Educational Project is one such exemplar of early childhood pedagogy that has received increasing attention worldwide. The influence of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project internationally has been significant, as evidenced by expansive networks and a prominent position in the OECD review of early childhood education and care in 20 countries, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2006). The Reggio Emilia Educational Project's focus on the early childhood years is consistent with other research findings regarding development in the first years. These findings demonstrate that young children are at a foundational point in their lives where the type of environment, at home and in educational settings during those years will inform their long term physical and mental health, their behavior and capacity to learn (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). The considerable South Australian interest in the Reggio Emilia Educational Project was reflected in the invitation for Professor Carla Rinaldi to be the 2012/13 Adelaide Thinker in Residence.

The literature reflects international interest in how the Reggio Emilia Educational Project has inspired the work of early childhood educators to reconceptualise their practice in the areas of documenting children's learning (Giamminuti, 2011; Given et al., 2009; Jones-Branch, Heaton, Edwards, Swidler, & Torquati, 2009; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006); creating inclusive learning communities (Gilman, 2007; Vakil, Freeman, & Swim, 2003); developing reciprocal relationships between educators and families (Bennett, 2001; Bersani & Jarjoura, 2001; Linn, 2001; Macdonald, 2007; McClow & Gillespie, 1998; New, Mallory, & Mantovani, 2000; Sisson, 2009); and creating meaningful learning environments (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007) to name a few. The literature also reflects a growing interest in the Reggio Emilia Educational Project within the Asia Pacific region, with related research emerging from China (Zhao, Edwards, Youngquist, & Xiong, 2003; Zhu, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2008) and Singapore (Wei, Chongvilaivan, & Yang, 2008).

The principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project (hereby referred to as the Reggio Emilia principles) however, cannot simply be adopted or copied. Rather they must be engaged with in a dialogical way to allow re-interpretation and re-definition through the cultural and contextual perspectives in which they will be used (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Hewett, 2001). While research has focused on understanding how the Reggio Emilia principles inspire teachers' work, there has been little research focused on understanding how a range of culturally situated perspectives have been brought together to re-imagine early childhood education beyond a single context. The pilot research presented within this report contributes to this international body of research by providing an understanding of how leaders and educators across five different educational sites brought the Reggio Emilia principles into dialogue with their culturally situated perspectives to re-imagine early childhood education within South Australia. Rich descriptions of re-imagined pedagogy within each case summary provide an understanding of the experiences of leaders, teachers, children and families within each site. The cross case analysis offers insights into the challenges and supports participants faced in re-imagining early childhood education, and informs recommendations for future policy and practice.

Methodology

Cultural models theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) provided a useful and important framework in understanding how early childhood is being re-imagined within the context of South Australia. This theoretical lens has been important for understanding the social contexts of the research sites as figured worlds where individuals come together. Figured worlds consist of culturally situated values and beliefs that are communicated and sustained through the use of discourses and artefacts that inform identities and practices. Cultural models theory is significant in understanding the power relations that exist within figured worlds and the possibilities for agency in re-imagining these figured worlds anew. For the purpose of this study, cultural models theory was important in understanding how the figured world of early childhood education is being re-imagined within South Australia. It provided a lens from which to understand the multiple perspectives upon which participants drew, the struggles they faced and the supports they received.

Researchers also drew upon the research method, the Mosaic Approach, developed by Clark and Moss (2001). The Mosaic Approach is concerned with collecting data that enables a deep understanding of the lived experiences of participants in one or more settings, a method that enables participants to employ their many ways of communicating. As a result, the approach is multi-modal, participatory and reflexive,

with participants contributing to the methods being employed. It is also adaptable and focused on everyday practice rather than the setting up of special contexts.

The participant sites were recommended by leaders within their own education system/association, based on site participation in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project. Nominated sites were invited to participate in the pilot research project, resulting in a total of five participant sites (two State Department for Education sites, two Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) sites, including one rural, and one site from the independent sector). The researchers used a participatory approach in which participants were involved in deciding the methods used to collect data.

Data included, individual dialogic encounters with teachers and leaders, and group dialogic encounters with small groups of parents/carers and small groups of children. Participant informed methods included researcher observations and notes, and the gathering of artefacts such as site philosophy statements and documentation of children's and staff learning.

Ethics approval was given by all major participants, including the researchers' university. The site leaders, teachers and parents/carers and the parents/carers of participating children signed consent forms. Researchers respected children's agency in deciding if they wanted to participate. They asked them throughout the data collection process if they wanted to continue and paid close attention to any subtle cues that may also indicate their desire to discontinue.

Findings

Researchers found that the desire to re-imagine early childhood education was ignited by a growing concern for the experience of children in their early years of education. Leaders, teachers and parents/carers within this pilot research experienced dissatisfaction with what they considered to be the standardisation of education via curricula and testing. They believed that such practices did not meet the learning goals of children, parents/carers and communities and diminished the richness of children's educational experiences. They longed for a different approach to education that valued the unique capabilities of every child and engaged children as active protagonists in their learning. In some sites parents/carers explicitly said that they had chosen the setting because it offered an alternative vision of education that they considered superior. Findings presented within the case summaries provide illustrations of how five early childhood sites have re-imagined their pedagogy, and the transformative impact this change has had to the educational experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders within these sites. These illustrations provide insight into how the sites brought a range of different perspectives into dialogue to re-imagine educational worlds in ways that reflected the shared values and beliefs of their local communities. They also highlight the significance of creating democratic communities of learners to engage in deep critical reflection and transformative action within their sites. The Reggio Emilia principles provided an impetus for such critical reflection. While findings highlighted the unique qualities and processes of the re-imagining of early childhood education that occurred within sites, they also illuminated common values and beliefs that were seen across sites. The belief in the competence and capacity of children, educators and parents/carers, the importance of democracy in education, the understanding of knowledge as being socially constructed, the role of inquiry and research and the importance of making learning visible are important to informing future policy and practice. Like parents/carers, teachers and leaders expressed concern about the standardization of education, making education settings and their work a 'one size fits all' model. They recounted how their settings had worked hard to build locally responsive and inclusive approaches, and to counter the fragmentation of education in relationships and pedagogy that concerned them. They told how they had restructured to enable continuity of educator-child and child-child relationships and lessen transitions for children. Parents also expressed concern about leadership change, and the resultant change in site direction risking the loss of educational approaches that they so valued. These findings highlight the significance of leadership and continuity within a site.

The report's cross-case analysis sheds light on the challenges and the supports to re-imagining early childhood education, each significant in informing future policy and practice at the site, system and state levels. At the core of these challenges were dominant discourses about education such as deficit views of learners, hierarchical relationships, and linear perspectives about learning which often went unchallenged. The nature of dominant discourses is that they become naturalised and accepted as the 'way things are'. Such unquestioned truths made it difficult for sites to re-imagine their worlds, but not impossible. Cultural models theory (Holland, et al. 1998) was useful in uncovering the acts of agency in

which participants engaged as they re-imagined and re-authored their figured worlds and consequently their identities and roles within them. These acts of agency were made possible through engaging with supporting structures such as The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, professional organisations, professional learning opportunities and supportive individuals, such as principals, early childhood directors and sector leaders. These support structures were critical in providing opportunities for shared professional learning and collaboration across sectors. Sector and site leadership also provided a significant amount of support to participants. Supportive leaders provided permission for participants to take risks in re-imagining their pedagogy, served as role models in enacting agency and provided the time and space necessary for participants to re-imagine their pedagogies. Participants also identified parents/carers as a support to their work to re-imagine early childhood education. Educators within these sites did not see parents/carers just as those to whom they reported. They included parents/carers within what they saw as a broad learning community and this image of parents/carers as competent increased their capacity to re-imagine their pedagogy. This reciprocal relationship was important to parents/carers and provided them with an opportunity to be active contributors to their child's education. These findings highlight the importance of bringing people together in dialogic relationships to co-construct knowledge through a process of communing.

In sum, there was a deep belief in the image of the child as a capable person with rights from birth and also of teachers and parents/carers as competent and thus having power and capacity to be full participants in the setting's educational program including pedagogy and curriculum. These sites showed considerable bravery in stepping away from accepted and dominant educational thinking and practice, to forge a new pathway, stepping into unknown territory that better aligned with the values and vision for education that they long held. All data collected conveyed a sense of the research sites as educational contexts with children who were deeply engaged and highly motivated learners who were respected protagonists in their learning environments.

Recommendations

The aims of this pilot research project were to develop an early understanding of how early childhood education is being re-imagined and reconceptualised in South Australia, and to trial and develop research tools for engaging with the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and their families. The recommendations presented here are based on the findings from this pilot research and are in keeping with the philosophical and theoretical nature of Reggio Emilia principles. In acknowledging and valuing each context and learning community as unique, the recommendations have been written to provoke deep engagement and reflection by those who choose to enact them. The case summaries provide some inspiration into how these recommendations might look in practice.

1. Maintain and extend a collaborative intra and inter systems approach.

1.1 Continue with the expansion and funding of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project to enable and encourage research, a focus on early childhood education and care, and develop cross-sector engagement.

1.2 Redesign system leadership groups as innovative think tanks that welcome multiple perspectives and engage in respectful and critical dialogues.

1.3 Strengthen dialogue between systems to support the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia to enhance the experiences of children and families.

Those who work for change and improvement in education derive considerable strength from frequent and in-depth contact with their setting colleagues, working together on a shared and mutually determined vision.

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project serves as an organisational hub for state-wide work, as do hubs within systems. Resourcing maintains that work and enables it to expand. Educators, including teachers and principals, derive considerable support from collaborating within their sites, in their own systems, and in cross sectoral work.

Inviting other stakeholder organisations who engage with children and families, either directly or indirectly, to participate in the re-imagining process brings multiple and richer perspectives. For example, universities have a pivotal role in teacher education and in contributing to an international audience through research publication.

2. Foster educational innovation, creativity and cultural responsiveness.

2.1 Allow for time, space and resources to bring multiple perspectives into dialogue to inform innovative and culturally reflective pedagogies.

2.2 Enable sites to be unique and responsive to local contexts and communities of learners.

2.3 Enable sites to engage with alternative forms of assessment that reflect the values and beliefs of the site.

2.4 Design structures for reporting learning progress that honour children's multiple capabilities.

Education settings do well when those who attend, work and visit feel able and welcome to contribute to the creation of a site that is deeply connected to its community in that it reflects local characteristics, is inclusive, and as a result is in many ways unique. Participants in such a setting feel that they have permission and are indeed encouraged to present their ideas, to initiate a dialogic conversation, to experiment, and take risks.

Modes of assessment of learning are locally determined and include the voices of community members. The modes employed are highly accountable, providing authentic evidence and in-depth analysis of children's learning that is shared with children, their families and at times the broader community, and used to inform further planning. Such assessment is broad in scope, capturing the full range of children's capacities.

3. Establish learning communities that embody a culture of dialogue at the site, organisation and state levels.

3.1 Enable time and space for the engagement of dialogue between cross-sector sites with shared interest in re-imagining pedagogy.

3.2 Create structured dialogue to engage educational professionals and community members in dialogue with key policy makers.

3.3 Establish fora within sites for families and staff to engage in dialogue about matters that impact on their experiences and those of the children that attend the site.

A dialogic culture enables communication that is intersubjective (Newson & Newson, 1975) in quality. Intersubjective communication is two way: the parties involved build meaning together, creating new understandings. A dialogic culture requires all involved to not only share their own perspectives but to also listen with the openness to being changed. Such authentic listening is referred to as a pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2013).

The development of dialogic cultures contributes to the building of learning communities that are responsive to their members. It also provides opportunities for creating and working towards a shared vision, based on the beliefs and values co-constructed within the learning community. Efforts toward challenging dominant discourses require bringing policy into dialogue with practice and research.

4. Promote pedagogical leadership.

4.1 Reconceptualise all roles to include opportunities for pedagogical leadership, alongside the roles of designated leaders.

4.2 Create site structures that enable learning through dialogue, by giving educators permission to experiment with ideas, try different approaches, allowing time to reflect and evaluate.

4.3 Address the issues of how the selection of designated leaders is aligned with the existing established site community.

4.4 Support the development of courageous transformational leaders, who enable themselves and others to explore and try innovative pedagogies throughout all levels of the site.

4.5 Make research into pedagogy a foundation of site thinking and day-to-day work.

When a site adopts a participatory culture, leadership is a role for all. Everyone, in whatever capacity, children, parents, teachers, educators, as well as those in designated leadership positions are well placed to enact pedagogical leadership. When a leader is to be chosen the community needs to be authentically involved in the selection of a candidate whose own beliefs and record of work are aligned with that community.

Those in designated leadership positions are well placed to lead the creation and maintenance of a dialogic culture in their learning community. Such learning communities are formed when structures such as the physical environment, rosters, meetings, and curriculum development are created, critically reflected upon, researched and re-imagined to ensure that the intended vision for learning and participation is being enacted. When educators see themselves as researchers into their own pedagogy and work collaboratively and collegially to grow their understanding of their work, the setting becomes a more effective environment for learning.

5. Reconceptualise professional learning that fosters "teacher as researcher".

5.1 Engage in ongoing professional documentation to critically reflect on learning and pedagogy.

5.2 Provide a range of collaborative and dialogic professional learning, at the level of site, system and across systems.

5.3 Expand The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and continue its critical role in organising democratic structures to enable professional learning, dialogue and sharing across systems policies, practices, resources and knowledge in re-imagining childhood and pedagogy.

5.4 Continue engagement with multiple perspectives (including local perspectives) to reconceptualise pedagogy.

Educators who see themselves as lifelong learners value the richness that multiple perspectives bring to their own pedagogy and thus strive to understand different points of view by carefully listening to children, colleagues, and families. They also read about education, keep abreast of current thinking, and research their own practice either individually or with colleagues to inform their pedagogy. They see their knowledge not as fixed but as always evolving through their interactions with others and their perspectives. Professional learning is not solely an event activity, but rather an everyday dialogic approach to work and practice in educational settings, and often conducted collegially. Pedagogical documentation is central to an ongoing re-imagining process of reflection and re-thinking, enabling continual dialogue about children's and educators' learning, enabling all to see what has been done. In the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, this process is called making learning visible and directing the way ahead (Giudici, Rinaldi, Krechevsky & Barchi, 2011).

As well as being an individual, group and whole site activity, professional learning enhances learning within and across systems and settings. It can also involve parents and community members, as bringing multiple perspectives together creates richness in possibilities. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project is well placed to continue to offer learning opportunities across sectors, as are similar within sector organisations. These professional learning encounters must strive to involve the learning community in the co-construction of knowledge rather than positioning them as passive recipients of knowledge from others. Such structures need to be well resourced.

6. Reconceptualise early childhood education and care in South Australia by developing a local approach that brings together multiple perspectives.

6.1 Develop policies and practices that recognise the child as competent and capable.

6.2 Engage in a pedagogy of listening to include children in the development and enactment of curriculum and pedagogy at all phases.

6.3 Conceptualise teachers and children as co-teachers and co-learners.

6.4 Expand the view of learning as a process of co-constructing knowledge.

As the Reggio Emilia Educational Project reminds educators, teachers and leaders the image they have of the child will inform all that they do. Children are able and competent at all ages and recognising them in that way opens a multitude of possibilities. Educators who engage in democratic pedagogies listen carefully to children and include them in important decisions that have an impact on their lives. Democratic pedagogies create a space for transformative learning communities where children and teachers are both learners and teachers. Pedagogical documentation is not only used as a means to share children's and teachers' learning, it is also part of the process of learning that engages children deeply in a rich curriculum. Teachers who see themselves as learners acknowledge the importance of feeling comfortable with uncertainty and at times, 'not knowing', opening a wide spectrum of learning possibilities and creative innovation. Democracy in all is a useful lens through which to re-imagine thinking and practice.

7. Continue and expand research.

7.1 Focus on understanding the experiences of a wider representation of children, families, teachers and leaders.

7.2 Continue with participant-informed methods.

7.3 Conduct longitudinal ethnographic research focused on following over time the experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders within sites that are re-imagining early childhood education.

7.4 Focus on understanding how cultural perspectives including local and Aboriginal perspectives are brought into dialogue to reconceptualise pedagogy.

Continued research is warranted in order to understand the impact of re-imagining education in democratic and culturally inclusive ways. Such research needs to continue to focus on the experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders, providing an understanding of both depth and breadth. A longitudinal ethnographic research approach would provide insight into impact over time while quantitative methodologies would offer insights into the degree of interest in re-imagining pedagogy and the rate in which it is being taken up. The use of participant informed methods are important in providing a depth of understanding of different experiences, as well as providing rich illustrations of pedagogy and practice to inform future policy.

8. Create a culture that values an image of the competent and capable parent/carer and fosters an awareness of their role as protagonists in children's learning.

8.1 Acknowledge the competent and capable parent, drawing on parent/carers as valued knowledgeable resources.

8.2 Welcome families in all aspects of the development and evolution of the site.

8.3 Engage with families in two-way dialogue and co-construction of knowledge.

8.4 Engage families in the process of pedagogical documentation.

Parents/carers are able and competent. As the holders of family and community cultural knowledges, they are able to contribute richly to learning environments. When parents/carers feel valued and welcomed in education settings as participants and co-constructors of curricula, the learning of all is enhanced.

Conclusion

The findings presented within this report reflect the potential of South Australia as a contributing global leader in early childhood education. The energy and commitment of professionals, systems and organisations across the state have created optimal conditions to re-imagine early childhood education on a systemic and cultural level. The findings of the pilot research are therefore of emerging significance in a national and international sense. Accounts of the approaches that educational systems and settings are employing to re-imagining childhood is an under-researched aspect of engagement with Reggio Emilia principles.

This work has provided a context for a broader investigation into how South Australian early childhood settings are re-imagining early childhood education and the experiences of a greater number of leaders, educators, children and families. The findings presented within this report are an important step toward understanding the potential of this work for improving education in South Australia. This pilot research project offers a foundation for extension into national and international dialogue and research, concerning democratic and culturally responsive pedagogies and their possibilities for early childhood education.

SECTION 1

Introduction

In 2012, Professor Carla Rinaldi was invited to South Australia as part of the state government Thinker in Residence program. The support for Professor Rinaldi as an early childhood focused Thinker was indicative of the wide interest in the Reggio Emilia principles across the State, with more than 60% of invested commitment from non-government sectors (Rinaldi, 2013). This extraordinary level of commitment to reconceptualizing early childhood in South Australia has continued following the completion of Rinaldi's residency. The South Australian Government responded by supporting this continued interest in two ways: accepting the invitation for South Australia to become a member of The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi, and establishing The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project.

The invitation from Professor Rinaldi in 2014 for the Government of South Australia to become a member of The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi was in recognition of the work the government was undertaking to promote early childhood education, and also of the collaboration between South Australia and Reggio Children. In October, 2014, the South Australian Government became the only one outside of Reggio Emilia to be a member. South Australia's membership to The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi signifies a commitment to "education, childhood and the promotion of the rights of the child" (Fondazione Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi, 2018).

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project is a collaborative network of professionals focused on re-imagining early childhood in South Australia. It was developed in response to the recommendations provided by Thinker in Residence Professor Rinaldi. Guided by the principles and objectives outlined in the report, The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project has a key role to deliver on the recommendations and to assist South Australia in enacting its membership of The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project set out to provide state-wide leadership to develop strategic and collaborative partnerships between organisations within South Australia in order to:

- advocate for children's rights as citizens from birth
- work in partnership with Reggio Children to develop an original approach that builds on highly regarded existing local practices that are inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles
- assert South Australia as a leader in early childhood education and child development within Australia and the Asia Pacific by making visible high-quality early childhood practices and policies
- contribute to the international body of research in collaboration with The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi.

A subsequent research program was designed by local researchers from the University of South Australia, with pilot research focusing on the reconceptualizing of early childhood education in South Australia. The aims of this pilot research informed the development of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant application and included:

- trialling research methods for exploring the perspectives of leaders, educators, children and families
- developing research tools for engaging with leaders, educators, children and families
- identifying additional areas of research expertise needed to develop a strong team for the larger following stage of the project

- developing an early understanding of how early childhood is being re-imagined and reconceptualised in South Australia.

This pilot research contributes to the knowledge base of the field through the following outcomes:

- providing an understanding about how educators "develop a local South Australian approach that has traces of the Reggio Emilia principles" (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 13).
- providing an understanding of the challenges that educators encounter and supports they access in reconceptualising practice
- providing an understanding of the impact of reconceptualised practice on children and families
- providing recommendations for policy and practice that are intended to support early childhood education
- strengthening collaboration between key sectors in early childhood education
- developing a report as a resource that comprises examples and provocations to support early childhood educators.

This report presents the findings from the pilot case study and is presented in a way that can be utilised as a resource for professional learning. Within the first section of the report readers will find a description of the research project and associated literature. Section two of the report presents five case summaries as illustrations or examples of re-imagined pedagogy. Section three includes a cross case analysis of the challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education. Section four consists of a final conclusion and section five presents recommendations for policy and practice. Provocations for readers to use as a resource to the case summaries can be found in the appendix, while provocations arising from the identified challenges and supports can be found within the cross case analysis.

The research findings and associated resources are intended to support educational providers, policy makers, educators, children and families in the following ways:

- Children will benefit from this research project, albeit indirectly, as it will serve to inform pedagogy in early childhood. The project will contribute to achieving, in Rinaldi's words, "Recognition that children are fully participating citizens from birth" (2013, p. 42). In this way the report will provide support for critical reflection on the connection between values and beliefs and how those are enacted through pedagogy. Children will also benefit from their educators' engagement with the report, its illustrations of practice and provocations. These resources are intended to assist educators to hold an image of children as powerful, contributing citizens. In practice, this means that educators will be supported to facilitate continuity of learning and pedagogies which acknowledge children's agency.
- Educators, leaders and teacher educators will benefit from this research in three ways:
    1. It will provide an opportunity to contribute to critical dialogue about future practice and planning for moving forward.
    2. It will assist in informing the development of local South Australian approaches to pedagogy.
    3. It will provide an opportunity to strengthen collaborative relationships, enabling state-wide impact.
- Families will benefit from this research project in that it promotes the recognition of "families as active protagonists in the educational project" (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 44) who are enabled to fully participate in their children's lives in education and care settings and valued as competent and capable participants.
- Policy makers will benefit from this research as it draws upon the perspectives of key stakeholders and provides recommendations to inform policy development.

Review of the literature

The Reggio Emilia principles were developed over time within a particular cultural context and historical time and thus it is recognised that they cannot be transplanted into a different context. Rather, they serve as a provocation for critical self-exploration of the meaning of early childhood education in many cultural contexts (New, 2007). The Professor Rinaldi Thinker in Residence opened the possibility to "consider how [these Reggio Emilia principles] could inspire South Australian pedagogy and practice" (Rinaldi, 2013, p.11). In exploring how early childhood education is being reconceptualised in South Australia it

is important to understand what the Reggio Emilia principles are, how they have inspired pedagogical change in other contexts and what are the possible struggles to such change.

Overview of the Reggio Emilia principles

Important to this research on the re-imagining of early childhood education is an understanding of the history of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project and subsequent principles of education. Following the destruction of WWII, the parents and community members of Reggio Emilia, Italy had a deep desire to re-build a better, democratic future for their children and for their city. They viewed the development of children's centres as important to grow the citizens with the capacities to enact that vision. Since that time, as Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (1998, p.7) write:

> *This system has evolved its own distinctive and innovative set of philosophical and pedagogical assumptions, methods of school organization, and principles of environmental design that, taken as a unified whole, we are calling the Reggio Emilia approach[1].*

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, was instrumental in leading this transformation (Edwards et al., 1998). As it developed, this pedagogical approach has engaged in dialogue with various theories and perspectives, such as those of Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey, Bruner, and more recently Gardner, to name a few. In this way, the Reggio Emilia Educational Project is dynamic, constantly in a mutual relationship of transformation.

The work of educators within Reggio Emilia has attracted increasing interest around the world. New (2007) observed, in a time when many educational reforms focus on deficit views of children, teachers and schools, the Reggio Emilia Education Project has provided an optimistic view. As educators from around the world continue to show strong interest in learning from Reggio Emilia they often turn to the Reggio Emilia principles. In the context of South Australia, these principles were provided by Thinker in Residence Professor Rinaldi as a provocation for educators to re-imagine childhood and education in South Australia.

In understanding the Reggio Emilia principles, the words of Malaguzzi and Rinaldi are useful. Their ideas can be summarised in the following way:

- The ***image of the child as powerful, competent, creative curious***, who is full of potential and ambitious desires (Malaguzzi, 1994; Rinaldi, 2013)
- Children's thoughts, ideas and theories are taken seriously and respected.
- Children are respected as contributing members of the community who have rights.
- Children are ***protagonists*** who are active in the educational process as ***co-constructors of knowledge***.
- Children are natural ***researchers*** who have interests and inquiries that are explored in depth to contribute to learning communities.
- Children are social beings. Relationships are essential to the co-construction of knowledge and the creation of a living culture.
- Communication is important and involves the expression of thinking in many languages, in Reggio Emilia called ***the hundred languages of children***.

Malaguzzi's (1998, p.65) description of the amiable school provides further understanding of the goal for educational sites that engage in dialogue with these principles:

> *Our goal is to build an amiable school, where children, teachers and families feel at home. Such a school requires careful thinking and planning concerning procedures, motivations and interests. It must embody ways of getting along together, of intensifying relationships among the three central protagonists, of assuring complete attention to the problems of educating and of activating participation and research. These are the most effective tools for all those concerned – children, teachers, and parents – to become more united and aware of each other's contribution. They are the most effective tools to use in order to feel good about cooperating and to produce, in harmony, a higher level of results.*

Malaguzzi (1998, p.68) continues, "The strength of our system lies in the ways we make explicit and

1. The Reggio Emilia approach refers to the Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts, their contextual interpretation and subsequent translation into practice within Reggio Emilia. Within this report we are specifically drawing on the Reggio Emilia principles and how they are engaged with and re-interpreted within the South Australian context.

then intensify the necessary conditions for relations and interaction". In describing family participation, Malaguzzi said:

> *Family participation requires many things, but most of all it demands of teachers a multitude of adjustments. Teachers must possess a habit of questioning their certainties, a growth of sensitivity, awareness and availability, the assuming of a critical style of research and continually updated knowledge of children, an enriched evaluation of parental roles, and skills to talk, listen and learn from parents* (p.69).

In writing her report for the South Australian context, Rinaldi (2013, p.32-35) outlined the Reggio Emilia principles she intended to serve as provocations to educational thinking and practice in this state:

- the hundred languages
- participatory processes in all structures and interactions
- the pedagogy of listening
- learning as a process of individual and group construction
- educational research between adults and children
- educational documentation
- 'Progettazione' which is about the process of planning and designing the teaching and learning activities
- environment, space and relations
- organization of work, space and time
- professional development
- assessment.

The principles provide educational provocations of the highest order, requiring profound intellectual engagement.

Engagement with Reggio Emilia around the world

The influence of Reggio Emilia internationally has been significant, as evidenced by expansive networks and a prominent position in the OECD review of early childhood education and care in 20 countries, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2006). The Reggio Emilia Educational Project has been recognised as inspiring early childhood curriculum and pedagogy around the world, including curriculum through exploring projects (Forman, Langley, Oh, & Wrisley, 1998), technology (Mitchell, 2007) music (Bond, 2015) and the primacy of relationships in emergent curriculum (Biermeier, 2015). There has been international research interest regarding how the Reggio Emilia principles have been used to inspire educators to reconceptualise their practice. This literature shows the use of the Reggio Emilia principles to inspire educators in their thinking about pedagogical documentation (Giamminuti, 2011; Given et al., 2009; Jones-Branch, Heaton, Edwards, Swidler, & Torquati, 2009; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006); inclusive learning communities (Gilman, 2007; Vakil, Freeman, & Swim, 2003); relationships between teachers and parents (Bennett, 2001; Bersani & Jarjoura, 2001; Linn, 2001; Macdonald, 2007; McClow & Gillespie, 1998; New, Mallory, & Mantovani, 2000; Sisson, 2009); role of the environment (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007), and the influence on their own philosophical approach (Hesterman, 2017; Zehrt & Covert, 2010), to name a few.

The Reggio Emilia principles have also been an emerging focus of interest in Asia, for example in China (Zhao, Edwards, Youngquist, & Xiong, 2003; Zhu, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2008) and Singapore (Wei, Chongvilaivan, & Yang, 2008). Pilot projects have involved Chinese and Singaporean preschools learning from the Reggio Emilia principles and engaging with them in their settings. This influence in China coincides with an opening up within the central government as it looks for ways to be internationally competitive in a market economy (Zhao et al., 2003; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). In Singapore, the influence of Reggio Emilia has come through a search for ways to make the education system more creative and responsive to future economic imperatives (Wei et al., 2008). The influence of Reggio Emilia in Asian early childhood education, however, has also been criticised as a type of Western colonialism (Tobin, 2005). This has ignited the realisation that education is a cultural construct and, as such, educational approaches, in this case the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, cannot and should not be transplanted

without regard to the cultural understandings and practices of the societies and communities where change is desired. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to understand how cultural constructs are brought together in dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine a South Australian approach.

Researchers agree that the Reggio Emilia Educational Project cannot be taken up or copied, rather, must be engaged with in a dialogical way to allow reinterpretation and redefinition through one's own cultural and contextual perspectives (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Hewett, 2001; Gandini, 1998). Further exploration of cross-cultural exchange is needed, as well as consideration of the diversity within the educational pedagogies across different countries and communities.

The struggle for change

The widespread interest in the Reggio Emilia Educational Project signals a philosophical shift in thinking about education. Moss (2011p.102) identified the attraction to the Reggio Emilia Educational Project as, "a critical case of democratic experimentalism…willingness of a community to engage in collective innovative practice to explore the possibilities of new perspectives and new ways of working". New (2007, p.11) similarly wrote:

> *These characteristics—a sense of optimism, pride, support and an openness to experimentation and innovation—derive directly from the local features of Reggio Emilia…[t]hat so many teachers have found these qualities missing in their work environments is surely a major part of Reggio Emilia's attraction; this understanding offers new insights into conditions for educational reform initiatives.*

While *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2006) adopted a sensitive and nuanced approach to capture the diversity and complexity of early childhood systems and pedagogies between countries, the direction of recent international trends is towards global testing regimes (OECD, 2015) and a reversion to a reductionist paradigm (Moss et al., 2016). This move has sparked calls by Moss et al. (2016, p.349) for "the creation of a truly educational environment, where learning of real value may take place between countries" through an expanded comparative study to provoke critical thinking and dialogue about diverse approaches to early childhood rather than international league tables and surveillance.

Regulatory approaches to education reduce teachers to a technical role, making it difficult (but not impossible) for them to enact change (Sisson & Iverson, 2014). Research suggests that educators' capacity to enact change is often confined to their own teaching spaces, working in isolation (Sisson, 2016). Moss (2011), however, illuminated the global influence of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project. He identified a growing number of networks across 13 countries dedicated to exploring the Reggio Emilia principles. Moss (2011, p.102) highlighted the possibilities these networks have to promote change by creating space for counter narratives to be heard, stressing the importance of democratic participation in education at a political and systemic level:

> *I want also to consider whether the case of Reggio Emilia might offer insights into the possibility of a new relationship in education between national and local, and between coherence and diversity, a relationship between municipal micro projects and national macro-policy based on a strong value given to participatory democracy and pedagogical experimentation*.

It is this area of systemic and policy influence where South Australia has a unique position. The Rinaldi residency (supported by non-government as well as government investment), its membership of The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi, and the establishment of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, positions South Australia well for being a world leader in early childhood education. The energy and commitment of teacher professional organisations within the state has also provided wider support for deeper democratic participation. This work has provided a context for an investigation into how five early childhood settings are re-imagining early childhood education and the experiences of leaders, educators, children and families. The findings presented within this report are an important step toward understanding the potential of the work for education in South Australia. This pilot research offers a foundation for extension into national and international dialogue and research, concerning democratic and culturally responsive pedagogies and their possibilities for early childhood education.

Conceptual framework

Cultural models theory (Holland, et al 1998) was chosen for this project as it enabled the researchers to explore how cultural influences come together to shape policy, practice and experience in reconceptualizing early childhood education in South Australia. Cultural models theory describes social contexts as figured worlds with culturally situated values and beliefs. These values and beliefs are communicated and sustained through the use of discourses (shared languages) and artefacts to inform identity and practice. Holland et al. (1998, p.26) suggest identities "are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts". Figured worlds, however, are not static physical places but "like activities, are not so much things or objects to be apprehended, as processes or traditions of apprehension which gather us up and give us form as our lives intersect them" (Holland et al., 1998, p.41).

Figured worlds are formed and re-formed through the everyday practices of those who inhabit them (Holland et al., 1998) and thus can be changed or altered by everyday practices. There are, however, figured worlds that have "*some durability*" to the practices used within them. These figured worlds are socially reproduced without question and have dominant discourses that are taken-for-granted as truth and used to promote particular practices as a natural way of life (Holland et al., 1998). The discourses and artefacts play a key role. They serve as symbols used to create an embodied understanding of the values and beliefs to mediate human identity and action (Holland et al., 1998). If left unquestioned, they become accepted cultural constructs (Hatt, 2007) and serve as trusted powerful markers of worth (Holland et al., 1998).

Individuals exist within and move between multiple figured worlds throughout their lives. In doing so they bring with them a *history in person* consisting of multiple experiences from different figured worlds. The *history in person* individuals bring with them and the social histories within a figured world inform each other through contentious local practices (Holland & Lave, 2001). Past histories and visions for the future are strongly connected to the present. Individuals draw upon the past to imagine opportunities for the future. Holland et al. (1998) draw on Bakhtin to describe how discourses from different figured worlds come into dialogue with each other at the site of individuals. Individuals can enact agency through improvisations as they orchestrate multiple discourses from diverse figured worlds they have experienced through their *history in person* (Holland et al., 1998; Holquist, 2002).

Within this case study, early childhood education in South Australia is seen as a broader figured world with multiple micro-level (local) figured worlds (individual sites and organizations) assembling within. In recognising the potential re-imagining or improvising local figured worlds can have on the broader figured world of early childhood education, this research focused on providing an understanding of five local sites in their endeavours to re-imagine their local figured worlds. In acknowledging the importance of identity and agency, this study paid particular attention to the experiences of leaders, teachers, children and families. As enacting agency can be difficult within figured worlds, this research also focused on understanding the challenges and supports participants experienced along the way.

Project design

This pilot project was designed as part of a larger research program focused on exploring the reconceptualisation of early childhood in South Australia. The pilot research project served as the first phase within a four phased program:

- Phase 1: Establishment of relationships and pilot projects
- Phase 2: Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant Proposal and subsequent research
- Phase 3: Early Childhood Summit
- Phase 4: Implementation of recommendations and research on impact

For the purpose of this report the researchers have described the design of the two pilot research projects. In designing this pilot research, the researchers were concerned with:

- developing relationships with partners
- developing and trialling research tools for engaging with leaders, teachers, children and families,
- gaining a beginning understanding of how early childhood education is being re-imagined
- identifying additional areas of research expertise needed to develop a strong team for the larger following stage of the project which will require a nationally competitive grant application.

Two parallel pilot research projects explored the same research questions through different groups of participants. The first was focused on the perspectives of leaders (sector and site leaders) and was funded through a 2017 seed grant from the University of South Australia. The second was focused on the perspectives of teachers, parents/carers and children and was funded by partner organisations, The Department for Education and Catholic Education South Australia (CESA). The pilot research was designed to explore the question, 'How is early childhood being re-imagined in South Australia?', with the following sub-questions:

- How are the Reggio Emilia principles being re-imagined and reconceptualised into meaningful practice in the South Australia context?
  - How are experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia brought together with the Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine practice?
  - What are the challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education?
- What are individuals' (leaders, teachers, children and families) experiences within sites that are re-imagining pedagogy?
- What methods are most appropriate for exploring the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and families?

Site and participant selection

Once ethical approval was obtained by all partnering institutions, initial contact was made with the appropriate sector leaders as a point of contact. These leaders provided a list of early childhood sites that they recommended and were also participating in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project. After gaining permission from partners, researchers contacted site leaders to invite them to participate in the two research pilot projects. Information sessions were held to provide opportunity for potential participants to learn more about the study and their potential involvement.

All five sites responded eagerly to engage within the pilot research projects. This included two sites from The Department for Education, two sites from CESA and one from the independent sector. Before the commencement of the second pilot project, one of the sites experienced a high percentage of teacher turnover and withdrew from the project. As data collection had only started, the research team invited the partnering organisation to elect another site that would be interested in participating. The site accepted the invitation and joined the project.

The lens of cultural models theory also informed the participatory research approach employed. During each of the initial information meetings, participants were invited to offer suggestions of questions, information, artefacts or processes for the participation of children that would represent the experience of re-imagined early childhood practice at their site. These were important strategies for building relationships prior to data collection. Most effective were the methods where participants made suggestions about significant artefacts they wanted to share with the researcher. Once the data collection commenced, researchers took the time to observe at the site, to become familiar with children, teachers and leaders as well as the discourse, rituals and artefacts. This was important in developing an understanding of participants' figured worlds and informing subsequent data collection. A description of each participant site is included within its case summary (see section 3).

Participation was voluntary. Participants were free to leave the project at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were used in place of all sites, leaders, teachers, children and parents. In the cross- case analysis of challenges and support all names and pseudonyms were removed to further protect the identities of sites and individuals.

Methods

This pilot research employed a qualitative case study approach (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). For the purpose of this case study, the researchers identified the figured world of early childhood education as the broader case and each participant site as a case within the larger case. The use of a case study approach provided an opportunity to draw on the multiple experiences and realities of participants within their shared figured worlds of education (Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). This approach allowed for multiple individuals and groups to share their experiences through a variety of ways to contribute to a holistic account of the contexts, values, processes and interrelationships within each site.

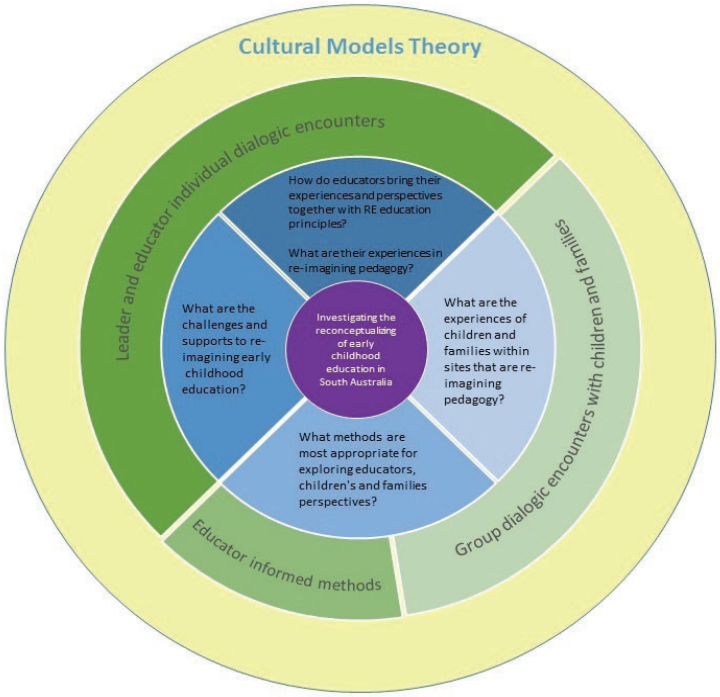
The Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) was used to provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences through multiple languages. The Mosaic Approach is, "a way of listening which

acknowledges children and adults as co-constructors of meaning. It is an integrated approach which combines the visual with the verbal" (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.1). The following elements of the Mosaic Approach were carefully planned and implemented accordingly:

- Multi-method: A variety of methods were used including dialogic encounters, observations, guided tours and artefact sharing.
- Participatory: All participants were viewed as experts and active agents in their worlds and involved in making decisions about what types of data they believed would be most important in sharing their experiences.
- Reflexive: Participants were engaged in co-constructing meanings of their experiences with their peers and the research through group dialogic encounters.
- Adaptable: Approaches to and timing of data collection were unique to each site as informed by leaders, teachers and children.
- Focused on participants' lived experiences: The methods employed were focused on understanding participants' experiences within sites that are re-imagining their pedagogy.
- Embedded into practice: The methods used were connected to the everyday practice of the site. For instance, stop motion videos were used at a site where this had been children's preferred method of communicating. In another site, children were really interested in authoring books to share their thinking. In this way, the methods used reflected the typical everyday practices used at each site.

A number of data sources were employed in the research. The following graphic shows the relationship between research questions and data sources. Yin (2009, p.115) suggests using a variety of sources of evidence in a case study approach to develop "converging lines of inquiry" through "a process of triangulation and corroboration".

Figure 1: Cultural models theory (Holland et al. 1998)



Dialogic encounters

Drawing on Freire's (1993, p.72) notion of dialogic encounter, this study acknowledged humans as "being in the process of becoming – unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality". This understanding of the process of being and becoming connected well with a cultural models theory view of individuals as active agents and authors of their own identities (Holland et al., 1998). The use of dialogic

encounters has been recognised as a useful research method (Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Sisson, Giovacco-Johnson, Harris, Stribling, & Webb-Williams, 2018). It involves participants connecting to their co-existence in their figured world in relationship with others (Freire & Betto, 1985). Dialogic encounters were open ended, allowing participants to engage in authentic conversations that led to a deeper understanding of their experiences within their figured worlds. All dialogic encounters with adults were audio recorded and transcribed. Group dialogic encounters with children were video recorded and transcribed.

Dialogic encounters with leaders and teachers focused on understanding how they re-imagine their practice and pedagogy within their context. In particular, the researchers were interested in understanding the perspectives these educators were bringing into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles, and the challenges and supports they experienced in re-imagining their figured worlds. Researchers also used this time to engage in dialogue with participants about methods they believed would be most effective in further sharing their experiences, and the methods they thought would be most useful in engaging with the experiences of children and families. These participatory methods were then explored as part of the research process.

The leaders and teachers informed the design of group dialogic encounters with children by suggesting time, space and possible recall activities. In some cases, the teachers were able to stay with the group working as co-researchers to help stimulate recall of experiences and engagement of dialogue. In other sites, teachers felt that the children were accustomed to engaging in dialogue with adults and did not actively participate in the dialogic encounter but remained in view in case they were needed. During dialogic encounters, participant children were asked if they had any other ideas about how they could share their experiences for other people to learn from. These suggestions were followed through by the researchers as participant informed methods. MacNaughton and her colleagues (2007) argue that young children are not only capable of expressing their perspectives on things that affect them, they also enjoy doing this and learn much about active citizenry through the process. A variety of participatory methods (Clark, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2001) were used to engage with children's perspectives and are listed in Table 1 below. Verbal children shared experiences and products of their past experiences with researchers during video recorded dialogic encounters where they offered to share their ideas about their learning and experiences within the site. Consistent with this pattern of use, Salmon, Roncolato, and Gleitzman (2003) observed that prompts such as those used within this research enhance children's recall. The children's visual text *My Map Book* (Fanelli, 2001) was used to support children to conceptualise maps of their learning, which provided useful prompts for dialogic encounters. The use of participatory methods such as these have been found in other studies to provide more information than if the participating children were to discuss or re-enact an event (Clark & Moss, 2001). Such dialogic encounters were designed to gain an understanding of children's experiences within their re-imagined figured worlds.

The methods used to conduct the group dialogic encounters with parents were also informed by leaders and educators at their sites. Leaders and educators worked with researchers to refine the dialogic protocols by providing contextual information to which parents would connect. Children's education begins and is shaped in so many ways from the home. Parent's deep knowledge and care for their children was valued by the researchers.

Participant informed methods

A participatory approach to research (Clark & Moss, 2001) enabled the development of credible and collaborative relationships with participants as partners and stakeholders. Throughout the research process researchers worked closely with participants to inform the design and refinement of participant informed methods for exploring the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and families. This included the development of dialogic protocols that connected with the language of each site and the trialing of various participant informed methods. The methods were used in the sites where participants suggested them and are highlighted in each of the case summaries. The development and trialing of these methods will serve to inform the progress of further research undertaken by the research team.

Table 1: Participant informed methods

Participant informed methods		
Teachers and leaders	**Children**	**Parents**
• Observations of conference presentations	• Stop motion moving making	• Observations of parent information sessions

• Observations of team meetings	• Book making and the created artefacts	• Observations of end of term sharing of learning
• Guided tours	• Map making and the created artefacts	• Parent and staff professional learning
• Observation of daily life in site	• Guided tours	
• Artefacts- school information, documentation, readings	• Observation of daily life in site • Observation of meal time	

Analysis

An interpretivist lens was employed to explore significant themes observed across the differing sites. Data analysis was conducted throughout the data collection process and used to inform subsequent data collection (Cresswell, 2007). The analysis process began with the transcripts from dialogic encounters with leaders, observation notes from guided tours and artefacts shared. The researchers read and re-read the transcripts and reviewed observation notes and artefacts together, recording significant themes as they emerged. Once significant themes were identified, the team met to identify significant recurring themes across data sets. They then returned to the transcripts, highlighting recurring themes as well as compelling and unique themes that emerged. These themes were used to further refine the protocols used for engaging in dialogue with teachers, families and children.

The second pilot project commenced with dialogic encounters with individual teachers and continued with participant informed methods and dialogic encounters with children and parents, with analysis as a continuing process throughout to inform further data collection (Cresswell, 2007). The researchers examined each transcript individually to create a concept map containing emerging themes including examples of re-imagining practice, supports and challenges to re-imagining (Simons, 2009, p.122). This process was then repeated for the leader participants from the first pilot.

In the next phase of analysis, the concept maps of the participants and participant groups from each site were analysed together with artefacts. Stake's (1995) direct interpretation was used to more closely examine instances of unique experiences. Case summaries, including chosen illustrations of practice, were written using these data, and through this process, further analyses were conducted. Case summaries were then sent to the site leader for member checking and any errors in understanding were reconciled (Cresswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The case summaries and key elements of data from each site were reviewed to determine cross site themes – similarities and differences in approaches across the sites and to consider future recommendations.

Finally, a cross case analysis of the supports and challenges was conducted. This analysis involved looking across participants, sites and types of data collected for emergent themes. Categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995) was used to organise and analyse common threads between participants, sites and forms of data. Significant themes were then used to write section three of this report, *Cross case analysis of challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education*.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approvals for the two pilot projects were received from the University of South Australia and our partners, The Department for Education and CESA. All participant leaders, teachers and parents signed a Human Research Ethics Committee Consent Form. Parents signed a consent form for their children to participate, and verbal consent from children was sought before each dialogical engagement. The participatory method (described above) was important in respecting children's agency in making decisions about their participation and also their right to voice their perspectives (Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2011).

Researching with children

The importance of listening to children's voices on matters relevant to them is recognised in educational practice (Clark, 2010) and is a particular principle within the Reggio Emilia Educational Project (Rinaldi, 2006). Historically however, children have not been credited by policy makers and researchers as "competent reporters of their own experience" (Colliver & Fleer, 2016, p.1560). It was important therefore, to include children's voices and perspectives in this research. Colliver's (2017, p.2-3) three

ethical dimensions of power were relevant to this study – the power of the researcher over the researched, the power of adults over children, and particularly, the power of teachers over students.

Ethical considerations were most important in making decisions about children's participation. In addition to gaining signed consent from their parents, children were also asked for their permission to participate in all aspects of their involvement, including photocopying their work. If children initially had given consent, they were asked again immediately before the session begun. If they preferred to undertake other activity at that time, the data collection did not progress. A dialogic or ethnographic approach rather than a literal question and answer approach was adopted. Researchers found that often while they were in settings participant children approached them, wanting to engage in a conversation about what they were doing, or to show something on which they were working. The approach used in the present study is consistent with that of Lahman (2008) who advised researchers to let go of their agenda to fully understand 'the child', and to allow children to drive the data collection. As Powell and Snow (2007) and Blades, Spencer, and Waterman (2004) observed, non-normative, open questions elicit more information more accurately.

Trustworthiness of the research

In establishing the trustworthiness of this research project, the research team employed strategies for maintaining credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Credibility of findings were achieved through the process of dialogic encounters that allowed for participants and researchers to develop relationships. Member checking was also used throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Participants reviewed transcripts for accuracy, their corresponding case summary, and the cross case analysis for accuracy in interpretation (Cresswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The use of audio to record dialogic encounters with adults and video to record dialogic encounters with children ensured the dependability of findings. Confirmability of findings was ensured by the research team working closely together throughout the data analysis process. Researchers read across participants' transcripts and engaged in critical dialogue concerning emerging themes. In addressing the transferability of this pilot research, thick rich descriptions were used. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.316) write:

> *[T]he naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility.*

Limitations

As this report presents findings from two case study pilot projects, it is important to recognise the limit of these pilot research projects in representing the broader experiences of South Australian leaders, educators and teachers, children and families. The research presented in this report represents the experiences across five education sites in one Australian state. Further research is needed to understand how representative these findings are across multiple contexts. The one-year time frame provided for this research was also a limitation. Further research with an expanded time frame could provide further illustrations of, and insights into practice that will add to an understanding of how early childhood education is being re-imagined in South Australia.

Reflection on methods

One aim of this research project was to trial different methods for exploring the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and families. Through the process of trialling different methods, researchers found three key themes to inform future research: significance of participant informed methods, time and member checking.

Significance of participant informed methods

In trialling different participant informed methods, the researchers set out to understand what methods are most appropriate for exploring the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and families. After trialling different methods, the researchers concluded that the methods most appropriate for exploring the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and families were those that were meaningful to them and connected to their daily lives. For instance, stop motion video and bookmaking were not only languages in which the children from two sites were well versed but they were also intimately connected to their stories of their experiences as these methods for communication were unique to each figured world. As valued artefacts (Holland et al., 1998), the stop motion videos and bookmaking provided children with an opportunity to be active constructors of knowledge within their learning communities. Engaging

participant children in this research through their valued methods of communication was not only important in generating a deep understanding of their experiences but was also important in signalling their valued role as knowledgeable participants.

This finding was echoed across other participant groups. In gaining an understanding of the language of each of the sites as figured worlds, researchers were able to tailor group dialogic encounters with parents in ways that reflected their experiences. Similarly, engaging leaders and teachers in making decisions about research methods provided opportunities for them to share unique artefacts or aspects of their figured world.

Importance of time

Time was also an important factor to the methods used within this research. Researchers found that observations that occurred during half day or full day visits were fruitful in providing opportunities to connect with the experiences of participants in the moment as they were happening. This was also important in collecting data with children during times that they wanted to participate. During each visit, participant children were asked verbally if they wanted to participate and were free to decline. During dialogic encounters participant children were also free to come and go as they pleased. Having researchers visiting the sites during long stretches of time allowed them to be available when the children were ready.

Researchers also found that attending site functions when invited was important in connecting with participants' experiences first hand. They provided opportunities for researchers to engage in meaningful dialogue about recent events. Observation notes in collaboration with transcripts provided an opportunity to retell participants' stories from multiple perspectives.

Time became a challenge when researchers needed to schedule dialogic encounters. Participants live busy lives and such dialogic encounters were an added factor to their already full schedules. Researchers needed to be flexible in meeting participants during the times that were most appropriate to them. Sometimes this meant delaying data collection until participants felt they could commit the time. While this created some challenges to meeting milestones, it was an important negotiation in respecting participants' time. As a pilot study, this research was confined to the parameters of one year, so researchers' time was limited at each site. In future research it would be important to follow participants' experiences at each site over an extended period of time to understand how these might change over time and the factors that might contribute to those changes.

Member checking

Member checking was an important part of the participatory methods used within this research and happened throughout the research process, starting with participants reading their transcripts and continuing with the sharing of case summaries and analysis. The researchers welcomed participants' feedback on any errors in quotations or interpretation. Unexpectedly, a small number of participants wanted to change not only the grammar and sentence structure, but to replace their oral contributions with a written statement. These have been included at the participants' request.

Conclusion

This section of the report has served as an introduction to the investigation of the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia. In beginning with an overview to the movement toward re-imagining of early childhood in South Australia, this section provides an understanding of the context of early childhood within this state. The literature review provided an overview of the Reggio Emilia principles and demonstrated a growing global interest in the exploration of these principles within different cultural contexts. The review of literature also highlighted the need for further research on cross-cultural exchange of pedagogical ideals from which this study has aimed to contribute. Finally, a detailed description of the conceptual framework and methodology used within this research was presented.

The remaining sections of this report will present the findings and recommendations for policy and practice. Section two presents a case summary from each of the five participant case sites. Section three presents a cross case analysis of the challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education, section four contains the conclusion and section five includes recommendations for policy, research and practice.

SECTION 2

Case studies

Introduction

In exploring the reconceptualisation of early childhood education within South Australia it is important to recognise the significance of context which includes individuals who bring with them a variety of experiences to inform the values, beliefs and practices that shape context. Because knowledge is contextually situated (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), the distinctive journeys that each learning site embarked upon are significant to understanding the possibilities for reconceptualising early childhood education more broadly. In recognising that knowledge is not easily transferable from one context to another (Bernstein, 1996; Wheelahan, 2007) this section presents a summary of each of the five learning sites explored in this research.

These case summaries allow us to understand the diverse experiences of leaders, educators, parents/carers and children within different contexts that have aspired to reconceptualise early childhood education. They shed light on the different perspectives leaders and educators bring together with the Reggio Emilia principles to inform a local approach and provide examples of reconceptualised pedagogy. While there are many examples of re-imagined pedagogy from each case, a selection of illustrations is presented to provide an opportunity to explore these examples in depth while also providing insight into the range of practices the sites used.

Within each case study summary, the reader will find a description of the context and the perspectives brought together with Reggio Emilia principles. Selected illustrations of re-imagined practice are presented to demonstrate leaders' and educators' understanding and enactment of the Reggio Emilia principles within their contexts. The voices of leaders, educators, children and parents/carers will be presented to show their experiences of these re-imagined practices. It is through examination of the developing identities of educators and leaders and their acts of agency and improvisation in re-imagining their practice as well as how this practice is experienced by children and parents/carers that we are afforded a glimpse of the re-imagined figured world that is developing in the site.

Each case summary addresses the following research questions:

1. How are culturally situated perspectives brought together with the Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine practice in South Australia?
2. What are the experiences of leaders, educators, children and families within sites that are re-imagining practice?

The collection of case summaries is intended to contribute to the knowledge base of the field by providing an understanding about how educators and leaders "develop a local South Australian approach that has the traces of Reggio Emilia principles" (Rinaldi, 2013 p.13)

Westside Primary School

Context

Westside Primary is a publicly funded school for children from preschool to year 7 located in an industrial area approximately 12 km from the CBD in Adelaide. There are approximately 355 children enrolled in the primary side of the school and 60 children in the preschool. The school is culturally diverse, with a high percentage of children from Aboriginal and international backgrounds. Westside is identified as a Category 2 school with approximately 40% of children accessing school subsidy. Allen, the school principal affirmed, "but we're not going to look like it and we're not going to act like it." Westside Primary school has had a long history of re-imagining education that dates years before their engagement in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project. This history has resulted in a progressive school structure that is well supported by families and staff. The key values promoted throughout the school are Wellbeing, Discovery, Diversity, Belonging and Success. A significant spike in enrolments over the past three years has been attributed to "positive word-of mouth".

The school is open five days a week with school and the Treehouse starting at 8:45am and ending at 3:00pm. Westside Primary also offers out of school hours care before and after these times. Children from Reception to year 7 attend five days a week. Kindergarten children attend Monday-Tuesday or Wednesday-Thursday in terms 1 and 2 and are able to attend an additional day in terms 3 and 4. On Friday the Treehouse is used for play group.

Westside has three distinct communities of learners arranged in mixed aged groupings.

- The Treehouse – integrated preschool and reception (ages 3-6)
- Gumwood – Year 1-7
- Jacaranda – Year 1-7

At the time of the study, Gumwood and Jacaranda had vertical classroom groups of year 1-3, year 3-5 and year 5-7 with 1-2 teachers and 1-3 co-educators, however, in 2019 they plan to return to the structure of 1-7 vertical classroom groupings they had used for the previous twelve years.

The curriculum is co-constructed with children through various offerings that provide children with an opportunity to make choices about their learning. Within their homegroups children have English and Maths time as well as engagement in inquiry-based projects. In the afternoons, Discovery time provides children with flexibility to make choices about other discipline topics required in the Australian Curriculum. Discovery learning topics are organised by teachers in their specialist fields throughout Gumwood and Jacaranda and are open across years 1-7.

Gumwood and Jacaranda learning communities each have a designated building with flexible learning spaces, outdoor courtyard areas, and community areas that serve as a home base. Treehouse consists of a large outdoor nature-based learning area. Classrooms are housed along one edge of the school building and within two small buildings nestled throughout the outdoor learning area. A fourth small building serves as an art studio. The school Out of School Hours Care and playgroup share the treehouse learning areas to provide consistency for children transiting before and after school.

While the school had a long history in re-imagining their figured world, they understood their transformative work as a process of always evolving rather than a destination to which they would arrive. This pilot research focuses on one part of their re-imagining journey. At the time of the study, participants' concerns about children's experiences in transitioning to primary school identified a pedagogical disconnect that existed between the Treehouse and the primary side of the school. The pedagogy used in the primary years was described as "structured" while the pedagogy used in the Treehouse was described as "play-based" and "inquiry-based". Sue described the difficulty children had in transitioning into the primary side of the school, "there were a lot of meltdowns, not coping with the changes, the expectations were quite, like "Now that you're in year 1 you have to sit down and you have to write, and you have to do this and that." This pedagogical disconnection was confirmed by leaders and teachers alike. Chloe, a primary teacher said, "Even though I had year 1-2's, I think the school has been functioning very separate in a way."

Concerns about children's transitions to school are well documented within the literature (Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2009, 2014; Fabian, 2013; Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2012; Moss, 2013; Rinaldi, 2013; Sisson, Giovacco-Johnson, Harris, Stribling, & Webb-Williams, 2018). The discontinuity between

the Treehouse and the primary side of the school is not surprising as fragmentation within and between systems was a major finding presented in Rinaldi's (2013) report. In her diagnosis of the South Australian early childhood system, Rinaldi indicated that, "Each early learning site is an "island" within a number of systems: preschool, early learning centres, primary schools, long day care, occasional care, family day care" (Rinaldi, 2013, p.13). Rinaldi suggests, "the challenge for South Australia is not to continue to separate or make a special pedagogy for the disabled, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the children at risk or the Aboriginal children" (Rinaldi, 2013, p.39).

Mary described the Rinaldi (2013) report as "really powerful". She further described the fragmentation between pedagogy:

> *The pedagogy [in the Treehouse] is about children doing the thinking so it's not feeding them information, then getting them to regurgitate it. That whole thing of inquiry and using that with everything…involving children in that exploration and investigation rather than feeding them all the time. In the school, there is actually an inquiry time called project-based inquiry but I don't like that because it puts it in a box separate from everything else whereas I think your maths and your literacy all ties in together around whatever you're investigating with your kids. There's some things, yes, you have to explicitly teach but you can do it in such a way that they are exploring it and coming to understandings themselves about it.*

Concerns about children's experiences and the continuity between Treehouse and primary prompted the school to develop a strategy for bringing teachers together, Mary explained:

> *Because there is still that barrier between the Treehouse and the rest of the school and we've realised the only way to break that down is to do this. That's going to strengthen their teaching so much, but it also means that they bring that early years' pedagogy and make sure that it does not stop [at primary].*

In striving to transform figured worlds, Freire (1993, p.168) suggests individuals must come together to "become co-authors of liberation action". A strategy for bringing teachers together to re-imagine their pedagogy at Westside was to invite teachers to move across teams. Two teachers took on this invitation. Sue, an educator from the Treehouse, moved with a group of children to collaborate with the Gumwood primary team and Chloe, a primary teacher came into the Treehouse to collaborate with the preschool/reception team. Liz, an additional teacher with experience in engaging in the Reggio Emilia principles, was hired to work in the Jacaranda primary team.

Data collection

Data collection included individual dialogic encounters with leaders and teachers, dialogic encounters with small groups of children and parents/carers and a range of participant informed methods as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Data collection methods – Westside Primary School

	Individual dialogic encounters	Group dialogic encounters	Participant informed methods
Leaders	• Allen*– Principal • Mary* – Early years coordinator		• 2 guided tours • Documentation shared by leaders including power point presentation and video about the school

Teachers	• Teachers from the Treehouse: · Jenny* · Bella* · Chloe* • Teachers from Jacaranda: · Liz* • Teacher from Gumwood: · Sue*		• ½ day participant observation in the Treehouse • ½ day participant observation in Gumwood • ½ day participant observation in Jacaranda
Children		• 3 preschool children · Angelo* · Maya* · Caroline* · Kate* • 4 primary school children · Sarah* · Kim* · Jacob* · Sydney*	• 1 video walk and talk guided tour with preschool children • preschool children's drawings of their experiences in the Treehouse • primary school children's drawings and books about their experiences in primary school
Parents		• 3 preschool parents/ carers • 4 primary parents/ carers	• parent information session

* Pseudonyms

Perspectives used to inform practice

The learning program across the school is inspired by a variety of contemporary perspectives in education. Three of the most significant to the philosophical perspective of the school are the Reggio Emilia principles, perspectives on Nature Play and the Nunga Way.

Reggio Emilia principles

The principal and a previous preschool teacher had been drawing on the Reggio Emilia principles to inform practice within the preschool prior to the Rinaldi residency. Allen said, "We had done a fair bit of research around Reggio Emilia [and] if the state [was] going to go down that way, we want[ed] in." Mary later joined the team as the Coordinator of the Treehouse. As the Treehouse grew so did their engagement with the Reggio Emilia principles. In addition to their involvement in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, Mary was deeply involved with the local Early Childhood Organisation (EChO):

> *I'm part of EChO as well and EChO also is – has been running for the last five years, six years, a re-imagining childhood project that sites actually buy into. They pay to come in and go to learning days to learn about the principles and they get a critical friend who works with them.*

The project involves a full day workshop to explore the Reggio Emilia principles that included guest speakers and examples of practice. Mary is a critical friend to another site where she engages and supports them in drawing on the Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine their practice. Mary said, "The EChO project is outstanding, It's a very exciting project". Mary described her involvement in EChO and the Collaborative Project as significant to her understanding of the Reggio Emilia principles:

> *I think becoming involved with the EChO project and with the Collaborative Project and just learning more about [Reggio Emilia principles] and going to conferences and actually going over to [Reggio Emilia] then it sort of becomes a part of your language that you just – because they put it so beautifully.*

When asked what she found to be the most influential principle in helping teachers re-imagine their practice Mary said:

> *I think for me that number 1 image of the child is the most important one and it's one that we spend a lot of time on it. I think that's the thing if you don't get that, then you're not really going to understand this pedagogy at all.*

The Nunga Way

The Nunga Way was also highlighted as a significant influence informing the pedagogy and curriculum. The Nunga way was the result of some work that Westside was a part of with Dr Tyson Yunkaporta, a Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Knowledges at Deakin University. Allen said, "it [was] a mixture of Ngarrindjeri and Kaurna and Narungga and Pitjantjara people [from the community] that were part of that construction." He described the Nunga way as:

> *Looking at working with our Aboriginal children, our Aboriginal community members and elders, as well as our non-Aboriginal children and our staff to develop this notion of how we can teach through culture rather than just only to learn about culture. Nunga way is based on using the hand as a way to help you understand the process and of course there's five digits on the hand so the Nunga Way actually has these five levels as well, one being that starting at the simplest, at the child level and it goes up through a research level and then it goes to the level which basically is, if you're not Aboriginal, you don't go to level 5 because that's truly about imbedded culture.*

The children at Westside were also engaged in consultation to develop a shared language to represent the first level. This level's four learning processes are paraphrased below:

- First finger: "Watch and learn". This stage promotes careful observation and listening.
- Second finger: "All together". Children work in collaboration with others.
- Third finger: "Do It Yourself". Children apply knowledge in different ways through independent learning.
- Fourth finger: "Celebrate". Children demonstrate their learning and understanding and pass on their knowledge to an audience.
- Thumb: "Check feelings". The thumb connects with each finger to indicate the transition from one stage to the next.

These learning processes are connected across each level as represented in the graphic on the page opposite.

Allen was firm that the Nunga Way was not a packaged approach that can be copied or transplanted from one context to another:

> *It's not just grabbing a program and running a program, we'll grab a piece of thinking that seems to kind of connect and potentially build on to where we are at the moment, or add value and we'll incorporate those components into it. Even though the Nunga Way was developed from within, it's not a matter of we're rolling out the Nunga way to everybody, it's kind of like everybody knows it's there, everybody kind of connects with it. Nunga Way demonstrates that while there may be similarities, there are also differences across Aboriginal Nations. The thinking behind its development has been the notion of learning through culture rather than just about culture.*

Nature Play

Nature Play was identified as an emerging area that the school and particularly the Treehouse had been drawing on to inform their pedagogy. Mary said:

> *It's still developing here but it is reasonably new. Kindergartens used to just put this here and that here and that there whereas we've sort of gone right away from that now and just letting children do the creating and putting out the loose parts and all of that and just having an environment that they can really, really explore and learn from, so, lots of trees, lots of plants, and different surfaces to walk on and all that kind of thing but it's good to see that it is going everywhere and lots of people are thinking more carefully about it.*

The value placed on outdoor learning environments came from years of observations of the connection children have to nature. The Treehouse had recently won a grant to re-develop their outdoor learning

space into a nature play space, "We wanted to create something better, so we actually went out [with the children] and visited a whole lot of [outdoor] learning spaces. Mary described the transformation of the outdoor space:

> *We had fixed equipment, we had artificial, the rubber surfaces and we had asphalt everywhere. I mean, the outdoor area, even though it was pretty horrible – I mean, they still loved it because we had lots of loose parts and we got rid of the fixed equipment so that we could use more loose parts and they had their mining dig and their archaeological dig and all that which we've maintained but I guess what they didn't have is all the – now they're seeing plants that are changing – even though they're only this high, they've already seen them change from being nothing to, oh my goodness, look at those flowers and now look at those leaves. So, just having that, I think, and a garden area that they're working on – out here they – the children have set up an insect garden, so they've made homes. The fact that yes, the learning can happen outside. It doesn't have to be inside. You can go outside and do things. You can do bookmaking outside. You can do reading outside – but also, what's the learning happening while the children are engaging with the outdoor environment and what are you noticing and what are we recording about that and that's sort of been our biggest thing that we have the indoor and the outdoor [open to children] right from the start of the day.*

In creating an open indoor/outdoor environment that promoted children's engagement, the teachers within the Treehouse wanted to not only provide children with opportunities to learn in nature but to also learn about and connect to nature. This perspective is common amongst the literature on Nature Play suggesting that children's sense of connection to nature is vital to the sustainability of our world (White, 2014).

Other influences

While three theoretical perspectives have been named above in having influenced the curriculum and pedagogy used at Westside it is important to understand that these are not the only perspectives the leaders and teachers drew upon. Leaders and teachers share a wide range of different perspectives that they were engaging with to inform their practice. A description of all the different perspectives is beyond the scope of this report. The three that have been named and illustrated here are those that consistently

emerged throughout multiple interviews and were also reflected in shared artefacts such as the school website and pamphlets provided to families. It is important to mention that multiple perspectives were being explored as it sheds light on the engagement and negotiating of multiple perspectives that is needed to re-imagine practice. Allen's role as principal was significant in this endeavour:

> *I think for me, a lot of my role now has become kind of two key things, one is probably a provocateur in some respects, of trying to sort of throw out some things to get people thinking in different directions. But also an enabler, so we've got such a diverse group of thinkers and so many of them creative thinkers, it's trying to go okay, so you're wanting to bring this idea in, how do we actually incorporate that and bring that into it? And that's beyond staff too, because we've got a parent that is particularly passionate about gender and sort of un-gendering teaching practice and so forth. And so she's been given space to work with our staff and trying to influence our thinking as well.*

At Westside we can see multiple perspectives being brought together as leaders and teachers engaged in multiple figured worlds. Participants' participation in the figured world of professional organisations (ie. EChO, Nature Play SA) and professional development projects and research (ie. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, Aboriginal communities) were instrumental in shaping their identities as teachers and consequently their pedagogy. Principal Allen's approach has been to value and be inclusive of all community members. He does so by not only encouraging engagement with multiple perspectives but also by creating space for community members to engage in dialogue with perspectives, thus creating a figured world where community members are empowered to critically reflect upon the values and beliefs of the school and how they are enacted.

Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy

The following illustrations provide insight into how the figured world of Westside was being re-imagined in pedagogically congruent ways. It includes one illustration from the Treehouse and one from the primary side of the school.

Figure 2: Map created by Angelo

From the mining hill to the museum

The mining hill, a large compacted dirt hill in the outdoor learning area designated for the preschool/ reception groups, was a popular spot for many of the children in the Treehouse. Inspiration for the mining hill came from children's interest in digging. Mary said, "so we put bones and old bikes and old implements and shelves and all sorts of things. There's so much buried in there that they'll be finding it for years." Children can be found climbing and digging for hidden treasures on a daily basis. Angelo was one of the frequent visitors to the mining hill.

Children's map drawings of places that are important to them in the Treehouse all depicted the mining hill. Angelo, Maya, Caroline and Kate excitedly led the researcher to the mining hill as the first stop during their guided tour. Angelo enthusiastically shared his passion for hunting for treasure in the mining hill with a researcher. While creating a map of the places that were most important to him, Angelo described his autonomy in engaging with the mining hill. Angelo indicated that he did not have to seek permission but could choose to work on the mining hill as he wished. This was made possible by the open schedule that provided a long stretch of un-interrupted child initiated free exploration. He also shared how he had open access to use tools from the shed. In the following illustration, Angelo shared his thinking about other tools he might need and how he can go about getting them:

> *In the art studio while drawing maps of important areas of the school Angelo shares his thinking. "I can just go to the shed and get a shovel". He pauses then continues, "Then I get a jackhammer*

Figure 3: Map created by Maya

then I just bang bang bang I smash the mining hill into pieces. I just want to find something I can just smash the mining hill so big. I just had a great idea, a bulldozer!" Angelo exclaimed. Angelo's eyes intently scanned the room. He looked at the researcher and said, "Well I can just make one in the making area that can actually do work. I think I need lids and corks and one drill bit". He paused for a moment, "I think I might make it right now!" Angelo ran excitedly to the making area.

Angelo's story of mining hill shows his agency in making decisions about his learning during exploration time and his confidence in his own competency in identifying tools that would progress his work in the mining hill. Angelo did not go to the teacher to solve his problem but rather was confident in his own abilities to theorise about how to mine the hill and felt empowered to test these theories. The organisation of the daily schedule allowed for Angelo and other children to drive their own learning by following their passions and curiosities.

Angelo's mum and his teacher, Jenny, shared how his interest in the mining hill sparked an inquiry project. Angelo's mum said, "Angelo is really into crystals. He hunts the mining field. He's got all of the kids hunting for crystals for him. He has a team of miners who bring him crystals." Jenny described how the inquiry project emerged:

> *He came in to [see] me [Jenny] and said, 'Oh look what I have found!' And it was a lump of concrete and that concrete obviously meant something to him and he found it in the mining hill. He loves the mining hill and he said, 'I found these crystals as well'. So, he found some white stones and rocks and everything and I said oh that's amazing. He said, "Can I show the children in the classroom today?" I said yeah but it would be a really great idea if you could show the rest of the [Treehouse] as well. So, all of the children in the [Treehouse] area can learn from what you've found. I asked him, how could we do that? He said, "oh maybe I could put them on the table?" We moved all the literacy puzzles from the table and we said this could be your table and we made a sign that said Angelo's Rock Table and if people want to know information or where you found them then they can come to you because there was a picture of him on this table. He was really excited about that. That was his connection to that table and he wanted to teach his peers all about these rocks and crystals and he went to the library to find a book on crystals that could also give more information to himself and to the other children.*

Figure 4: Map created by Caroline

Jenny's recall of her conversation with Angelo about his crystals is one example of children and teachers working together to co-construct the curriculum. Both were working as teachers and learners as Jenny supported Angelo in the planning process and Angelo shared his knowledge as an invitation for learning

to the other children within the Treehouse. Opportunities for learning continued to surface as crystals and rocks started disappearing from Angelo's sharing table:

> *Unfortunately [some children] took the rocks from the table, and he was really upset and then I said so when we go to a museum and we see rocks and special treasures what does it look like in a museum? And he said they are behind glass. And so he problem solved how could we still show our rocks, but people can't just come up and take them. He was really upset, and we had a chat within our group and some of the other children went out and found more rocks for him. So, he put them all in the jar and so people could still look at his rocks but not take them away and so he had control over that whole process. What he learnt and to also show everybody else what he has learnt. He's passing on his knowledge to other children and he was critical in what he thought would work. It was a good experience for him and for the other children because we often have problems with people taking things because our room is open all the time and you know there's 3-year olds and they come in and they see something that they like, and they take it away. So, I have been asking the children to make the story tables themselves, so they have got another connection to that story table, so it's something that they have built, and they have constructed and they have that connection.*

Angelo's mum also spoke about the incident. She described it as an opportunity for "collaboration":

> *The whole learning from that is the learning about respect for other people's properties, about what you can find and how to work together and to problem solve and to help each other and share which is what the teachers pick up on, they listen to the children and they don't stand from the top and preach down, they gather. And you can see their minds and they're all engaged in it.*

Rather than stepping in to solve the issue of the disappearing rocks and crystals the teachers engaged children in a problem-solving dialogue. Authentic opportunities for learning like this one were widely supported by parent participants and demonstrated shared values and beliefs about education within the school. Angelo's mum's description of the incident as being an opportunity for collaboration was an example of a shared value in children as being competent and capable and the co-construction of knowledge.

The interest in museums grew amongst the children. Mary reported that different children began to create museums for their own collection. This interest extended into the home with one child sharing a photo with her teacher of the museum she created at home. Over a two-month period the teachers and children within the Treehouse visited different museums around Adelaide. The emergent project was called "The Treehouse Museum: Exploring 'Culture". During this time, they also became aware of an end of the year celebration that was happening in the local community. The teachers decided, "a Museum could be a way for the children to show and understand the true meaning of culture through a museum that explored their own individual cultures". Over the following weeks they continued to engage with different perspectives such as invited "experts from the community who provided provocations to extend the children's thinking" as well as the children's own theories and ideas. As a result, children were grouped based on their ideas and interests and were tasked with "representing their interests and identity" through the language of their choice.

The evolution from the mining hill to the museum is an example of re-imagining pedagogy that values children as competent and capable in making decisions about their learning and contributing to the learning of others. Chloe, a primary teacher, described her views about children changing toward seeing them as competent and capable as a result of her time in the Treehouse:

> *[Before] they weren't where I expected them to be, I guess I felt like I had to teach them a bit more. Whereas now, I'm getting better at understanding, no, [they] need to work it where they're at, and they've got so much to offer. They are capable of doing so much.*

Chloe described her challenge in working in the Treehouse was to find teachable moments to expand upon:

> *It's still good to have that struggle and to constantly be thinking okay, what is my teachable moment? And what is something that they can get from this? This shift in thinking challenges traditional forms of curriculum planning.*

Planning in the traditional sense is often seen as something teachers do in advance. Bella a teacher from the Treehouse described how their planning differed from traditional forms "So looking at what [children] are interested in and then sort of back planning, if you want to call it that not having a plan and 'this is what we're doing, this is how we're going to learn our maths'". The illustration above shows how planning

involves a dialogical process of engaging with children. It shows the value of children as knowledge constructors through an example of how one child's interest can spark a line of emergent inquiry that inspires the learning of others. Had the teachers set predetermined lesson plans before the week or scheduled the day packed with pre-set activities we would not have had the chance to see the passion and competencies that Angelo displayed through his involvement in co-constructing the curriculum, nor would we have been able to see his peers and the broader learning community engaging in collaboration and dialogue to co-construct knowledge. The role of the pedagogical approach used in the treehouse was recognised as enacting their values and beliefs about education and their image of the child as competent and capable and thus became the inspiration for continued re-imagining of pedagogy in primary as demonstrated through the next illustration; sustainability inquiry project.

Sustainability inquiry project

At the time of the study the learning communities on the primary side of the school were engaging in a whole school inquiry on sustainability. This inquiry was described as "open ended" and allowed for each of the learning communities to develop the projects in their own way. Sue, a teacher who came from the Treehouse with a group of children to a primary classroom, described how the inquiry into sustainability was developed in her classroom:

> *So, ours was based on our discussions in the first few weeks, we talked about what sustainability meant, how our environment is affected by our waste. And then as we got into about week 4, really enjoyed meeting up with the other educators in my group, because we had some discussions about where to go next. We looked at the different areas our groups were headed towards, and we came up with three different areas that we could see that it was the majority of children that were interested in that area. So, what we then did was we went to the children and gave them the options, and said, "Choose where you want to be" and actually that was pretty even, they selected which group they wanted to go into. Where children have got a really strong interest in animals, straight away they knew that's what they wanted to do. So, for each group there was an automatic connection with some of the children, so it was really good.*

Figure 7: Artwork by Sydney

Sue described how the projects evolved across each of the three topics as informed by the children's interest and wonderings:

> *One group, they were focusing on animals and they went to the zoo, and they talked about habitats and all relating to sustainability, so how animal's habitats have not been sustained over the years, and how we can help them to continue to be able to survive, how we survive. Each chose an animal and then they looked into the animal, what their needs were and what their habitat looked like. So, they went to the zoo and that was part of their research, so that was good. So that's all up on one wall, and there's a map of all the different habitats that they were talking about.*
>
> *The other group, they were looking at all things natural, so they were looking at planting of the different things. I think they were looking at potatoes at the time, they were pulling up all the potatoes that are in our gardens, we have a veggie garden. They looked at life cycles of animals that, like insects and stuff like that which are in the garden. They cooked the food as well, so everything that's natural that we use, and how we sustain ourselves as human beings, so that was that one.*
>
> *My one, we looked at reducing, reusing and recycling. So, we were looking at the wastage that we use, the plastics, how we can recycle that plastic, and also how we can stop using so much plastic. So the children looked at metals and glass and whether that was a possibility of using that. We went for a visit down to the beach and we cleaned up the beach, the closest beach around here, and that was really good. We also made solar powered ovens, so that was actually on the request of a couple of children in that group, that they wanted to use some recycled materials, and also see how they cannot use electricity to cook something. We tried cooking marshmallows [but] it*

didn't [work] unfortunately. We had a couple of obstacles which we did discuss. We talked about the fact that there was wind on the day and the temperature didn't stay constant, it dipped a little bit lower after we put it out, and that some of the boxes weren't airtight. In our discussions we talked about how we could fix those issues so, we came up with ideas to fix them. This week we're actually going to give it another go, so we've fixed those, we've come up with some ideas and hopefully this week we get some melted marshmallows. We also [did] a collection of rubbish and we analysed how we use our rubbish and what rubbish we use the most.

As with the illustration from Treehouse, the teachers from Gumwood were also noticing children's interests and wonderings and then using that to inform their invitations for engaging in an inquiry project taken on by the school. Once children become a part of an inquiry group they continued to engage in dialogue with their peers and primary teachers to make decisions about the direction of the project based on their wonderings, theories and questions. The children took on the role as both learner and teacher within and across their collaborative groups. Observation notes provided insight into how children engaged in collaborative learning during inquiry work:

During an observation Sue and a teaching colleague brought their two groups together and invited them to share their knowledge to create a habitat for an animal. The children were organised in small groups consisting of members from both inquiry strands. The children were asked to share their research and knowledge from each focus of inquiry to create a habitat for a chosen animal. The children were observed discussing various ideas, negotiating in making decisions, and developing a plan. The children then went to the Creative Room (pseudonym), a shared space in the school that housed various recycled materials, to collect materials they then used to collaboratively create their habitat. It was the end of the term which marked the end of the inquiry project and thus these habitats brought their learning together as a conclusion.

In critically reflecting on her past experiences within other figured worlds of schooling, Liz spoke about the boundaries often placed on learning, "Schools seem to have this thing about scope [and sequence] because you can't do frogs twice in 2 years. And I think, well you can actually, because you might have a different focus one year to that year." Liz challenged the notion of needing to plan the school curriculum in advance and described the difference she experienced at Westside, "What I like is that there's a broader approach. So, you might have a project for a term." While the life of a project at Westside was typically a term, Liz suggested that this was not a steadfast rule and that there was freedom to extend these projects:

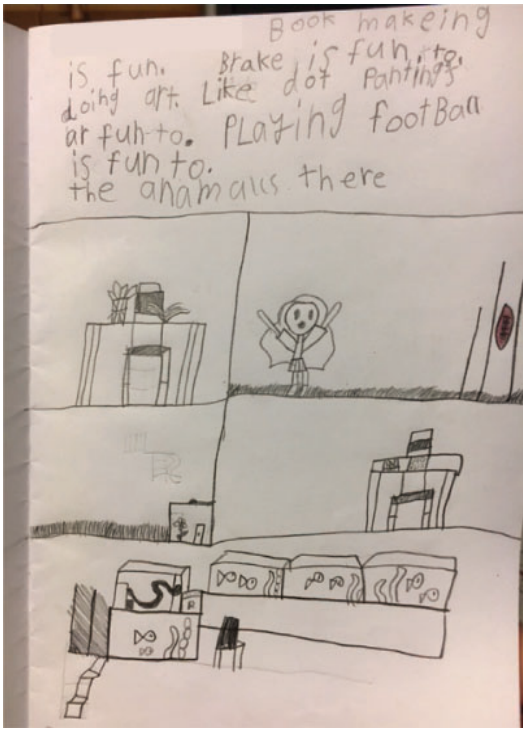


Figure 5: Artwork by Sara

So, sustainability, well that really could be for a year. So, my sustainability, one the threads of it are still going on in term [2] because I can't just leave it. It should be lifelong, it should be something that we're continually talking about and learning about and thinking about because it's a really big concept.

Liz described the school policies and structures as being important in providing teachers with time and space to follow children's interests. She also suggested they were important in offering an interpretation of the Australian Curriculum that is congruent to teachers' pedagogical views:

I don't find the Australian Curriculum as a challenge. I think that everything's in there that we want to do. All the capabilities are there and I think it's how you interpret it. Perhaps that's where the school policies start to fit in, in how that all gets interpreted.

Dialogic encounters with children occurred at the end of term one and provided an opportunity to observe children preparing to share their inquiry projects and other learning through a school wide exposition open to the broader community. During an observation, a small group of children excitedly shared their

preparations for the learning exposition which included documentation, photo's, children's group projects and books they had been making. Two children proudly explained how they were going to distribute their books to a wider audience during the learning exposition:

Sarah: Week 10 we put our books everywhere and then we give them our books and they start looking in it. And because we're going to photo copy heaps and then they can have our books.

Kim (clarifying): But we keep the one we originally made because they're our books.

As with the inquiry project, book making also provided children with an opportunity to be active agents in their learning and sharing of that learning. Children were referred to as "authors" and talked about "publishing" their finished work. Bookmaking was a common interest of the children as demonstrated by the books and drawings participant children created for the researcher.

When asked about what they liked about school many of the children said things like, "I like to do book making" and "book making is fun". Others drew pictures of what they liked about school and included illustrations that represented bookmaking. The positioning of bookmaking alongside statements like, "school is fun", "I like my teacher", "I like my friends" and "I like the playground" suggests that bookmaking was a positive aspect of children's everyday experiences at Westside.

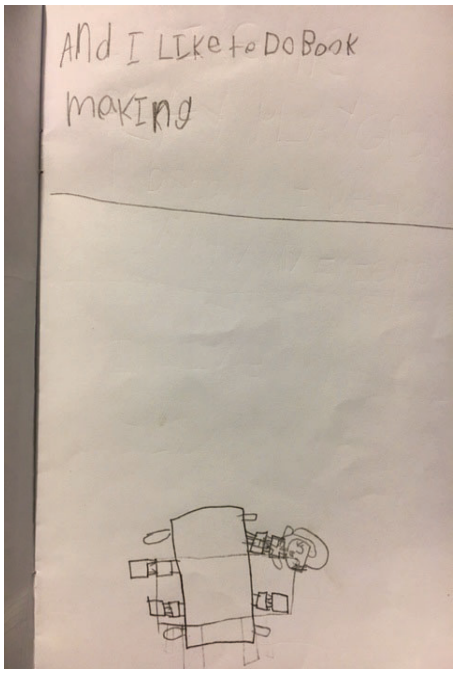


Figure 6: Artwork by Kim

The sharing of learning through book making and interactive presentations such as the learning exposition demonstrates how reporting was reconceptualised to align with the values and beliefs of the school community. This approach was widely supported by parents/carers.

Sue described parents/carers as being supportive of the pedagogy being used and the methods for sharing children's learning:

> *We've got a lot of good support, and particularly in our classroom, of families that are just really interested in what their children are doing, so there was quite a good amount that came into see [the learning exposition].*

Parents confirmed their support for the learning experiences their children engaged in at Westside. During a group parent interview, parents/carers from the primary side of the school shared important aspects of their experiences from the re-imagined pedagogy being used:

> *Inside the room there is always something going on. There is a feature of everything that the kids have been involved in and so it's nice to be able to go around the room and see what your child has said in something.*
>
> *It's just so nice and Jim wanting to invite me in and he goes, "I've written another book, can you come in and help me finish it off or can I read it to you?" So, I find that it's not you drop him off at school and you expect the bell to go and they're all sitting down cross legged and they are getting their names marked off like we use to. They have been given that absolute freedom. They have a choice on what they want to participate in.*
>
> *There is no push- there is no stress to be confident and it's allowing them to develop those skills and that resilience along the way.*
>
> *It's very gentle and it's rewarding for us parents to see your child [is progressing]. He's coming home [and] just coming up with all these facts and "you're seven, how do you know that?" or you know the interesting part is they've put everything together and they have come up with like a philosophy.*
>
> *And they have a real passion for books and for reading, ever since the Treehouse. That was the real big focus just having a passion for reading.*

We all choose Westside for a reason [and] of the people [who] go to the school because they live in the zone. They just went wow the school is just amazing what it offers and how our children have developed. So yeah, a huge credit to the teachers. For me they are more of a facilitator or more of a mentor, maybe a mentor inviting them. They are teaching them, but they are allowing them to teach themselves or to direct their learning.

I think Allen, the principal had a lot to do with it as well. Yeah, I think they have helped to build a lot of confidence in the kids through their book making, through calling them authors rather than readers and they don't have the readers that we use to have, they are the reader and I think that's really helped build the kids' confidence around books and around reading and writing.

Significant to re-imagining the figured world of Westside was enacting their image of the child as competent and capable across the school. Engaging children in important decisions about the curriculum and providing opportunities for them to explore and test their theories proved beneficial in creating continuity between the Treehouse primary side of the school. Sue described the impact re-imagining the pedagogy in the primary years has had on children's transitions, "The transitions have been really [good] with no problems." Dialogic encounters with children and parents/carers provided insight into the experiences they had as a result of re-imagining the primary pedagogy.

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy

From the two illustrations above we can see the negotiation of the Reggio Emilia principles, Nature Play and the Nunga way to inform a local approach. Table 4 below highlights the traces of each perspective found within the two illustrations.

Table 3: Data analysis – Westside Primary School

Incidents from illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy	Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts	Nature Play	Nunga Way
The creation and value of an outdoor learning environment seen throughout site and evidenced in both illustrations	• Environment, space and relations	• Outdoor and engaging with nature is significant	• Touching, connecting • Link to culture, community and country • Hands-on, experiential, outdoor, land-based
Both illustrations happened as a result of the open schedule with long stretch of uninterrupted free exploration	• Organisation of time and space	• Importance of time, space and materials to engaging with nature	• DIY • Connected, contextual, independent learning
Within both illustrations, child and teachers were Co-constructing the curriculum. In the mining hill illustration the child taking the lead to share his learning with his peers	• Child as competent and capable • Learning is a process of individual and group construction • Democracy		• All together • Peer tutoring and team work
The mining hill illustrations shows problem solving about children taking the rocks	• Progettazione • Child as competent and capable • Democracy		• Interacting, cooperating-working together to support each other

Mining hill illustration shows the development of a museum to share learning. Throughout both illustrations teachers engaged in pedagogical documentation to make the journey visible	• Research • Educational documentation • Hundred languages of children		• Producing and celebrating
Project on the mining hill led to teachers and children engaging in a museum project to explore culture	• Child as competent and capable • Hundred languages of children		• Teach through culture rather than just teaching about culture
Small group inquiry-based projects focused on sustainability	• Research • Learning is a process of individual and group construction	• Understanding and caring for nature	• Connecting to the land • Interacting, cooperating-working together to support each other
Sustainability project demonstrated the sharing learning through: • Collaboration across groups • learning exposition • Bookmaking	• Child as competent and capable • Hundred languages of children • Learning is a process of individual and group construction • Educational documentation		• Producing and celebrating
Both illustrations highlighted children's choices in learning	• Child as competent and capable • Democracy		• DIY- Connected, contextual, independent learning

As outlined in Table 4 above, there were common threads across the three philosophical perspectives. These common threads focused on valuing nature, providing children with opportunities for free explorations in the out-door learning environment, and provoking care and agency for the land. The attention to the importance of our natural world from the Nature Play perspective and the responsiveness to culture and connection to the land outlined in the Nunga Way have contributed to a contextual understanding of the Reggio Emilia principle of the environment as a teacher.

Similarly, the Reggio Emilia principles and the Nunga Way can be seen across the remaining illustrations as being brought into dialogue. The cultural lens used within the Nunga Way contributed to contextualising the Reggio Emilia principles. For instance, the notion of DIY from the Nunga Way provided a contextual perspective of the image of the child as competent and capable. Children engaged in DIY show independent learning as they make decisions about what they do and the materials, tools and space they use. The continued message about the importance of checking their feelings about their own performance and the importance of this to developing confidence in moving to higher levels also positions the child as competent in knowing themselves as learners. The Reggio Emilia principles provoked deep thinking about the image of the child, role of the teacher and pedagogical documentation to shape leaders and teachers, understandings, values and enactments across the school. We can see an example of this in how the teachers choose to document children's learning. For the leaders and teachers at Westside Primary school this critical reflection has been important in re-imagining their pedagogy and the congruency of this pedagogy across the school campus. As demonstrated by the stories and perspectives shared by children, families, teachers and leaders bringing multiple perspectives into dialogue has contributed to positive experiences that have created a community of learners, thinkers and doers.

Summary

Westside Primary School has a long history in re-imaging pedagogy. However, Rinaldi's (2013) diagnosis of South Australia's early childhood system as being fragmented served as a catalyst for re-imagining how they might engage teachers from the Treehouse and primary teachers as co-authors of their figured world (Holland, et al. 1998).

This case is significant as it provides insight into what is possible when a school community comes together to re-imagine their figured world. Westside's long history of re-imagining pedagogy is important to acknowledge as the time and space they dedicated early on to engaging with families and teachers in critical dialogue around values and beliefs has contributed to the supportive learning community that was observed throughout this study. This signifies how important being open to engaging with multiple perspectives is to building a sense of community and re-imagining pedagogy to reflect the values and beliefs of that community.

Bringing the Reggio Emilia principles into dialogue with the Nunga Way and Nature Play provided an opportunity for leaders and teachers to re-imagine their pedagogy in ways that reflect the shared values of the school community. As a result of dialogic encounters (Freire, 1993) traces of each of these perspectives can be seen throughout the culture of this learning community. As the importance of continued critical reflection is strongly valued, the leaders and teachers at Westside see their pedagogy as always in a state of transformation as they continue to engage in dialogue with their colleagues, children and families.

Many families travel long distances to attend Westside Primary School because they want to be a part of a learning community that differs from their own experiences of schooling. The concern about continuity across the school provoked leaders and teachers to explore how pedagogy can be re-imagined throughout the school. The illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy have shown the opportunities these pedagogical changes provided to their learning community. Most notably it has provided an opportunity for children to engage in rich learning experiences that connect to their life worlds and empowered children to be co-constructors of knowledge. As seen in the dialogic encounters with children and parents/carers, their experiences of re-imagined pedagogy have shown they have been an instrumental part in the co-construction of culture.

City Centre Childcare Centre and Preschool

Context

City Centre Children's Centre and Preschool is a long day childcare centre that includes a preschool. The site is owned by The Department for Education and funded by a combination of state and federal government support and parent fees. Located within the CBD in Adelaide, the centre services families who live nearby and parents/carers who commute to work in the city. These families are heterogeneous, so the community of children is diverse. The daily occupancy is 61 children across three rooms, infants, toddler and preschoolers. Long day childcare operates daily Monday to Friday and the preschool four days a week. There is one director, three teachers, 12 educators[1], and a chef. The centre has two outdoor areas, one extending from the babies room, and another flowing easily from the toddler and preschool rooms at the rear. City Centre also makes regular use of community facilities, for example, nearby parks and a library, and cultural institutions in the city, with the children and accompanying staff making frequent visits to these sites. The centre also participates in a local community garden and has a strong reputation in the early childhood field as an innovator and leader of practice. Teacher Kristine explained the quite dramatic changes instituted at the centre approximately four years ago:

> *I think the big challenge for us at the beginning was to rethink the way we worked as a team and the way we understood programs, for want of a better word, for the children, so what we – so we almost tipped upside down what we were doing because we realised that what we were doing wasn't actually listening to the child, listening to the children, we weren't seeing them as a group that was working together, we were seeing them very much as individuals.*

Upon taking the leadership role at the site years earlier, the Director began a process of deeply engaging with the EYLF, using the curriculum framework to drive teachers' and educators' thinking and practice. Upon that basis, beginning with learning stories inspired by the work of Carr and Lee (2012), the site's pedagogical practice began to change. The Director appointed two full time early childhood teachers to provide the day-to-day pedagogical leadership needed. Then she was offered the opportunity to join the partnership for the Rinaldi residency which provided the next stimulus for re-imagining childhood at the centre. The depth of director and lead staff involvement in the residency was a critical step, giving the setting a set of principles with which to engage, another stimulus to rethink the work of the site. The reflections of Kristine, a teacher at the site provides some insights into this history:

> *We weren't listening to them with all of our senses and all of our being, I don't think. We were turning out individual programs and group programs by the term and then evaluating but not necessarily connecting with the children in their lives and the really rich learning that's built into the everyday moments that we have together. So, we changed the way – we almost threw out everything that we had been doing.*

Kristine's description of the high level of dissatisfaction with thinking and practice shows clearly the strength of the desire for change amongst many staff. There was a strong desire to find a different image of the child. Engaging with the Reggio Emilia principles, the staff decided that the image of the competent child better matched their values. The Reggio Emilia principles prioritised democracy in everything and regarded children as having rights from birth. This approach was respectful of children, seeing them as authentic participants in their learning. It recognised children's extraordinary capacity to express their ideas, and to research their world, looking for meaning in everything they do. The Reggio Emilia principles recognised children as members of a group rather than always focusing on the individual. It also recognised the power of the environment in education. Another element, documentation as an ongoing process that informed the planning of learning, attracted the team.

These Reggio Emilia principles reflect elements of the principles of the EYLF. For example, Principle 5 describes as most desirable in early years settings, "a lively culture of professional inquiry" (Australian Government, 2009, p. 13). The National Quality Standard (NQS) (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, 2018) Quality Area 1.2.1 similarly promotes reflection through intentional teaching that requires teachers/educators to be "deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in decisions and actions".

This decision by staff to provide a much better learning environment for children as a group, not only as individuals links closely with the EYLF outcome regarding children's development of interdependence

1 While within this report we used the term "teacher" to refer to individuals charged with the education and care of young children, it is recognised that within this context that individuals' qualifications delineate between whether one is considered a teacher or an educator. We consider both to be equally important. We use teacher/educator throughout this case study. Instances where they are individually named refer to their qualifications.

as well as autonomy. The outcome focuses on their development of identity through relationships with others in a community. The EYLF notion of 'belonging' encapsulates this idea. As teacher Kristine described, the team searched for a way to become much more closely attuned to the children and what was important to them in their lives both as individuals but also importantly as a group.

The decision to reform the work at the centre including its physical shape from the ground up, and the work that has taken place since, exhibited considerable bravery as in some senses it was a step into the unknown. It is always easier to continue with existing practice, even when it seems less than satisfactory, rather than beginning again from the foundations.

Data collection

After an initial meeting with the whole research team, the researcher allocated to City Childcare Centre booked some initial times with the Director and staff. She attended the following occasions: during a staff professional development session after hours, a walk around with two teachers, observation in the infant and toddler rooms, lunch for the preschool children, individual interviews with the Director and two teachers, observation of two team planning sessions, and a focus group with six parents. Some notes the researcher made at a presentation by the centre at a national conference in November 2017 were also included, however all other data were collected between March and June 2018.

Table 4: Data collection methods – City Centre Childcare Centre and Preschool

	Individual dialogic encounters	Group dialogic encounters	Participant informed methods
Leader	• Lisa* (director)		• Individual interview • Conference presentation: Re-imagining Childhood • Lead role in after-hours staff professional development meeting
Teachers	• Kristine* Faith*	• Walk around with the two teachers	• Observation of 2 team planning meetings
Parent/Carer		• 6 parents	• Focus group meeting
Children			• Observation in infant toddler rooms • Lunch with preschool children
			• Jane* (chef) Observation principally in the lunch period

*pseudonyms

Perspectives used to inform practice

Several perspectives were employed at the centre to inform practice. These principally included the provocation of the Reggio Emilia principles, the EYLF and the NQS. Each is explained briefly below.

Reggio Emilia principles

The centre had been engaging with Reggio Emilia principles for about eight years however made significant changes to centre philosophy, thinking, practice and the environment in the last five years in response to the Rinaldi report (2013). In this total reformation process, the Reggio Emilia principles were used as a kind of filter through which to examine every decision regarding the centre's direction.

The Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Australian Government, 2017) curriculum has many synergies with the Reggio Emilia principles. Key ones include children positioned as able and active participants, as

researchers who are seeking meaning in their worlds. In terms of identity, in each they are presented as strong in self, valued, contributing community members, who communicate their ideas in many ways.

The National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (NQS) positions children as knowledgeable and contributing learning partners, whose cultures and interests drive the curriculum. The documentation of learning is foregrounded in both the Reggio Emilia principles and the NQS as part of the learning process, however in the latter, the documenter is a teacher. In contrast, the Reggio Emilia principles see the documentation of learning as engaging all participants, and as integral to making learning at all stages visible. The NQS, in contrast, positions children and families as the recipients of that documentation, rather than participants.

Other influences

To enact the program, the centre has purchased and located in the staff planning room a rich supply of resources to support staff thinking about practice. Teacher Faith observed:

> *We've certainly invested some money into buying books and videos and they're really useful and the staff team do [use them] so that's it's simple. Just having those books on hand is actually really important and we sit in here and have our reflection meeting and you think, oh, somebody's always reading something. Staff are also members of Early Childhood Australia, and other early childhood associations.*

An example of a text used to inform work at the centre includes Pelo's work (2007) on emergent curriculum. Pelo's notion of an emergent curriculum, comparable with the Reggio Emilia principle of progettazione, is a source of inspiration (noted as used in the researcher's observation of team planning sessions). Pelo's work on truly listening to children is entirely commensurate with that of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, which employs the term 'listening pedagogy'.

Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy

Two examples of re-imagined pedagogy which illustrate the philosophical approach and what it looks like in the work of the centre follow. One focuses on the food project and the second on an exploration of paint and paper called here the 'Black and White Paint and Paper Project'.

The Food Project

In her interview for this project, the director gave some insights into the thinking around re-imagining childhood in her centre. A principal focus was the Food Project.

Food is central to all early years services and yet often conducted as a kind of transactional process that does not receive much interrogation and critique. Regarded in this way, food, its preparation, delivery, consumption and clean up sits outside the curriculum. This centre brought food and its consumption fully into the curriculum. Centre Director, Lisa, described the project and its driver role in the re-imagining process. Lisa explained their reasoning:

> *The Food Project is something [that's] been the vehicle I guess for a lot of the changes in some ways or it's a good illustration of the changes and beginning from the fact that in food we see so much potential for learning so learning isn't separate from our everyday lives but it's actually woven into our everyday lives. The outcome of that is that the learning is richer and our everyday lives are also richer and the Food Project will always be I think part of our identity as a site because it touches everybody's life. You can't get away from the Food Project, it's always there – it is what makes us who we are in a lot of ways.*

Lisa also commented upon how the project enabled cultural inclusion with their diverse community, "So we are very multi-cultural and that's reflected within that Food Project as well", consistent with respect for diversity, EYLF principle four.

The decision to rethink from the bottom the preparation and consumption of food illustrates several Reggio Emilia principles. The image of the child as competent, and therefore able to be a full participant in their world, is a primary one. The children were put in charge of the preparation of the eating space

including table setting, transportation, serving and clean up, as well as consumption. The broad range of dishes prepared respected their diverse cultures. As Lisa stated:

> *Our kitchen is central physically to our space but the food that comes from it and the sense of community and the sense of welcome and the sense of the cultures that come together and blend together happen in that central part of our centre and move out from there to all the other corners of it so it touches everybody's lives.*

The decision to find a way to prepare and present food that embraced the cultures of the children and families in the service demonstrated both the NQS 1.1.2 quality descriptor regarding building programs on children's knowledges including cultural, and also in EYLF Outcomes 1 and 2 regarding both embracing and building upon children's home cultures as well as expanding their perspectives regarding diversity.

In the conference presentation, mentioned earlier as part of the data, teacher Faith told how the centre began the project by videoing meal times to see what they were currently doing. She said, when they looked at the video they saw that children were passive receivers, while the adults were moving, serving, cleaning, organising, controlling, and helping from beginning to end. Children's right to participate was not visible. There was a disconnect between the centre's values and its actions. Faith said that as the centre staff engaged in the food project they came to the understanding that the project was about the right of children to nutritious food that was prepared with love and care, and also children's right to be able to fully participate in meals and to be able make some decisions about the food they would eat. This decision illustrates the enactment of the Reggio Emilia principle of educational documentation, that is to analyse mealtimes to see what was really happening. It also shows children's as possessing rights to participate in their lives as fully as possible, and as competent and able to do so.

The refurbishment of the centre included lowering the kitchen counter, so that the children could easily engage with the people who work in the kitchen. Rather than being positioned in an out of the way space, the kitchen was located centrally and seen as a place of encounter for children, their families, teachers and educators, and of course the chef, and that was in some sense familiar and welcoming of all.

Furthermore, the spaces where food was eaten needed to be transformed to enable children to participate. The spaces needed to reflect the centre's espoused values. Dining tables, dedicated to meal times, and set by children, with crockery, glassware, cutlery and flowers, enabled a welcoming and unhurried meal space. The preschool (3-5-year olds) dining area was furnished with a dresser that contained cutlery and china crockery and glassware and stored in a way that was easily accessible to children in every step of preparation of the dining area. Teacher Kristine reported, 'Children showed powerfully and beautifully their capacity to participate'. They wanted to serve each other as well as themselves. Parents made similar comments:

Parent: I like the kitchen also being part of it as well. So that the kids get to see everything that's going on.

Parent: Open. Yep.

Parent: And it's not just closed away behind a door or wall.

Observations conducted in the centre focusing on the food project revealed children climbing frequently on low stools placed just under the counter to pass over their fruit and greet the chef in the morning. A parent commented on the high level of child participation in meals, "It's sort of driven by the kids rather than this is what we're kind of doing and they'll kind of fit within those confines, so, it's always evolving." The researcher observed that at lunchtime children from the toddler room arrived to transport their meal to their dining area, via a tray mobile.

The lowering of the kitchen counter and the refurbishment of the dining area shows in action the Reggio Emilia principle regarding the environment as a teacher. These elements were arranged in such a way to encourage interaction and communication with chef Jane, with children being physically able to act to a degree autonomously in that environment, as well as to explore what they were eating.

Director, Lisa, referred to the toddler food trolley in an after-hours staff professional learning session that, consistent with centre's philosophy, began with an evening meal. She wanted the team to focus on how the trolley taking food to the toddler room might become a learning opportunity/ project focus for the children. One idea was how children might represent the trolley. She asked staff to consider:

- *What to focus on in depicting the trolley? It looks different from different angles, eg lower, higher, or sideways, end ways (only two wheels visible)*
- *The mechanics of how it works*

- *The shadow of the trolley*
- *Other children could watch the video as a stimulus*
- *Value of repeated watching to see more, revisiting but for what purpose?*
- *Trolley as a symbol of sharing good, a connection to the kitchen that not all children can see*
- *The attractiveness of a previous trolley for children as they experimented with it in the outdoor play area*
- *Filming the trolley from the front as it is being pushed to see the children's faces as they did that action (the usual back view misses children's expressions)*
- *The trolley clip is a strong pivot because it raises lots of questions.*
- *How to capture the beginning of an event/action? Often educators see something to document but miss the beginning. How to address that?*

The Reggio Emilia principle concerned with professional development is manifest in this in-house professional learning session. The director and her team understood the need for a continual cycle of learning. Rosters are the usual hurdles to staff working together in long day childcare, so the team met after hours, beginning with a meal, to examine their practice.

The Reggio Emilia principle of the right for children to fully participate was very evident in all aspects of the dining area preparation, the serving of food and the clean-up process. When the time came, the researcher observed volunteer children setting the tables, under the supervision of an educator, who guided the children with open-ended questions about the placement of bowls, forks and glasses for each diner. When all the bowls for one table were placed only on one side, an educator asked the child involved about how they might make enough room for everyone to sit down. Another child dropped a china plate accidentally and it was swept up quickly and without admonishment or fuss. Children carried large jugs of water to the tables and flowers in vases for the centre piece. Once the chef indicated the meal was ready, the children assembled and sat with an educator until all children had arrived, then moved to the dining tables. Designated children brought the food to their table and then children served each other or waited patiently for the server to put food on their plate, and later to take a second serve if they felt like it.

Parents were very supportive of the food project, and the learning involved regarding participation:

Parent: I love the food project. I just think that's such a great project.

Parent: Yeah, the food project over the last couple of years has been a highlight.

Parent: I think it just teaches kids so much, not just about food but also about sharing and taking turns and it, yeah, just, and practising. And I go out with other friends who have got kids and see how their children behave at a dinner table and [child's] always the one who's like, "Would you like some food? Would you like?".

Parent: Here's some tongs. I'll pick it up for you.

Parent: So, I really enjoyed seeing that and seeing how we can incorporate that into our home life as well.

Teacher Faith observed the learning regarding inclusion that was evident in the actions of a two-year old:

> *One of the two-year-old children collected all the bowls and put all the bowls around the table in the morning for the children and then made sure that everybody had a bowl so if there was a chair then that didn't have a bowl and somebody sat down, she made sure that they did get one. So, an understanding that everybody has a right to be part of that time in the day.*

A parent observed that she thought the meal process was a valuable learning experience regarding participation by waiting your turn:

> *While there is this clear opportunity for children to just sort of lead the way in how they want to play, I think it's also good that there is in part group time activities where there's actually a coming together and sitting down and a discipline of sitting in a spot and listening and paying attention and participating and waiting your time and all of that.*

Educators sat and ate with the children at each table, chatting and supporting. There was no hurry and younger children in particular took time to handle the food, to explore it with their hands, their nose and mouth. Once children finished eating they took their plate to a station set up on a low table nearby,

containing a small bucket, a scraper, and a second bucket with soapy water. Clearly familiar with the routine, children scraped their bowls, piled them up and put their cutlery into the soapy water, then wiped their hands. Other children piled up the glasses and, with the now largely empty platters, returned both to the kitchen. When all other children had left, a three-year old remained, still taking her time with her meal, exploring the food and chatting with an educator about it. As she ate, other children had collected wet cloths from the kitchen and were wiping the tables and stools, returning vases of flowers to the sideboard and bringing all back into order ready for the next meal.

A parent observed that centre meal times demonstrated the educators' respect for children as capable and competent participants, consistent with the Reggio Emilia principle of the child as competent:

> *I think the food things a really good example with that, that they've now changed how they approach, that the children do serve themselves when they're very young and help carry the plates out and do all of that stuff, rather than just being served by the teachers. And I think that was very much the educator learning from the children about what the children wanted to do and could do, rather than, oh we're the grown-ups, so we have to serve them and whatever. It seems to have very much changed the approach here for the better, probably, for everyone.*

The Food Project extended to the centre's garden. In the refurbishment of the outdoor area a suitable section was allocated to a substantial garden, so that children could see the process from growing to consumption. As the centre's outdoor spaces is not large, the centre also had another garden space in a local community garden with the children involved as gardeners. Another stimulus for the establishment of a productive garden was that, as one teacher observed in the walk around, 'families nearby often live in places with no gardens so this is an important experience for the children'. This point was confirmed by one parent who said, "Particularly when there's so many people who do live in the city – we don't have a garden. I can't even keep a pot plant alive! But, I feel then at least C's getting that here."

Children's participation in this garden was, thus, an important and for some a new experience. In the walk around, a teacher noted that the garden was a key pivot for children's morning transition into the centre, as they were eager to see what had grown since they last looked. She recounted that when the garden was established a gate was included in the design, however in time staff noted that children showed great respect for the plants, so it was always left open.

Parental participation in the Food Project

The centrality of the food project to all aspects of the centre's philosophy, thinking and practice is well illustrated by the participation of parents/carers. Their involvement was not as the receivers of news about their child's progress, but rather as participants in the project. As one parent observed, she felt consulted, and involved in a two-way communication about the project:

> *I remember with the Food Project, there was a lot of interest in seeking feedback from parents about what food meant to them in their culture as well and how they thought about food at home. And I think a lot of that has been fed back into the project moving forward, which has been good. So, it's not – I don't think it's just one way – we're telling you what's happening.*

Two parents also noted the impact of the food project on meal times in their homes:

> *And I know that the food, the active participation that the children were having with [Jane] and with the food process, probably inspired a lot more home activities in that area as well. Which I think is really important for children to get their hands dirty and learn about that stuff and be comfortable with making food, because particularly in current culture, fast food, and it's important to have a healthy attitude to food. And I think that really encouraged it, not only within the centre but also more broadly in the children's lives.*

> *I think that E recently, in the last few months anyway, I've noticed that she's been very – E's 4, 5 next month – she's very focused on when she's eating, where has this come from? Is it from she says, "from the ocean, the farm or the shop?".*

Another parent commented on how supportive they found the high quality of food to their parenting, which built trust because they knew that their child was well fed during the day:

> *But there's that trust that you know he's had such a good day otherwise and that also comes to food sometimes as well. Where he won't eat the family meal and I think well, if you just have some rice – I think at least he's had a really good meal during the day.*

Summary

The Food Project illustrated the major principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, while also showing practice that exemplified EYLF principles, practices and outcomes, and NQS concepts. Those most fully enacted include the image of the child as competent participants in their world, the expanded role of parents/carers as participators in and contributors to learning, not as receivers of information about their child's learning, and the role of the environment in enabling participation, thus enhancing learning. Finally, the importance of staff professional development in making meaning, creating a continuous cycle of learning.

Black and white paint and paper project

The second illustration of the centre's engagement with Reggio Emilia principles concerns the black and white paint and paper project. The two and three-year old children at the centre were involved in an exploration of paint and paper and the potentialities involved. The project arose from several stimuli. These included, children's expressed interest in light and shadow within the centre, the Colours of Impressionism from the Musee d'Orsay at the South Australian Art Gallery and the ideas of Pelo (2007) concerning standing on the edge of colour, that is, limiting the palette. This work is also consistent with the EYLF Outcome 3 regarding handling equipment. Teachers and educators wanted the children to experience the act of painting, holding a brush, and painting on paper. They wanted to see how children employed painting as a language of expression, developed intentionality with the materials, and how the children interacted with and responded to these materials. The teachers and educators documented the children's work, and then in their team meeting discussed at length the records they had collected.

As mentioned previously, the centre had discarded much of their previous thinking and practices and had begun a process of rebuilding in an intentional and carefully considered way, using Reggio Emilia principles, together with the EYLF, NQS and other influences, as a filter through which to inform direction. One stimulus came directly from Professor Rinaldi Thinker in Residence during a visit to the centre in her 2012-2013 term. Her provocation was that the centre must find a way for the staff teams to regularly talk and plan together.

The black and white paint and paper project rested on staff having the time to meet together to discuss the project to date, including examining various pieces of documentation assembled and then in the light of the learning intention that they had established for the project, deciding on a way forward. The meeting of staff teams is a crucial point, as it makes the emergent approach being employed possible. It requires organisation of spaces and time, not easily found in a centre that must by the nature of its service, have most staff working on rosters. In response to this provocation, the centre abandoned individual staff planning time, reorganised rosters, and re-purposed the Director's office for team meetings. The director moved her desk into the space with reception. The gatherings were called 'reflection meetings'. As teacher Kristine observed:

> *One of the first challenges that Carla gave to us at this site was to find time for our teams to work together so that happened pretty much at that same time so instead of spending all of this time with the individual people going off to do their, have their non-contact time, programming time, whatever you want to call it, we put the teams together to come together to have conversations about children and their learning and that was really critical to the changes that we made.*

This work shows in practice the Reggio Emilia principle of organisation, which allows space and time to meet. It also is consistent with the notion of progettazione, which is the "process of planning and designing teaching and learning activities, the environment and opportunities for participation" (Rinaldi, 2013, p.33). It is not about preparing a program for a defined period ahead of time. The work is in some ways an exemplar of EYLF Principle 5, 'Ongoing learning and reflective practice', however taken to a deep level in that there is no defined outcome, with doubt and uncertainty considered resources to spur thinking. From the perspective of the Reggio Emilia principles, teachers and educators move from being those who know, to those who may not, which means becoming learners within their practice.

Kristine commented upon how programming as a team became a process for teams, not a static plan that would be enacted as planned. While describing the fascination of this process, she also noted the challenges involved in moving from a static program to a dynamic process, and the courage involved:

> *So, reflection meetings, that kind of documentation became a process itself rather than just a product. I am never comfortable. And that's a positive. So, I never get bored and I am always learning and I am always challenged.*

In a way it's much easier to do that, isn't it, to follow the rules and to tick the boxes rather than to actually have to think and be creative and actually make yourself a bit vulnerable, living with uncertainty and that's quite difficult really because there's even the identity of the teacher has always been the person who has the answers and provides the answers and is the expert in the field where what we're suggesting is that it's not actually like that and we're working together on these questions. To step away from what you've always done, it's not something that most people would relish the thought of so it does take a certain amount of courage, strength, I suppose, belief in what's possible.

Next Kristine focused on how the meetings enable the team to come to understand the meaning of what the children and they as teachers are doing.

Having time out as a team, documenting what the children are saying and doing and then analysing that in regards to, not what they have done as a description, but as, what does this mean and how have they done it.

Kristine also outlined the foundational Reggio Emilia principles of the meetings, those of the image of the child, children as holders of rights and responsibilities, the teacher and children together as researchers, participating with families democratically:

An image of the child is always at the top of everything. The teacher as researcher with the children is, I think all of the principles, you can't say that some are more important than others really but for us here and for where we are at this point in time. I think the principles of participation and the idea of rights and responsibilities as well as an understanding around democracy and how that looks and feels for children and families is probably one of the principles that we've worked most closely with.

Kristine also reflected on the effect of these meetings and the philosophy within which the centre operates on the participation of staff:

We've all had to work together in ways that perhaps we haven't before and it did I think enable some of the educators to become more open in sharing their ideas and in knowing that they would be heard and it would be valued along with everybody else's words and voices.

Furthermore, Kristine talked about the importance of discussion of documentation in the reflection meetings to enable the team to see the children and what they are doing, to think about what has happened and where to go next.

Educational documentation is central to the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, as it drives the learning process forward. As seen in this illustration, in their meeting the teachers kept a focus on the learning intention, at the same time employing the traces of children's learning, [documentation], and other resources like those of Pelo (2007) and Kolbe (2007), to find a way forward for the project. Faith noted:

I think without that you couldn't connect to the idea of re-imagining childhood or seeing the child as competent because if you didn't you wouldn't have anything to document and without the documentation you couldn't see, like that wouldn't be made visible. So, I think documentation is important which is what those meetings are anyway. They are a form of documentation.

The commitment to documentation as an informant regarding children's learning was a theme in the parent interviews. Parents noted the teachers' high level of awareness of their children's learning:

I think there's just a lot of notice of things. And you think it's, it would take quite a lot of attention and time spent to actually notice that kind of stuff happening. Whereas usually you could, oh, they're playing together, whatever, but to actually notice exactly what was happening.

Parents also made comments about how children were positioned as genuine participants in a dynamic process of determining the direction of their learning, and how through this process, they noticed that the teachers found meaning for themselves, and for the children:

Looking at how the kids behaving and then changing what activities they do. Yeah, it's like, but it's sort of driven by the kids rather than this is what we're kind of doing and they'll kind of fit within those confines, so, it's always evolving. And I think that makes it really interesting for the carers as well. They seem to be, from the meetings we've had, they're really fascinated by that.

I think there's very much an appreciation of [how] children can use a material to do what they want to do with it. And to be inventive and creative, rather than, oh, this is, whatever it is, and it

does one thing and we do that, and then we get bored and we move onto something else. I think that's excellent.

The project itself

As part of their practice, the team had themselves documented the project, entitling it, using Pelo's term, 'Standing on the Edge of Colour'. Their documentation included an account of the project's beginning. The project was in progress when the researcher collected the data. For context, the key ideas from the documentation of the beginning of the project are presented:

> *Our initial thought was to give the children a lot of experience and practice with painting. We wanted to support them to develop the skills and control and understanding necessary to use brush, paint, paper, space and time to bring physical competencies, ideas and thought processes to life. We wanted them to fall in love with the potential that these materials have to give visibility to their movements, and to fall in love also with the relationship that they can have with these artistic supports which offer potential for expression of both physicality and of creativity.*
>
> *We were influenced by the notion that materials have two lives—a basic life that requires a knowledge of how to engage: how to hold a brush, how to dip in the paint container, how to wipe the excess paint off so it doesn't drip, how to control the movement of the brush over the paper to make intentional, considered marks, how to use the size and shape of the paper to bring together and give body to all of these things.*
>
> *The documentation of the children's work regarding the learning around the act of painting shows in practice Outcome 3 of the EYLF, 'manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence and skill' (p. 32).*
>
> *The documentation piece then moved on to the idea of painting as a language of expression, also found in the EYLF under Outcome 3, 'children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media' (p. 32).*
>
> *The second life is one of language, of expression, of identity. With a strong set of skills in using these materials in their first life, they have the potential to become a vehicle for expressing ideas, for thinking about the world and the questions and theories that fill it with interest and intrigue.*
>
> *Our questions revolved around the way children perceived themselves in relation to the materials, and how the materials in turn influenced the way the children thought about and worked with them.*
>
> *The documentation was what the EYLF and the NQS call 'intentional teaching', in that it is deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful' (EYLF, p. 15) in decisions and actions.*
>
> *We chose to offer the children a limited palette to begin our research with them. We had read some of Ann Pelo's work and connected with the idea that it was a valid approach to begin with a palette of black and white and stand on what is essentially the edge of colour. We offered white paper and black paint, and then black paper and white paint. These offerings of time and materials happened over a number of days. Children were invited to revisit the materials.*

In their account of the ongoing project the team made the following observations, drawing on the ideas of Alberto Burri (Vecchi, Giudici, Grasselli, & Morrow, 2004):

> *Children seem to grow understandings about materials that could be described as visual literacies. They read the way of engagement into the forms and shapes and tones of the paper offered.*
>
> *This research project has highlighted the beauty of the line. In limiting the palette to black and white there is something of a purity to the movements of the children and the marks that result from these movements. The dialogue of mark and movement is strengthened through the very simplicity of the materials.*
>
> *In working with children the primary focus is, and must always remain, the children themselves, with their own strategies of thought, their knowledge-building processes, and their relationships.*
>
> *So, what we need to seek out and apply when working with the children are some of the processes involved in the creative act, such as synthesis, exploratory tension, the intense relationship with things, symbolic invention, metaphor, evocation and analogy, cultural courage, and expressivity.*

The teacher's role is to be a competent listener to the visual language and to the children's individual and group strategies in order to support the children in a way that is in tune with their autonomous expression.

In their documentation the team commented upon the work of particular children, and the possible interpretations of their and other children's painting decisions.

'May' began with white, moved to black then back to white. Her work was focused and movements controlled, with a series of circular marks weaving their way across the paper. The soft tones that resulted from her use of both black and white make her work subtle in comparison to much of the earlier work she and the other children have created.

Several of the children who have had less experience with these materials chose black paint on black paper. We wonder whether the other children with their greater experience and understanding about the potential within the materials knew that choosing contrasting elements would result in bold lines and shapes. (Observation)

Perhaps this is the way forward for the project—a gentle expansion of the children's understanding and experience of colour, line and form through a careful introduction of differences, both striking and subtle, and the tools to blur and blend the edges of both.

Thomas joined the group at the beginning of the session, and stayed virtually until the end. He was totally engaged for 40 minutes. The fact that he created 2 art works in this time (and worked on his first for most of that time) speaks loudly of the care and intent that guided his strokes and their placement. His lines and shapes were made with thought and care, and the painting grew as if it was a gentle conversation between him and the paper. Perhaps the marks he made were an evolution of themselves—with new ideas born at the appearance of shapes before him. Here is an artist with sophisticated skills in handling the materials to follow his thought processes.

The team then drew some conclusions at that point:

There is an interest in each other's ideas.

While the children work independently, they are in close proximity, and they share space and materials. They can see and hear each other.

We know that children teach children.

We know that the richest learning often comes from moments when children are working with each other.

We wonder now about how we can support this to happen more amongst the children.

The team also decided to laminate two of the children's work and also black and white art work done by Aboriginal Australian artists, and, as stimuli, to offer different configurations of black and white paper to take the investigation to another level.

This documentation reveals the team's deep engagement with and listening to children as learners and researchers, investigating individually and together the properties and affordances of paint and paper. This work illustrates in action the Reggio Emilia principles of listening and learning as a process of individual and group construction and research (Rinaldi, 2013).

The planning process

To convey an understanding of the process that the team used in their reflection meetings, an account of a meeting that largely focused on the black and white project follows. It is intended to be a kind of snapshot to convey the process this team employed.

At their reflection meeting the team began by discussing documentation they had brought with them. The team referred to a folder with annotated photos entitled 'Documentation – exploring the wonder of shadow'. The team also watched an ipad video they had made of children dancing and watching their shadows move as they moved, and also noticing other shadows. The team also brought other documentation with them, including children's art work and a folder of published academic readings to which they referred. During the meeting they also took relevant books from the nearby staff library and referred to them throughout the meeting.

Together the team recounted the journey to date of the black and white project, beginning by examining photos of 3-year-old 'Matilda' showing interest in drawing. One member recalled with joy Matilda's coining of the phrase, 'the line of light'. The teachers made links between the shadows and the black paint currently being used in the black and white project. They also recounted their discussions with parents/carers about restricting the paints employed to black and white paint, and referred to chapter 10 Light and shadow' in Ann Lewin-Benham's book 'Infants and toddlers at work'.

Teachers brought out another folder containing children's artwork. They noted the variations in brushstrokes and the amount of paint used. The team identified commonalities, for example, that children worked more on one side of the paper than the other, usually the one closest to their bodies. They also noted that children seemed to leave a kind of 'invisible' border around their work. A note of this pattern was also made in their project documentation:

> *At our Reflection meeting we looked closely at the children's interpretations of the space and the paint, and wondered about the way they saw and read the edges of the paper...as a border perhaps? It seemed to us that a number of them kept the paint to almost a uniform distance from the edge.*

Further discussion ensued regarding the completed testing of this hypothesis by giving children paper with a border on one side, that is, a smaller contrasting paper stuck on to the backing paper on one half of the paper, thus creating a kind of frame for 50% of the surface. They discussed children's responses to it. Teachers observed that children always seemed to commence painting on the side of the paper that had the border before moving on to the side with no border. Furthermore, they noticed that if children had only black paint and the framed paper was black they still painted black on black, despite it being hard to see. Teachers hypothesised that children interpreted the framed side of the paper as the place to paint. Teachers also observed that children tended to paint a similar shape or image on the non-framed half of the paper as they had done on the framed side. In a further discovery, the teachers noticed that when the activity was tried with preschoolers they had the same response as the toddlers so the decision about where to paint was not age related. Their hypothesis was that the children read the backing paper as a frame, demonstrating a kind of visual literacy.

At this point teachers examined a reading by Pelo (2007) regarding the use of colour with infants and toddlers, then discussed the next step that had occurred in the exploration. Children were given paper that was half white and half black but had no borders. When children were given black paint all commenced to paint on the white side. Furthermore, teachers noticed that with one or two exceptions all children painted on the black and white sides separately. The teachers' hypothesis was that children were reading from the paper what they should do. They also observed that children showed a preference for landscape over portrait mode.

Finally, the team affirmed their decision that no teacher/educator would make a verbal direction or stimuli of any kind to children, however they saw that at times children suggested ideas to each other, or 'caught' and enacted the idea of a child seated near them.

At this point, one team member drew on the idea of Kolbe (2007) that children find the meaning in the painting once it is underway. The idea is that once a child makes a mark, and that stroke suggests a bird for example, they then respond to that shape. In other words, young children don't begin with an idea (unless attempting to emulate the image of a peer), so their painting is informed more about the materials themselves, and a series of spontaneous strokes to see what will happen, which they may then build upon, drawing upon what they know to make meaning.

As can be seen in this process, the team positioned themselves as inquirers into children's learning, using the documentation as a base from which to think and reflect on meaning. Their uncertainty about the meaning of the children's work is evident, so they posed hypotheses to test. Their desire to find out how children would respond to a change in the paper and paint reveals a researcher mind-set.

At this point in the meeting, teacher Kristine asked the question, 'what next?' After some discussion, they decided to next offer children black and white paper in a four quadrant checkerboard and either black or white paint.

To summarise, the team discussed what they had learned, and came to a hypothesis regarding children's responses to this next configuration of paint and paper. They predicted that children manage paint in a particular area so it is expected with the four quadrant paper that children will paint four images. The team also reiterated the value of two stimuli and going slowly.

After the formal meeting was done, teachers told the researcher about the value of reflection meetings. They said that the meetings helped them to stop and consider against the bigger picture, to reflect, consider and plan from there, to ask, what are children communicating? They noted that this way of working creates a much more interesting job for teachers/educators in that it creates meaning for them, because painting is now not just an end point of an activity to be displayed but instead has become a way of them making meaning in their work because it is communicating, it is a 'language' that they can read and build from. The Reggio Emilia principle of the hundred languages of children is clearly in evidence. In this way painting becomes more than developing children's fine motor skills via painting. When teachers/educators take children's language of painting as a communication the children, in turn, are likely to feel the respect for their work and thus become more considered and expressive makers.

Summary

The black and white paint and paper project exemplified at heart the Reggio Emilia principle of progettazione, that is, bringing together ideas from a range of stimuli, including documentation of children's learning. The project comprised an investigation involving children and teachers/educators that does not have a defined outcome but rather positions children and teachers/educators as joint researchers and learners. The focus was on pedagogy, the process of inquiry, through engaging in a process of documenting, and then team reflection in repeated cycles. The cycles of group reflection enabled what the Reggio Emilia Educational Project calls relaunching of the work. Crucial to this pedagogy was centre organisation and structures to enable teams to gather and discuss, that is participate fully, enabling learning for both children and teachers/educators. In this pedagogical approach, parents/carers were not the recipients of their children's learning but rather contributors to the process. The data collected at this early-years setting revealed day to day interactions and structures that enabled the building of a learning community, one that involved children, teachers, educators and parents/carers, positioning all as both learners and teachers. Kristine summed the site's pedagogical approach in these words:

> *It's also inspired by the children and the families that we work with and is responsive to them and that's what makes us unique. I guess, if they [teachers/educators] are open and if they know their families, are prepared to know them [they can] use that relationship to build a pedagogy together really'.*

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy

The two illustrations above show leaders and teachers bringing the EYLF, NQS and other perspectives from their readings into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles. Table 6 below highlights the traces of each perspective found within the two illustrations.

Table 5: Data analysis – City Centre Childcare Centre and Preschool

Incidents from illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy	Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts	EYLF and NQS
The refurbishment of the centre and outdoor area to enable children to participate more fully	• Environment, space and relations	• EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity practice principles: Learning Environments (p.15) and Culture competence (p. 16). • NQS 1.1.3: All aspects of the program maximize children's learning opportunities.

Intentional engagement with focused materials (black and white paint)	• Environment, space and relations	• EYLF Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators; children use the creative arts… to express ideas and making meaning. • EYLF Outcome 3: children manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence and skill. • NQS 1.1.3: Program learning opportunities – all aspects of the program are organised in ways that maximize opportunities for each child's learning. • NQS 1.2.1: Intentional teaching: educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.
Participatory approach, including children, teachers/ educators, parents/carers, and to some extent the broader community in the food project Chef as an educator	• Participation and democracy in everything • Image of the child as competent and capable • Learning is a process of individual and group construction	• EYLF Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners; participate in a variety of rich and meaningful inquiry based experiences. • EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity- 'they have a sense of belonging'. • NQS 1.1.3: Program maximizes children's learning opportunities. • NQS 1.1.2: Child centred; each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions.
Children, teachers/educators and families collaborate as co-learners and co-teachers and inform development of project work	• Participation and democracy in everything • Image of the child as competent and capable • Learning is a process of individual and group construction	• EYLF Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners: follow and extend their interests with enthusiasm, energy and concentration. • EYLF principle 2: Partnerships with families. • EYLF Outcome 4: Children are effective communicators – educators promote learning when they provide sensory and exploratory experiences with natural and processed materials.
Teacher research into and critical reflection of practice Sharing and engaging in critical dialogue about pedagogical documentation during team meetings to inform curriculum and pedagogy	• Reflection and intentionality in all decisions • Progettazione • Research • Pedagogical documentation • Hundred languages of children	• NQS 1.2.1: Intentional teaching: educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. • NQS 1.3.1: Assessment and planning cycle- each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analyzing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection.

Table 6 demonstrates the links between the Reggio Emilia principles and the EYLF and NQS, mandatory national frameworks used in Australian early childhood education. These links are important as they demonstrate shared values and beliefs about pedagogy, the role of the teacher and the image of children and of families. The illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy presented within the City Centre case summary shed light on the possibilities for transformation when bringing the Reggio Emilia principles into dialogue with national frameworks. At City Centre the Reggio Emilia principles served as a catalyst for leaders and teachers to re-imagine their identities. It provided them with a sense of agency to engage with national frameworks in more critically reflective ways. As a result, there was a transformation in their pedagogy that more deeply reflected the principles and outcomes of these national frameworks. And because this site put those national frameworks into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles it created more powerful actions, identifying them as a strong, critical lens that enabled deeper thinking of the meaning of all three perspectives.

Summary

There is considerable interest from readers regarding how individual educational settings engage with Reggio Emilia principles, along with the EYLF and NQS and other influences. This interest focuses on how educational settings employ the Reggio Emilia principles as provocations to re-imagine thinking and pedagogy. This case study provides some insights into how a relatively small long day childcare centre and preschool undertook this process, and the transformative effect on the educational experiences offered to children, teachers, educators and indeed families.

Prior to the Thinker in Residence of Professor Rinaldi in 2012, the centre had been rethinking its practice and making some changes, however the impetus of the *Re-imagining Childhood Report* (Rinaldi, 2013) and the formation of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project provided greater stimulus to that reform process. The decision to rethink its philosophy and pedagogy from their foundations by bringing their practice into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles was a decision about creating a new figured world (Holland et al., 1998) to better meet the evolving educational values and aspirations of teachers, educators, the director and parents/carers.

This case study presented insights into that process from a number of perspectives, those of the director, teachers and parents/carers and via observations of children. In providing these rich descriptions, readers will be able to see the process and depth of transformation, the intentionality and the deep level of engagement that was required of all concerned. This transformation required scrutiny of every part of each day to examine existing pedagogy and question their alignment with the centre's philosophical direction, encapsulated in the Re-imagining Childhood report, the EYLF, the NQS and other influences.

Key principles included children being positioned as capable and worthy of great respect, as co-researchers and thinkers. Educator identity moved away from being the person who knows with children positioned as those who don't, to the notion of a community of learners researching together. The idea of democracy in everything was used as a filter to re think all aspects of centre life. Interactions became learning encounters for all involved, creating a learning community, with abundant resources to match. The processes chosen for use in the transformation enabled 'communing' which built a strong sense of belonging and ownership. With a heightened value given to listening to children's voices, their rights to participate as citizens was more fully enacted. The environment was positioned as a teacher, and so remade in all aspects to enable greater participation and engagement.

Memorial Early Learning Centre

Context

The Memorial Early Learning Centre is a part of an established private K-12 single sex school on an extensive campus close to Adelaide's city centre. The ELC has been in operation for 20 years and offers learning programs for children aged 3-5 years. The school has an open enrolment policy and is culturally and religiously diverse. Students reside in many suburbs of Adelaide and most families are considered socially and economically advantaged.

There are three classes in the ELC, each staffed by an early childhood teacher and a co-educator. With 20 children in each group, there is a 3-year-old group and two-four-year old groups. The three-year-old group of children has a two-year journey in the ELC, and has the same teaching team of a teacher and co-educator over this time. Teachers and co-educators take turns to work with this group and to work with the two four-year-old groups, one of which attends the ELC for one year before starting school.

Children are encouraged to attend for three days per week and can attend up to five days per week. In 2017 the ELC offered a daily schedule from 8.45am-3pm but in 2018 the hours of this service broadened from 8am-5 pm daily, to support families who required extended hours due to work arrangements. Prior to extending hours however, if parents/carers needed childcare for their 4-5-year-old children out of ELC hours they were accommodated in the school OSHC program.

The curriculum at the ELC is based on the EYLF and also influenced by Reggio Emilia principles as well as the school's own positive education and wellbeing programs. The ELC and the school have a reputation for high quality education, as evidenced by the ELC's "exceeding national quality standards" rating through the NQS for early childhood settings.

Each class space features open spaces which can be flexibly arranged to accommodate learning experiences on mat areas and table areas. The class spaces have natural light and are decorated in neutral tones. There are display boards and cases for children's work, and this is displayed in an aesthetically pleasing way, with documentation to explain children's thinking. Low shelving provides children with access to resources. The centre is well resourced, with a store room in each space to enable changing of class resources. There are also clear values evident around the sustainability and care for resources to reduce waste. Each space has a central meeting area which is located adjacent to an electronic whiteboard, a children's bathroom area and shelving with hooks for children's belongings.

Class spaces have access to the outdoor learning environment, a central piazza dining area, and an art studio. There are meeting rooms, a leader's office, staff kitchen and bathroom amenities and an administration office. The outdoor learning area offers sand pits, lawn, bark areas for the provision of climbing equipment, swings and paved areas for art and water play experiences. A hedge encircles the ELC which offers a natural backdrop and reduces noise from neighbouring road and carpark areas. There are attractive garden plantings within the outdoor play spaces. As part of a bigger school, educators can also arrange for the children from the ELC to visit the school library, science centre, school hall, garden spaces and ovals.

Data collection methods

After an initial meeting with the whole research team, the researcher allocated to Memorial ELC liaised with the ELC Director to arrange visiting times to gather some suggestions about aspects of the centre's operation to observe. At the initial interview, in late 2017, it was decided that the researcher would observe one class group and their teacher to capture some important aspects of this group's two-year journey. Also, as there were orientation meetings for new parents/carers at this time, the researcher took the opportunity to observe them. The researcher also attended the evening showing of a collaboratively made class movie, which was used as a talking point with parents/carers from the class in a subsequent group discussion as well as with children from the class, in dialogic encounters. In April 2018, visits were conducted to another class within the ELC and an interview with this class teacher occurred at this time.

Table 6: Data collection methods – Memorial Early Learning Centre

	Individual dialogic encounters	Group dialogic encounters	Participant informed methods
Leader	• Sarah* (director)		• Conference presentation: Re-imagining Childhood • Conference: centre visit • First meeting to welcome new parents/carers for children enrolling in following year
Educator	• Teachers: · Kelly* · Amy*		• 5 class observation visits • 1 preliminary meetings before interview
Parent/Carer	• Nandu* (parent from Kelly's group who could not attend group encounter)	• 4 parents/carers from Kelly's group: · Cara* · Kerri* · Mandy* · Kathy*	
Children		• Group conversation with 4 children from Kelly's class: · Roberto* · Arnav* · Oscar* · Cohen* • Videos of 3 children in Kelly's class: · Roberto · Cohen* · Liam*	• Documentation of learning from the previous 2 years was used to stimulate children's discussion • Children were offered opportunity to draw as a way to share their ideas • Children offered to share their work as moviemakers with the researcher and then discussed this shared experience

*pseudonyms

Perspectives used to inform practice

The Memorial ELC is inspired by many perspectives in education and grounded in early childhood approaches, including the Reggio Emilia principles. Metaphor is a key strategy evident in the ELC's re-imagining. Metaphors are a device to communicate concepts and thinking by relating these to a recognisable image. The use and choice of metaphor has been recognised as a mechanism "through which the given culture perpetuates and reproduces itself in a steadily growing system of concepts" (Sfard, 1998, p.5), and is therefore significant to the way teachers in South Australia re-imagine their practice. The educators in Reggio Emilia make rich use of metaphor, however this, like many other aspects of the approach, cannot and should not just be transplanted into another cultural context. Memorial ELC uses metaphor to connect with a range of educational perspectives. As they are part of a bigger collegiate school, there are also influences which are used in the school which may or may not translate effectively in the ELC context. For instance, the school uses Hattie and Yates' (2014) concept of "visible learning" which is a very different concept from Rinaldi's (2013) interpretation of the Reggio Emilia principle of 'making learning visible' through documentation which is employed in the ELC.

Reggio Emilia principles

The ELC Director, Sarah, had her first encounter with Reggio Emilia principles in the 1990s through the *100 Languages of Children* exhibition and reading *The Challenge,* published by the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE) (2018). These experiences were the inspiration for her to re-enter a site leadership role, where she worked directly with children, in contrast with her previous consultancy role. She also found inspiration in the advocacy role that is encouraged in the Reggio Emilia Educational Project and connected this to the South Australian context:

> *Empowering people to be advocates, that's one of the things that I think in Reggio, those educators for many years have been enormous advocates, and we have strong advocates in Australia, and certainly South Australia as well, for early childhood.*

Teachers have been also been involved in the REAIE and have a deep connection to the philosophy through professional learning and reflection. Kelly recalled her first introduction to the book, *The Hundred Languages of Children,* when working with a theatre company before she had decided to pursue teaching:

> *My first introduction to Reggio Emilia was when he (the creative director) put the Hundred Languages book on my desk in my first week and said, "Oh you might be interested in this", and I remember reading that poem, A Hundred Languages and just going oh, this makes sense to me.*

Another teacher Amy, who had been introduced to Reggio Emilia principles upon beginning work at this ELC, also found that the principles fitted well with her experience and identity as a teacher:

> *Where I was before here, we did things very, very similarly in terms of embracing and listening to what children wanted and following their interests and really having that engagement. I knew nothing about Reggio Emilia then, but it was working in a similar style.*

The pedagogy of listening, the hundred languages and the image of the child as competent were among the principles that the leader and teachers named as foundational for sites wishing to embark on using the Reggio Emilia Educational Project to re-imagine their practice. ELC Director, Sarah, emphasised the importance of starting with the image of the child first and the potential for influence in South Australia:

> *I just look at how children are seen in the city of Reggio Emilia in terms of their value, their place, what the community looks like for them, and how children are such a part of the community. And there's the historical and social construct of Reggio children, which I get that, but I had to think wow, that would be something in South Australia that we could consider more.*

Other influences

As well as the influence of Reggio Emilia principles, the leader and teachers at Memorial ELC acknowledged the influence of other educational perspectives. These are provided as they give background to the many perspectives that shaped the re-imagining at this site.

Bricks, walls and castles

"Bricks, Walls and Castles: Learners collaborating to build an educating community", was the title of Memorial ELC's presentation for The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project Re-imagining conference. This metaphor is from the work of William Spady, a US educator working in outcomes-based education. The introduction to this thinking was through a senior South Australian childhood consultant, who has had a role of mentoring within the school for some years. As described in the presentation, at the time when educators had been struggling to find a metaphor to unite their ideas, the mentor left an article on Kelly's desk which described three layers of competence as 'bricks, walls and castles'**:**

> *I was talking to E about you know what direction could I go? This is where I'm at and then on my desk she just quietly left an article by Spady with that notion of bricks, walls and castles and it suddenly just clicked because along with that I'd told her that we'd been looking for a metaphor and we'd tried, you know, some of that beautiful language that's used in Reggio wasn't translating to our context directly so we were trying to find our own words to describe the learning that we were going through as a team.*

The educators used the metaphor to examine the layers in their practice with children. The concept of bricks, walls and castles allowed for the integrated understanding of how smaller skills and competencies fit into a vision of powerful learning. It was useful in understanding the place of these

skills in the bigger picture. For instance, in building a learning community with her 23 children at the beginning of their two-year journey of learning together, Kelly acknowledged the children's shared interest in trains as the first 'brick', a starting place where they could share experiences, learn to be together and learn to be safe.

Continuing with this metaphor and bringing it into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principle of the hundred languages, the educators considered ways to build shared languages amongst the group of children. Kelly noted that for this group of children the usual choices of activities were counterproductive to bringing them together as a community. She saw the opportunity to build the 'walls' by developing children's capacities in the 'language of drawing' and the 'language of dough'. As children began noticing each other through their shared work together in drawing and dough, Kelly became able to see how the 'castle', that is, of children directing their own challenges through their research on 'how animals move' and the process of movie making, could be built.

In a similar way, the Director used the metaphor to examine the layers in her leadership practice. She could see that laying the firm 'brick' of the organisation and structure of teacher meetings, paved the way for building the 'walls' of developing teacher identity, supporting comfort with uncertainty, developing a shared language to talk about practice and finding ways to begin the process of pedagogical documentation. The 'castle' of an educating community then became evident as teachers were understanding what it was to be a teacher researcher, able to challenge, support and co-construct practice, and share dilemmas and questions in the process of their work together.

The metaphor of bricks, walls and castles resonates with the Reggio Emilia principle of co-constructing learning (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p.254), however the metaphor for the co-construction of learning within the Reggio Emilia Educational Project is not of blocks that stack but rather spiraling, where learning is not linear but cyclic and reciprocal (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p.183).

Learning rainbow

A further influence on thinking from a South Australian context was the work of British educator, Guy Claxton (2018), who has visited South Australia many times in recent years and been featured as a guest speaker in a key public education strategy. His learning rainbow is a metaphor conceptualising seven different learning dispositions: Curiosity; Courage; Craftsmanship; Critical Thinking; Creativity; Collaboration and Copying. This metaphor was referred to repeatedly in several contexts, for example in the ELC's conference presentation, an induction presentation for parents/carers, a strategy in children's discussions, in educator and leader interviews and the group parent discussion. A parent spoke about the impact this metaphor had made on her child's learning:

> *I remember last year we made one at home and put the words on so we could remember to use them at home and I thought it was really great. I think it is really great for those ideas when they are talking with the kids or playing with the kids. Using his courage has been a big thing for us, like saying remember to use your courage and stuff like that. I think it's been really handy to reflect back at home.*

Kelly described the learning rainbow as a "pedagogically appropriate" response to a whole school push towards Hattie & Yates' (2014) "visible learning". The learning rainbow was communicated to parents/carers at an induction meeting as part of a whole school 'wellbeing' priority. This improvisation of a whole school approach indicates the sense of agency and advocacy for early childhood that is a key aspect of the teacher's identity in the figured world of this ELC.

Past research

The Memorial ELC educators opened themselves to a range of provocations and influences, including Sarah's past involvement with a transition to school research project (Rogers, Dockett, & Perry, 2017). The experience in this project assisted this site's involvement in shaping methodology. Sarah recalled how quickly children's recall of their experiences in a past setting faded, and therefore suggested the timing of researcher observation in Kelly's classroom and discussions for a group of children, to be at the end of their two-year journey with Kelly: "This is such a ripe time for the children in terms of it is very fresh, but they're confident, they haven't started to disconnect from this experience."

Kelly's previous study and work role at a local children's theatre company were powerful influences for her thinking. When planning for her group of boys, she remembered the thinking of the company's artistic director, who always worked with very simple design elements to provide focus in children's

theatre works. Kelly used this concept of simple design elements to guide her planning for her class when she identified the many diverse choices in her program as problematic:

> *And I guess D has some inspiration in that too, like when we think about how he works with a cardboard box or a beam of light or black and white, I guess you know there's that at the back of the mind, the way he's worked. You know I was talking about simplistic elegance and why not apply that to children? That's how an artist will work, they'll work with a pallette that they've got a huge skill set with and so why not children, rather than a myriad of choices and two seconds here and two seconds there with something. Yeah, so it really worked with this group of learners.*

Thoughts about working with uncertainty and complexity also emerged in the data:

> *If we're going to be a researcher, researchers are looking for answers about things, not deciding what the answer is before they start to research. We're actually going to go in to this not knowing, and that's okay, and it's exciting. Letting go of control for some people is always tricky as well.*

Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy

Reflection on the fragmentation of children's experiences in early learning posed by the Rinaldi Report (2013) was a catalyst for the leader and educators at the ELC to consider how they could change their hours by offering the option of a longer day to enable a more streamlined experience for children whose parents' and carers' working hours did not fit with the existing ELC timeframe. The change to the centre's hours was a considered decision to support children being able to stay in a familiar setting with familiar educators instead of making a transition to an 'Out of School Hours' program in a different setting with different educators at the end of a busy day. This decision represented a pedagogy of 'listening' to children's experiences and sensitivity to families' circumstances.

The following illustrations of re-imagined practice connect main themes of the image of the child as competent, making learning visible and reciprocal relationships across the experiences of children, families and educators. They are significant as they show how the educators and leaders have re-imagined their practice, challenging the concept of individualism to build an educating community. This idea links strongly with the Reggio Emilia principle of bringing people into relationship with each other through learning. As field notes from the ELC's conference presentation showed, the use of 'educating as a verb' is important in this concept: "educating – this present participle not describing a quality, a state of mind or permanent vocation".

"I has been replaced by we"

A powerful statement about the development of community within a child's experience in Kelly's group at the ELC was described by a parent, Nandu, as a change of his child's mindset from 'I' to 'we':

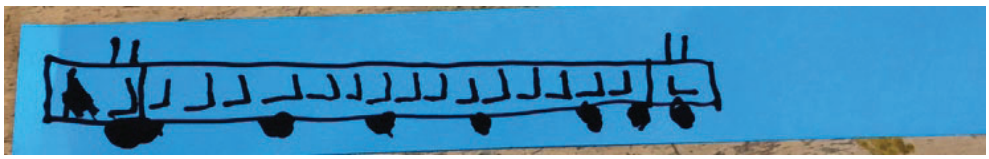
> *As a three-year-old or a three-and-a-half-year-old or whatever it was all about me. ' I want to do this', 'I did this', 'I will do that' but now it's a massive 180° change. It's about working together with friends. So, there is no more 'I want to do this' – pulling it from someone, nothing like that. It's more about working with friends. So, '**we** made a movie'. **'I'** has been replaced by **'we'**.*

On hearing this parent's description of his child's experience, the research challenge was to find out how this 180° change came about. Kelly expressed her feelings about the challenge of building community within her group of children in this way:

> *I am really enjoying working with the notion of community I guess and that's something that K and I have been reflecting about. What building a learning community means and what are the things that need to be in place to make that happen, so when you're working with diversity, as we all are these days, and you know how do we become, you know, come from being these twenty separate individuals to having a shared understanding and a shared path in our learning.*
>
> *Probably the biggest thing with this group, bringing them together as a learning community and working with the families in trying to start working with the families in a different way so that they also felt part of this journey, you know trying to create that culture where it's not just my child. We talked about 'your child, our children' and trying to create that culture so that they could see in supporting that child we're actually supporting everyone.*

As Kelly and the co-educator in her class worked with this concept of community, they re-imagined possibilities for themselves, parents/carers and children to take on different roles within the figured world

Figures 8: Arnav's drawing of the train tree



Figures 9: Oscar's drawing of the train tree

of the classroom. This is particularly clear in the idea of challenging the individual view of a parent's interest in their child to a possibility of broadening parents' and carers' interests to encompass all children in the class. The realisation of a need to reconceptualise the identities within the class was a first step, a 'spark' of consciousness towards bigger possibilities. The improvisations that Kelly used to bring children and families into an experience of different relationships follow.

In the presentation at the 2017 Re-imagining Childhood Conference, Kelly described her first impressions of her group of boys: "At first, they seemed to be orbiting on their own trajectories. They had nothing in common with each other or with the place". The first noticing of a shared interest was in trains. This in itself is not unusual – many teachers will relate to this quite typical shared interest. What was significant however is Kelly's reading of this shared interest as a means by which she could provoke children into coming together in other ways. In the presentation she cited Ramsay (2004 p.53) – "[t]hey need to make room in their minds for others, space for other's ideas, wishes and hopes" – and talked about the opportunities for shared experiences and imaginings, describing that "the tracks led us back to each other". Kelly first observed children's shared interest in using train sets then used children's pretend train play with a tree trunk in a 'secret garden' area, adjacent to the usual ELC play space, to enable their collaborative inquiry, and the 'train tree' emerged.

Children, parents/carers and educators independently referred to key memories of the train tree in interview, group discussion and through children's sharing of artefacts. This mentioning was significant as the experience of the train tree occurred over 12 months prior to the research visits. Arnav drew the train tree when prompted to think about 'creativity' as part of the learning rainbow. He said:

> *This is the train tree in the secret garden. P was using it as a train tree. It turned into a lizard truck tree, but P didn't like it. That's the coal bit and there is actually a driver there, which is P."*

Kelly supported children's recollections by recounting what she remembered:

> *Remember when you used to get sticks and things and say it was coal and you used to pass it to me, and you'd say, "it's very hot, careful". And I'd have to juggle the hot coals that you would pass me and throw them into the smoke stack.*
>
> *Roberto described it as, "we found a chopped down tree to use it as to make a train". The train tree was also recollected by Arnav's dad, Nandu, as an example of learning through playing:*
>
>> *Their childhood is all about learning through playing, that's what I think. And starting from last year, so I think they had a train excursion in term 2 or 3 last year. So, I absolutely loved it, the way they built the whole thing. I think they created some train station over here. Just with a tree and some cardboard boxes and you know, how they actually got to think about what trains actually do.*

Shaping an initial interest in this way led to further possibilities for children to become intertwined with each other ideas and this was evident in further examples of children's memories of details from past experiences. This excerpt from children's discussion about their learning shows their recollection of whose idea started a project. They recalled details of the book that had sparked the concept of the 'How animals move' project:

> *Roberto: Kelly – do we have that animal book?*
>
> *Kelly: Walking in the jungle? Which one is it?*
>
> *Roberto: It's the book that I liked.*
>
> *Kelly: Do you want me to check with K?*
>
> *Arnav: No, no, no. It's the giraffe on the front. It's the one with the giraffe on the front.*

Children informed me that the animal book, Grasslands, was significant as Roberto would read it every day, get the animals and put them where they were in the book. Arnav said, "That's when we first said, 'I want to do a movie'". This led to a conversation about where ideas come from and how you get to work on your ideas. The children were united in saying that Kelly usually said yes to their ideas. They talked about the process of working on ideas as a team:

> *Arnav: This is me and H. We want to build something but we don't know what. Roberto wants to join in. Me and H are making a plan but we don't know what to make, but then Roberto comes up with an idea – you can make a sing tower.*
>
> *Cohen: Ummm, it's making new stuff that you don't know but now you do know because you are working as a team.*
>
> *Arnav: It's talking to each other, cause I like talking the best, talking to Roberto and Cohen about what to do, like I was talking to Roberto about what he might do.*
>
> *Roberto: And then I did it.*

Project work as a vehicle for shared thinking

Project work was expressed as a vehicle to bring children's ideas together and to build shared understandings and shared contribution. ELC Director, Sarah, commented:

> *I think it takes skilled educators to be really mindful about what the project is that's developing, and, everyone's role in it, that the project needs to have enough kind of in-roads. Again, this is just how we've chosen to have our projects develop, so when something is developing here, we would hope that as a learning community, all of the children are participating in their way and contributing to that project in the way that's right for them.*

Important to the development of project work or progettazione, Kelly drew on thinking about the Reggio Emilia principle of a hundred languages. She compared the process of developing fluency in verbal language with fluency in the language of materials and described how she made a conscious decision to bring her disparate group of boys together using the language of drawing and the language of modelling:

> *You know to be fluent in any language, that first language and then you can take on others because you've got those notions of you know how language works, and how communication works, and I guess those materials meant that they – having that confidence in those two materials lead to them being able to transfer those skills to other media when introduced at the right time.*

In making this pedagogical decision to limit the choices of materials available to her class, Kelly was conscious of the challenge that this decision represented to a view of a hundred languages, however, she felt that it was vital in order for the boys to find each other as a group. This decision to challenge the concept of choice and how it is considered in early childhood indicated that rather than blindly following the literal concept of a principle, Kelly was weaving it with her own understanding through her reading of the children's experience:

> *I was very much challenged by that because there wasn't that, you know there's these notions that they have every choice of colour and they have every choice of material, a hundred, hundred languages but if they're not confident in one of those then you're missing bits and pieces and the purpose of it.*

If you're not speaking the same language, if you've got one child speaking the language of pencils and another person speaking the language of clay and this is what's happening at all times, it's very hard to come together as a group and, you know, read what the others are doing.

For Kelly that initial decision, to limit materials in order to support children's competency as a whole community, led to children being able to use the language of representation in meaningful ways as movie makers and collaborators, which was noted by Sarah:

You've heard Kelly's story. It's gone from not being a medium or a language that the children used, to for most of them, being the one that they're strongest in, and that they use the most. And then the others have been filtered in, or something might be taken out and put in, so it's not to provide so much of a palette that nobody can find their place in what's happening.

The following illustration powerfully demonstrated this concept. Roberto and Cohen were keen to show the process of their movie making. It was observed that other children working in the small space of the classes' indoor area respected their work and saw it as a usual part of the happenings of the room. When we read this context through cultural models theory (Holland et al., 1998), we saw that children were identified as capable movie makers in the figured world of the classroom. The educator's absence was also powerful here, showing a stepping back from the identity of teacher as controller and supervisor of learning to that of an enabler of a learning process, whose presence was not needed for these children to demonstrate their competence:

To set the scene, the children are working in a small block area adjacent to a painting area in the indoor space. They have quickly set up an iPad on a rubber stand mounted on a small table with a camera operator chair behind it. Cohen is seated in this chair. In between this set up and the block shelf are a square of blocks to define a space where Roberto is building a scene with blocks and some animals, getting animals and blocks as he needs them from the shelf. The two boys have set up this quickly and independently with no assistance from educators.

Roberto: I know we could pretend that all the animals were coming out from behind there" [pointing to the blocks].

Cohen: One animal coming on that side and one animal coming on that side. [Roberto moves animals to either side of the block building.]

Cohen: Put the alligator in. [Roberto puts the alligator to the left side and goes back to Cohen at screen.] Go [Cohen moves out of shot]. You haven't put it in.

Roberto: See it's there [pointing to the screen]. It's by the rhino.

Cohen: Oh yeah. [He pushes the replay button to watch movie so far.]

Roberto: Did you take another one?

Cohen: No, I'm just checking I'm not touching [presses replay again]. I can't really see the rhino.

Roberto: But he's going to come out [moves the rhino on set and then comes back to screen. Cohen pushes the bottom bar which shows each still]. Wait that's blurry.

Roberto goes back to block set and carefully moves the rhino on the right a little forward then goes to the right side and moves the alligator and the giraffe. He walks back to the screen and watches while the Cohen pushes the record button then replays. Roberto walks back to animal basket and chooses two more animals then walks purposefully back to the set and carefully positions them. Cohen points to a place on set, however Roberto is deep in his own intentions. He comes back to the screen. Cohen takes the photo and without waiting for the replay, Roberto goes back to the animal basket. He chooses a sheep, adds this behind the rhino and goat, moves both of these animals forward a little and then moves to shift the animals on the right side forward. This pattern continues with Roberto getting and placing animals and Cohen pressing the button. Then Roberto moves from right back to left without coming back to the screen. Cohen pushes the camera button then immediately sees that he has Roberto in shot.

Cohen: Oh no! [He quickly deletes the last frame. Roberto comes back to screen.]

Roberto: Ready. [He waits until he sees the camera button pushed before going back to position the animals.] Can you see them yet? What did you do? [Roberto comes back to the screen and together they watch the replay.] Nothing happened.

They continue with Roberto moving to set and moving animals on both sides, left then right, moving them forward then going back to the side so that Cohen can push the button. They work mostly in silence and without much eye contact. Cohen consistently watches the replay while Roberto repositions the animals, occasionally Roberto will come to the screen to check the replay.

Cohen: Should they be on that side?

Roberto: No, they are all going to go in there [pointing to the middle of the block building].

Roberto works carefully shifting the orientation of the animals towards the block fence and then carefully positioning the animals in various stages of going over the fence. Cohen waits patiently for Roberto to come out from screen, he is focused and not distracted by the other activity in the room. Other children occasionally cross the set but neither Cohen nor Roberto remonstrate with them and children move across without interruption or comment.

As can be seen in these children's interactions, they understood the language of stopmotion and were able to independently set up the materials within all the daily happenings of a busy preschool. They worked together effectively, with shared purpose, conscious of the roles they played and showing a high level of focus and critical thinking as they constructed, checked, edited, consulted and negotiated the story line and movie making process.

Coming together – the processes of communing

The impact of this concept of developing learning community was shown in the parent experiences, as in the title of this learning illustration, "I became we". In a group parent discussion, parents/carers also referred to the sense of inclusion within the whole class group:

Parent: The parent group is quite cohesive. We've got this chat thing that we do. Their social lives are largely intertwined as well, but if there is a birthday party, the invite just goes up and anyone in the class comes. It's quite inclusive of the whole class, so they are a social group outside of school as well.

Researcher: And so you feel that there is support there.

Parent: Yeah, it sort of gives a cohesiveness to their life as well because you hear that a lot of kids go to kindy and it's like they go to kindy and that's one world and they come home and that's another world. It's nice that they are tied together and it's not like well, we know one kid or two kids or something – it's all of them."

Another teacher at Memorial ELC, Amy, also expressed her goals for her group in terms of community. For her, the critical question that drove her pedagogy was, "How is this bringing us together?" She wanted the children to see how they were a part of something bigger within the school. Integral to this desire was exploring aspects of the school history, visiting other parts of the school and documenting their impressions.

Amy reflected on project work and children's competence through the challenge of how to enable access for everyone's participation in a project. She described a recent experiment with a voting process for children to decide which drawing of a beautiful window in the school hall would be the best to work on as a group mural. When working with their Arts teacher, children were given a counter and asked to put it on the picture that they thought would be the best to make into a large mural for everyone to work on. Amy noted:

They were absolutely amazing, and they blew us out of the water because I just thought okay, how are they, are they going to watch each other and just put one where their friends did? Or are they going to look for their own, and put their counter on their own? And one or two might have, or are they going to tell each other to put theirs on there? Absolutely, they looked, they were so critical, which was fantastic, like reflective and critical. They looked and thought okay, they've asked us to look for the one which is going to be most effective and I think they did the best job and the one that they chose looks fantastic. We're still working on it, it's still a work in progress, but it looks absolutely wonderful.

The provocation here and Amy's reflection presented another challenge to a discourse of the individual and provided the children with the opportunity to make a group decision and commitment to a larger project. It resonates with Malaguzzi's (1998, p.58) explanation of the genesis of Reggio Emilia as an educational approach:

They were the parents' thoughts, expressing a universal aspiration, a declaration against the betrayal of children's potential and a warning that children first of all had to be taken seriously and believed in.

The improvisations on practice, such as working with metaphors, materials and processes to build shared languages, capacities and interests amongst the children, shown in these illustrations of developing a learning community amongst children and teachers at the ELC was mirrored in considering the following leadership story of building community amongst the educator group.

Leadership story – "we could have assumed we were an 'educating' community"

The leadership story about developing a sense of community within the educator group was told in the conference presentation and also in the leader's interview. Sarah spoke about the challenge of using 'educating' as a verb rather than a noun and linked the Reggio Emilia principle of questioning and re-thinking:

> *We could have assumed we were an educating community, and there's certainly an understanding that everyone is an educator, been to university, they've taught whether it's a few years or many years, so they know how to be a teacher. And that's fine and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that thinking and that's what we would want everyone to come out of university knowing how to be a teacher. But if we're to wear our Reggio principles lens, it's so evident in their (educators in Reggio Emilia) practice; they are always questioning themselves and their thinking about the way children do things, how they do them, what their (educators') role is.*

This questioning rather than assuming that the teachers would come together was furthered by a university educator's provocation, "Can you be an educator and not know?" For Sarah, this provocation occurred at a timely point for the ELC, when they were beginning their journey with The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and had two new teachers join the team. The provocation spurred interesting discussion in the teacher group, challenging the concept of teacher as expert and supporting thoughts about the Reggio Emilia principle of teacher as researcher.

Sarah and Kelly spoke in the conference presentation about finding a common thread to bring the team together, not draw it apart, and this desire was behind the concept of "a broader community of teachers as researchers". The concept of an educating community was shaped by structural decisions about the timing and agenda of professional meeting times, as well as the more complex processes of 'going in to this not knowing' and 'letting go of control' – summarised by Sarah's statement, "If we're going to be researchers, researchers are looking for answers about things, not deciding what the answer is before they start to research."

The educators' perceptions of bringing people together as an educating community featured in interview transcripts. Amy spoke about the development of her confidence in her own method of documentation. She spoke about her documentation being a tool to bring children's thinking and educators' thinking together and as a vehicle for sharing this thinking with families, thereby demonstrating not just how children worked, but how everybody worked as a team. Within this, the outer layer of the collegial community was also evident. Amy became confident in her own process of documentation and while she was open to both receiving and giving feedback, she was satisfied that no one could say that her reflection was wrong because it was **her** reflection:

> *It's giving yourself permission to do something in the way that fits for you, then I've learnt to realise well you know what, it's not right or wrong. No-one's going to say well that's actually not right. It's research, and therefore it's reflection and it's my reflection, so it's what I'm valuing and what I'm taking from that. But I mean the great thing too is that because we're all so different, we've all had such different methods, it's been such a great way to do this for us, bring us together like this.*

Kelly described the process of organisation for reflection in staff meeting times as enabling the involvement of everyone. She referred to the structure as "shifting the focus" to a bigger identity as teacher as researcher, rather than adding a burden to workload. She also acknowledged the different ways that educators may view critical reflection and group sharing. She likened the recognition of this diversity to working with a class group:

> *Learning that other people don't find that as easy is a bit of a challenge and then you know working through that. Trying to find ways everyone feels safe to question yourselves and not be right and the best and you know yeah, a bit vulnerable. It's the same as working with a group of boys, everyone will bring something different and everyone will have a different entry point to the staff meeting.*

The examination of the conditions for effective learning for educators, in a similar way to the way the conditions for effective learning for children are considered, has also been noted by educators in the US. New (2007) examined the socially mediated construction of knowledge in the schools of Reggio Emilia for inspiration about the school culture needed to challenge traditional power relations of teaching and schooling. Sarah understood the importance of giving the process of changing towards an educating community time and persisting through difficulties and frustrations in the process of leadership:

> *The head-rubbing might initially have been frustration or a feeling of not being in control because they didn't know. But as they moved past that, they could see that that was actually a good thing because when you don't know, you'll think really deeply and critically, and you'll listen to others in different ways, to give you a new way of knowing.*

She was also encouraged to notice markers of significant shifts in participation in the educating community:

> *There's an excitement in people's voices. People are bringing their documentation and we've really moved it from being about a printed off something with photos and beautiful headings to raw documentation in scrap books with diagrams and post-it-notes stuck in and people having those ah-hah moments that they want to come and share, or say I just don't know where to go next with this, and for us as a group to have some conversations, there's been a few of those things. I'm thinking of one teacher, incredibly competent teacher, huge research headset, had got to a bit of a crossroads and the children had said we want to be able to do this, and she brought it to the table and she said this is what the children are saying, which way do I go, what do I do? Do I go this way? How do we? And so, we could co-construct some possibilities about where to go next. So that's another little mark, or a piece of evidence in our journey that we've shifted significantly from where we were last year.*

Sarah's description of these markers of success indicated that she was noting the shift in teacher's trust in each other, rather than constituting success as progress in coming to agreed upon conclusions. Sarah's process of challenging the assumptions of an 'educating community' connects well with Rogoff's (2003, p.52) conception of the ever-evolving development of culture: "As people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices, they simultaneously contribute to the transformation of cultural tools, practices, and institutions." In this case, the cultural tools are the scheduling and framing of staff meeting times and the artefacts of documentation, the practices are dialogue and reciprocity inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles and the challenge of re-imagining the educators' identity from knower to learner.

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy

From the two illustrations above we can see the negotiation of the Reggio Emilia principles with other theoretical perspectives to inform a local approach. Key in both illustrations of pedagogy was the idea of learning as bringing people into relation with each other. The table below highlights the connections found within the two illustrations.

Table 7: Data analysis – Memorial Early Learning Centre

Incidents from illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy	Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts	Other perspectives
Developing shared understandings and interests - children, families and educators sharing key memories.	• Learning in relationship with others and with materials • Making learning visible through documentation	• Use of "learning rainbow" to build shared language between educators, children and families. • 'Bricks, walls and castles' metaphor – honouring children's ideas and ways of using materials as part of a bigger goal of bringing a 'community' together through shared interests.

Development of movie making for children's collaboration and story telling	• Image of the child as competent and capable • Hundred languages of children	• Identification of dispositions for thinking such as collaboration and critical thinking to enhance children's consciousness about these aspects. • Building media as a complex 'language' from initial limitation of materials to build fluency with the languages of "pencils and clay".
The process of voting to choose an artwork for a group project.	• Learning is a process of individual and group construction • Image of the child as competent and capable	• Use of 'learning rainbow" to highlight collaboration and critical thinking. • Educators being prepared to take a risk and try different practices for democracy. • The concept of "not knowing" to support risk taking and teacher research.
Children initiating and managing their own ideas and having respect for the process of others.	• Image of child as competent and capable • Environment, space and relations	• Identification of collaboration and team work as part of thinking. • Children expressing themselves through confidence with materials.
Teachers building an 'educating' community	• Teacher as researcher • Documentation • Co-construction of learning • Making learning visible	• Teachers relating to the concepts of different ways of thinking for themselves. • Responding to provocation · "Can you be a teacher and not know?" • Understanding the importance of the 'bricks, walls and castles' ensuring that structures promoted safety in risk taking as well as challenge to think differently. • Understanding that changing mindset takes time, structural and relational change from a leadership perspective.
Challenging assumptions • about children's response to choice in materials, in voting • about being an 'educating community'	• Listening to children and to each other • Children as competent and capable • Democracy • Teacher as researcher-questioning practice	• Willingness to take risks and challenge taken-for-granted 'truths'. • Challenge of 'not knowing'.
How is this bringing us together ? Finding community across children, educators, leaders, parents/carers and wider school	• Democracy • Pedagogy of listening	• Emphasising collaboration, kindness and critical thinking as essential parts of thinking for everyone. • Bricks walls and castles concept of working in multi-dimensional ways to build opportunities for "communing"

Table 8 shows how the Reggio Emilia principles were brought together with other ways of thinking that Memorial ELC has developed through connection with different perspectives. The essence of both illustrations was around building community, and how this was achieved in a multi-dimensional way. The bricks, walls and castles metaphor has supported this view of acting in a myriad of small but connected ways in order to build towards the deepening concept of community. The importance of metaphor in providing shared language through which people can interact clearly had impact in creating and sustaining shared memories between children, parents/carers and educators.

Children's articulation of their learning was assisted by the Learning Rainbow metaphor, underpinned by the Reggio Emilia principles of the child as capable and competent, the hundred languages of children and making learning visible. The challenge of being a teacher and 'not knowing' worked together with the Reggio Emilia principle of teacher as researcher and also supported teachers to challenge their assumptions on the basis of really listening to children and taking risks.

Kelly's decision to challenge an assumption about choice in order to bring her children together in community and Amy's endeavours to support her group to understand that they were part of something bigger in the school, and her trust in children's decision making were also examples of understanding children's capacities and using the strategy of documentation to make their learning visible.

Summary

The Reggio Emilia principles of co-construction and negotiating relations as part of re-imagining a democratic community influenced the thinking and actions which are developing the concept of an 'educating community' as something shared, negotiated and constructed between children, educators, leaders and parents/carers at Memorial ELC. In a political landscape where individualism and competition can be dominant, the critical thinking and reflection which supported leaders and teachers to challenge their identities as knowers and in turn bring about new identities for children and parents/carers, were significant.

The ELC's journey and advocacy in making their young learners' thinking visible to the wider school community through the use of powerful metaphors strongly resonates with the Reggio Emilia principle of developing "a school for young children as an integral living organism, a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children…school as a sort of construction in motion, continually adjusting itself" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.62).

Another significant aspect of the ELC's learning with respect to the building of community was their reframing of success and progress away from a traditional linear view, for instance of proceeding from a state of not knowing to a state of knowing. The view instead was of an educating community who recognised success in the acts of communing (Studdert & Walkerdine, 2016), which showed developing trust in each other. This trust was sufficient for them to share their raw documentation, dilemmas and wonderings, in order to consult and truly hear different points of view rather than sharing finished work or documentation of 'success'. This indicated congruence with the shifting identities of teachers aligned with the Reggio Emilia principle of teachers as researchers.

It was by attending to processes and conditions for learning in both the environments for children and educators that Memorial ELC was using the inspiration of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project as well as other theoretical influences to re-imagine their early childhood pedagogy.

East Catholic School

Context

East Catholic School is a Catholic P-7 school located in the inner suburbs of Adelaide. It consists of 13 classes and a student population of 261 students with 36 children in the preschool. The curriculum for both the preschool and the school is guided by the Reggio Emilia principles and the Josephite principles, with the key curriculum documents being the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum. School hours are from 8.45am-3pm. An outside school hours care program operates before school from 7am and after school until 6pm to provide for the needs of working families. The school is highly regarded and supported within its community. It attracts parents/carers from the local community as well as families who come from out of the area to attend the school. The school is becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. Most of the families enrolled in the school would be considered socially advantaged.

The preschool, reception and year one classrooms share a playground and courtyard area which is also the home base for the school's outside school hours care program. The preschool has a smaller courtyard outdoor area offering sand play, block play and alfresco dining. The preschool indoor area is set with a couch and book area, table spaces for arts, writing and other explorations, a mezzanine home area and a central mat area for meeting and puzzle play. Walking into the early learning space feels like walking into a home. The Reception classroom observed as part of the study has tables with different central focus, one has a lizard, one has a vase of flowers, one has some blocks. At the rear of the class area there is a dress up area, a stage with musical instruments stored close by and an area with home corner furniture. There are bird cages along the side wall of the classroom and a central meeting circle of stools is arranged.

The years 2-7 shared spaces include a central open gathering place and library space and an outdoor playground. Some classrooms can be entered from a main corridor while other classrooms are located upstairs or in separate rooms in the grounds area. Currently there is consultation about development of the outdoor play space, which currently exists mostly of hard play court areas with a very small garden area, a small corner sandpit area and an adjacent small music wall. A high fence surrounds the perimeter, the reception area and central gathering area are adjacent to the entrance of the school. The central space is colourful with children's work and posters on display, the entrance to the Year 2/3 classroom observed as part of this pilot study, comes off of this area.

Inside the Year 2/3 classroom feels comfortable and informal, there is a central floor area with an electronic whiteboard centrally placed, and clusters of tables. There are also cushions and a higher table with stools. The room has tall windows providing natural light. Children's work is on display around the room and the table areas show traces of work in progress. On a morning observation visit, children, some with their parents/carers, enter for the morning, across a 15-minute time span. As they enter, they greet each other and their teacher – the atmosphere is relaxed, children gather in small groups at tables to chat and put their belongings in place to get ready for the day.

These observations of the physical environment in themselves provide a sense of the developing identity of the site. In the previous year, the focus for the site's participation in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project had been about involving children in decisions about their learning environments. The choices available to children about the kind of seating they preferred and the seating arrangements to facilitate group work and movement were a key part of this investigation.

Data collection

The pilot study sought the perspectives of children, teachers, site leaders and parents/carers. We experimented with a range of ways of learning from participants. This case study is based on individual interviews with leaders and teachers, dialogic encounters with small groups of children and parents/carers and a range of participant informed methods as summarised in the table below.

Table 8: Data collection methods – East Catholic Primary School

	Individual dialogic encounters	Group dialogic encounters	Participant informed methods
Leader	• David* (principal)		• Observation at 2 staff meeting times

Teachers	• Teachers: · Jill* (Preschool) · Nina* (Reception) · Alice* (Year 2/3)		• Conference presentation • 3 class observation visits to Preschool, Reception class and Year 2/3 class • 2 preliminary meetings before interview • Sharing of documentation about the school bell
Parent/Carer	• Preschool parent	• Year 2/3: · 2 parents • Reception: · 4 parents	
Children	• Georgia*	• Year 2/3: · May* · Cathy* · Emma* · Gerri* · Alex*	• Year 2/3 Work samples photographed and transcripts of children explaining their Atlas artefacts • Reception: Documentation of thinking during a class discussion and artefacts about the children's thinking for the bell story • Preschool: 2 visits in the group, viewing artefacts of children's thinking and documentation

*Pseudonyms

Perspectives used to inform pedagogy

Catholic East School is influenced both by Catholic Josephite principles to educate the child spiritually, culturally, socially, intellectually, emotionally and physically, and the Reggio Emilia principles, seeing each child as competent and capable. The key principles of the early learning program are: play, inquiry, imagination, environment, and community. In the primary years, the vision is of a learner who is a confident, creative individual, an active, informed young person who is ready to take their place in society. These espoused values of the school can be seen in the artefacts and rituals observed within the environment and the practices. The school's banner and website feature the phrase, "Where children are valued as capable and competent learners" and rituals such as prayer times include children's ideas, creations and active involvement.

Reggio Emilia principles

The school acknowledges a focus on the Reggio Emilia principles within its preschool, and the preschool leader, Jill dates her first encounter with the philosophy to 13 years ago, through a past leader's connection with the now educational consultant, Lisa Burman. The Reception teacher, Nina, recalled a transformational visit to another Catholic school in 2009, where a leader was inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles; photos taken at this visit still provide prompts to Nina's thinking. The Year 2/3 teacher, Alice, reports that a visit to Reggio Emilia in her fourth year out as a teacher, was a turning point in her teaching and an impetus for change in her practice. Alice had worked in the early years in her initial time at this school, previous leadership supported her to move into the primary classrooms of the school to support their work in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project in this part of the school. Alice described:

> *I've been looking at thinking in the classroom for a number of years. It was I think making that visible to the other staff and for them to actually understand that the children can lead us on a different path and we don't need to have set lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 but actually allow for that inquiry based learning and setting up inquiries but also finding those incidental teaching moments and I think making other teachers aware that that's there.*

The school's focus in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project began with deepening all teachers' connections with the image of the child as strong and competent. As reported in the school's presentation of their project inquiry, when teachers across the school discussed their image of the child there was a realisation that teachers were "all speaking the same language but there was a disconnect". The teachers leading the school's project work at this time realised that there was a need for more dialogue and shared work to build the connections across the school. They used investigation of class spaces within the school to consider the questions:

- How does your environment support children to be active protagonists?
- What are you curious about in your learning environment?
- Whose learning environment is it?

This shared inquiry was the beginning of 'weaving a tapestry' of reciprocal relationships across the school with the aim of seeing teachers becoming more active in partnering with children. The focus on children and teachers working together to negotiate their class environments, led to teachers working together to 'audit' each other's classroom spaces, and to share their thinking about what was and wasn't working. The presentation showed evidence of changed learning spaces, including more opportunities within the environment for children to make choices and feel a greater sense of ownership. The teacher leaders of this inquiry project finished their presentation declaring that schools as public spaces are a never finished tapestry and alluded to the process of challenge and change as complex and sometimes uncomfortable, with resistance at times impeding the development of trust.

The school experienced a recent change in leadership and was continuing to inquire, through the support of the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project. Their inquiry had moved from negotiation of learning spaces to negotiation of learning. Their focus being on documenting children's thinking in order to inform teaching and learning, their inquiry hypothesis was: Documentation provides evidence of children's thinking and ideas informing the co-construction of curriculum for understanding.

The school principal described his passion for hearing children's voice as a lever for change and improvement in practice: "How do we hear student voice to improve the cycle of teaching and learning and how do we hear that child's voice a lot stronger and how do we act on that as well?" Teachers at the school also described long held values about the importance of children's rights and deeply listening to children. Jill, the preschool leader, described this focus:

> *It is a project again this year, it always includes the children's voice, it always includes their thinking – how they came to that idea and so on – and it is so empowering for them. For you to write something down that they have said and for you to read it back to them to make sure you've got it right because sometimes the way that we express ourselves, it doesn't come out right. It is the same for a child. So, to read things back to them, to get it right, to reaffirm that with them, then see where they go from there. It is crucial if I don't. I've got children in this little group here today. They all think differently, they have different understandings of what this is, what the rules are, what their rights are and how to build this. If we don't pay attention and listen to their thinking, it's almost pointless. We're not machines, they're not machines. We need to have that relationship, and to have that relationship we need to understand their thinking and what's happening for them.*

Nina, the Reception teacher, also values deeply listening to children and referenced Matthew Lipman's approach to philosophy with children as an early influence from her teacher education. She recalled discovering how often children who may have struggled academically, were amazing reasoners. When she saw other educators putting the Reggio Emilia principle of listening into practice, she was inspired to learn more about Reggio Emilia principles. Further to this, Nina felt that her first priority in listening to children was:

> *…to have parents on board and to make them feel welcome and to try to understand their voice and what it is that they value, and what they want, whatever they want to contribute. Because of that, then I can hear their thinking more and so I think if I understand that well, I can create an environment that will let that grow, and help inspire the children to be motivated to do whatever it is that they want to do.*

This reiterates the importance of relationships to a pedagogy of listening. The new school principal, David, talked about the importance of being family focused in his leadership role, as well as building relationships and cohesion across a staff team:

> *That's maybe my biggest impact, to have a common approach. So, working together as a collective rather than as individuals and I think that's been a really good thing, but it's also been empowering as well, I think to staff. So collegially they've built stronger teams of teachers and I think with that combined knowledge, shared understanding, shared language, a shared meaning has transpired into being able to have deeper, better informed conversations with parents as well.*

In dialogic encounters, parents' and carers' description of their experience at East Catholic School showed that they were indeed on board as they described the sense of belonging and community which they felt on entering the school. One parent put it this way:

> *It's just the relationships as the teachers are quite familiar with each student and they know the families and that gives them the sense of belonging and feeling important in their environment.*

Their experiences of being acknowledged, and having their children acknowledged influenced their choice to enrol their children at the school.

Catholic identity

Catholic identity has been another major influence in the school's thinking and has aided the connection with the Reggio Emilia principles beyond the early learning context. The principal, David, described it this way:

> *I think the vision of Catholic Education as well. Catholic Education's vision must be at the forefront of what we do. It is about aligning thee understandings of a child centred and family centred approach to our Catholic social teachings, and I think the Reggio Emilia philosophy is similar. So, it's that child first, hearing the child, involving the family, which has been quite good. I wasn't the initiator of bringing Reggio into the school but certainly it's been easy for me to keep it going because I believe the Catholic social teachings align strongly to Reggio principles.*

The influence of the Reggio Emilia principles on the school's thinking has also presented some cultural challenges in the South Australian context as well. David considered:

> *How (can) we apply our Reggio principles yet have cultural meaning. We have a piazza as our common gathering area, we have piccolinis, we have bambinis, and I was asked by a Chinese family, were we an Italian school? So that's got me thinking about how we apply Reggio principles yet be faithful to who we are. We are a school within Australia. We are a school within South Australia. We need to present our school as a South Australian Catholic school adapting Reggio principles to our context.*

The Stimulus Paper, *Children: Close to the Mystery of God* (CESA, 2015), was written as part of the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project provoked by Professor Rinaldi's time as Thinker in Residency. The paper was written for the following purpose:

> *We hope that it will nourish theological reflection in our schools—that it will affirm and challenge school leaders, parents, carers and teachers to a renewed appreciation of children's immense value. As a consequence, we hope that the statement will assist our schools in radiating, even more warmly, the love of God.*

The paper's fourth point of reflection, "How does a disposition of listening affirm and challenge our approach to learning and teaching?", links strongly with the school's focus on listening.

Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy

The following illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy connect main themes of listening to children and families and viewing children as competent and capable, across the experiences of children, families and teachers. Throughout the illustrations, attention will be drawn to how teachers and leaders are reflecting on their identity and on their position in the broad figured world of education as well as the more localised social context of their classroom and school. The illustrations will be analysed to uncover acts of agency by teachers in re-imagining their pedagogy to challenge traditional views of teaching and learning and to consider how children's and families' experiences fit within this developing figured world. Both illustrations signal the way that teachers place value on children's and family's perspectives and how they have accommodated these views in their pedagogy.

The Atlas investigation:

The Atlas investigation happened within a class of Year 2/3 learners. On a visit, the researcher noticed children's self organisation as they used the morning reading time to continue their investigations with the atlases. A key point of sharing that day was children sharing their observations, wonderings and questions arising from their dialogue and investigations. During the observation, a productive buzz of engagement was evident, indicated by children working intently at times, asking each other questions and engaged in diverse 'performances' of learning such as, sketching, shared reading, writing and noting, discussing, questioning and commenting. Unlike many class interactions where there is a lot of child traffic to and from the teacher, there was noticeable movement between groups of children and also children so focused on their own thinking that they remained in dialogue with the child with whom they were collaborating. Children were also sharing their questions with the researcher, as a newcomer to their class space:

> *How do the Government come up with the names of the countries and the continents and the oceans?*
>
> *Why do so many flags have that red cross on them? (pointing to the Union Jack)*
>
> *Why do countries have flags and what do the colours mean? Who chooses the colours for the flags?*

These questions are a sign of children's deeper wonderings about power, sovereignty and global decision-making, illustrating children's capacity to consider these significant concepts driven by their own curiosity when provided space to inquire.

Alice, the year 2/3 teacher, spoke about how an unplanned opportunity for children to browse a set of new atlases from the school library was the spark to this investigation:

> *[The Atlas project] was unbelievable really because that was not what I had planned for the morning and those atlases we just had that quick five minutes because I had to put my roll into the computer, that was all it was. There were some children that pulled out paper and started writing things that they were finding in the atlases and then other children were seeing what was happening and it became this snowballing effect and in the end everybody wanted to be a part of it. What I found really interesting was like they wanted the permission to actually go ahead and do that, that they felt that they needed to ask, can we keep going with the project or can we keep doing this or can we keep doing that and that they don't know that they actually are in charge of their learning. I found that really interesting.*

Here the teacher's reflection signals her motivation to notice and work from children's own investigations and also her ponderings about children's need to seek permission. The wider school espoused values that positioned children as competent and capable. Alice also held this image of the child and sought to change her practice to provide more opportunity for children to direct their own learning as inspired by her recent visit to Reggio Emilia, Italy. Despite these changes, Alice noticed that children did not seem to understand the extent of their agency as learners in this classroom.

Dialogic encounters with children confirmed Alice's observations. When children were asked, "Who decides what you learn?", their first reaction was "Ms C". As the conversation progressed however, children began to show a deeper understanding of their sense of agency as they talked about ideas for learning as coming from both children and the teacher.

Emma: In this case it is us, if it is ok with Mrs C, but other times it's just Mrs C.

Cathy: Well your teacher and you because, you have to kind of like learning and Mrs C tells you what to do, but she has to make it kind of like fun for you and stuff.

The concept of the teacher's role to direct the right level of challenge in learning was also noted by children. Emma noted:

> *It helps you get more ideas if you learn the right thing that is right for you - if you learn something too hard it might not give you any ideas about what you would like to do or think about or anything like that - but if you do something that is at your year level which is a little bit hard and a little bit not hard you get more ideas.*

The image of teachers as controllers of learning stems from the notion of learning as a hierarchical progression where the more capable share knowledge with those that are less capable. Such beliefs

about education reflect what Freire (2005) refers to as the "banking system of education" and are perpetuated by dominant market orientations of schooling. Alice's desire to re-imagine her pedagogy to be more reflective of her image of the child as competent and capable aligns with a democratic narrative that is counter to the dominant narrative of schools serving to fill the need of the market (Moss, 2013). Alice's finding that the children "don't really know that they are actually in charge of their learning" signifies there is some durability of dominant discourses (Holland et al., 1998) however, further dialogic encounters with children illuminate traces of their transformative identities as active agents in their learning. This was shown a few weeks later as children keenly shared their thinking with the researcher about book making.

May: We started well thinking, what if we made books? What if we could make some books to help people learn more things about Atlases and things like that? We were drawing the compasses inside the book as well and we were writing and drawing facts and stuff and then we finished that book and we were deciding to make one of those things like Alex made - and we are going to make a flag book and this is about Asia and my section.

Cathy: That's me drawing the flags.

May: I've got a book and it's about how to create a country, and here is a picture of me making the book.

Researcher: So, the book about how to create a country, can you read a few pages for me?

May: It's ten pages. First create a flag – a country can't be called a country without a flag – you can make your own or use one of the flags below. Two, make a name and make it interesting. Don't call it Jeff island or Casey's country – make your own or use one of ours. Three, use a shape. You can add extra stuff after. For now just create a shape. Be sure to add bays, gulfs and peninsulas. You can make your own or use one of the ones below. Four, create a national anthem. Be sure to make it long and boring. You can make your own or use one of ours. Five, add things. You can add as much as you like. Six, find a place for your country. You can create it on a beach, yard or in your house. Seven, choose your materials. You can make it out of sticks leaves felt shoes cups or anything else you can find. Eight, make it. You can use your patterns or your profile. Nine, get people to know it. You can tell your family friends and community. Well done you've made a country.

Cathy: And then there is stuff at the back.

May: That is just the blurb. Have you ever wondered how to make a country? Well this book will help you in 10 easy steps. Africa. Hi America, New Zealand.

These children's descriptions of their questions and then their reading of their book can be viewed as revealing their understanding of the traditional conventions of a book, such as the blurb, sequenced ideas and the genre of a procedure, but it can also be interpreted as a step along the way to a powerful realisation that knowledge is co-constructed and of their own value as knowledge constructors. They are showing agency as learners in how they construct knowledge and demonstrate their ways of knowing in this particular classroom. Understanding their agency in co-constructing knowledge with their peers was evidenced across participant children's dialogic encounters. Emma, who had noticed the Union Jack on many flags in the atlas on the initial research visit described how she and Gerri collaborate to create new knowledge:

Emma: Me and Gerri decided to do a project about Australia and the Commonwealth. I started it and Gerri decided she wanted to help me with it.

Researcher: Where did your ideas come from?

Emma: The Atlas. Here's the Australian flag that I did and I wrote some information about Australia, a few pages about different states in Australia and I started a section on the Union Jack. And we're also going to do a collage sunset Australian flag, and Gerri is going to make a flag page at the back and she had the idea of making the Australian flag and the sunset blowing in the wind.

Researcher: How is it that you and Gerri work together? How do you decide your ideas together? How do you help each other to learn?

Emma: We both come up with an idea and then we try to make it together and if that doesn't work we'll do both ideas. I had an idea of doing the Australian flag on a poster in the wind and she had the idea of doing a sunset, so we decided to mix them together to do a sunset and an Australian flag. And we're also going to do a big poster with all of the flags of the commonwealth in the shape of the countries.

In another example, Alex describes how he and his friends had started on a large world map, he explained the negotiations which ensued as part of setting themselves a project:

Alex: I made this with E and J, who are my best friends. We started by making a flag book and then we tried making another one and then we decided that we would make something else. I didn't know what they were starting I went there when they started the countries. When I came they had started Australia up there, and I asked could I help and they said, 'Oh do you want to do something else?', and I said 'Yeah sure'. Then I decided to do this Australian flag on the top and they had to get a lot of A3 paper and I think Ms C had a lot. So, we done Australia, Papua New Guinea, China, Hungary, Germany, France, Turkey. I think that's meant to be Austria. North West Territories – I don't know what that one is.

Researcher: It says Yukon. I think that is probably in Canada.

Alex: Yeah that's Canada. We're still doing it and they are going to start to do America today, down here. They might finish Russia as well.

Researcher: How do you negotiate your ideas?

Alex: We talk to each other and tell each other what we are doing and how we are thinking and then we decide to make one big idea all together. So, this is our big idea and when we finish this we thought we might finish our flag book and then we will have to put this behind the couch because it won't fit in our drawers anymore like it used to.

Through their agency in working collaboratively, children showed a deep understanding of the process of learning. Their articulation of the process of their work together notes the negotiation and the importance of friendship. When this thread of thinking was pursued, some children identified that they don't always work with their best friends. They elaborated that they sometimes ask other people if they can work with them, but that doesn't always work, or that they felt that working together with friends helped them to meet challenges. The children's comments illustrate that social relationships, negotiations and inclusion are part of the figured world of how learning happens within this classroom. This relates strongly to the way that educators in Reggio Emilia see social relationships as essential for learning. Gandini (1998, p.170) writes:

> *Through shared activity, communication, cooperation and even conflict, children co-construct their knowledge of the world, using one child's idea to develop another's or to explore a path yet unexplored.*

Educators in Reggio Emilia believe the design of the space for learning should facilitate these processes and this was also evident in Alice's classroom. Children had choices of working at different levels, on stools at high benches, on cushions or the floor, around round tables or at tables which faced the wall or other displays. This arrangement allowed for more space for movement in the classroom and children understood the choices that they had by making the most of these spaces in their group work.

Alice used positional language in her description of the 'place' of the curriculum and whether it was enabling of or an impediment to learning. She described some teachers' use of the curriculum as a safety blanket to hold on to and alluded to the importance of taking risks to enable:

> *...bigger and better things in the classroom, being guided by the curriculum, but it slides alongside the learning rather than it being top heavy, the curriculum and the children coming underneath.*

Alice recalled a quote by (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.83):

> *Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn.*

She added her interpretation to reinforce the position of the curriculum in her developing figured world of the classroom:

Alice: So that in itself is the same as the students and the curriculum I guess so it's not just the teacher and the students but it's actually the curriculum, the teacher and the students – all three.

Researcher: In dialogue together?

Alice: Yeah and the parents too because they put their own spin on things, and not so much in the classroom but in the conversations they are having at home, so you don't know what's happening

at home either but that's that third partnership of what's going on there and the children are coming back with different ideas or different theories that are based on then their own personal relationships at home.

This connection from school to home was experienced by parents/carers and children as related in a conversation with parents/carers where a parent described, his son Alex' questions and curiosity stemming from the Atlas investigation:

Alex's Dad: You know he asked me, well my side of the family is Hungarian, so he was asking where the name came from, like Hungary. Where did that come from?

Researcher: I was wondering why Hungary was so featured on the map. Now it makes sense.

Alex's Dad: Yes, so he was asking questions about that. And he's thrown some curly ones at me. I'm sure you've been in the same boat where he asked questions and you think well I should probably know this. Yes, so it's an interesting conversation that turns into you know our culture and grandma and grandpa and all that sort of stuff, so those are the sort of things that he discusses, certain projects that he is on, things that he is interested in.

Parent and teacher dialogue also arose through Alice's description of a parent's query about how to assess this type of collaborative, student led inquiry:

Alice: A parent said to me well how are you going to assess this? I said well I am actually not going to give them a grade, I said, but I am actually going to assess the skills. You know are they taking initiative, can they work in groups? Those are the skills that I am actually looking for not so much an A, B, C, D, E grade.

Researcher: Those cross-curriculum understandings which are really the heart of it?

Alice: Yeah absolutely and yeah that's right and even the general capabilities. Sometimes you tend not to look at them when you are looking at your outcome base for what you are planning on doing, but something like this project the children have started, you can all of a sudden see different types of learning, and if you look especially at the creativity side of things there's so many tick boxes just there to say they can do this, they can do that but if you don't allow them that time to do that, it's very hard to see that as well.

This dialogue again reinforces the emergence of some new ways of relating to the ritual of student assessment in this developing figured world. However, as well as movement towards different ways of assessment, there was also reference to the artefacts of 'ABCDE grades' and 'tick boxes' in what we can recognise as dominant practices of assessment. Interesting also that the teacher's description of her focus of assessment was in the cross curricular understandings when there are also very clear links to children's content knowledge within the curriculum area of Humanities and Social Sciences.

In closing this illustration, a parent of a child from Alice's class responded to a question about her hope for the way that schools of the future may go by suggesting:

> *I suppose along the way of the learning we're talking about today. That's in year two and three. Does that stay through the older years or does it get more directed learning, that old school teaching of teaching* ***at*** *a class?*

At the same time, however this parent also described the tenuous nature of this kind of thinking within the school. She described her older daughter's experience of having choices and responsibility for her learning endowed by a teacher in a previous year:

> *They did have more of a say in the classroom and her spirits lifted. She was a different kid in the classroom because she felt that she was being heard and she had some power over what was going on in the classroom, where you sit. They were all more responsible for their actions like they weren't going to get consequences for the behaviour of others.*

However, with a change of teacher, this parent saw her daughter currently experiencing a 'complete flip' in the autonomy and responsibility she had previously been afforded.

In this story of children's thinking and investigation, it was the educator Alice, and the improvisations that she made to her teaching as she was provoked by Reggio Emilia principles and Catholic identity to be more receptive to children's thinking, which enabled the children to have their voices heard and time for

their own investigations. Alice made a fortunate choice to put aside her scheduled plan when she noticed the children's engagement with the Atlases during a 'routine time' of the day when she had needed some time to record class attendance. This improvisation linked to past experiences of making open ended opportunities for children's inquiry, saw her questioning her identity as the controller of children's learning and opening space for an identity as a connector with children's learning.

Alice's careful planning of the environment linked to the school's past inquiry about negotiating spaces with children. It is another example of making a clear choice to facilitate social relations which she sees through the Reggio Emilia principles, as a necessary condition for learning. She listened attentively to children's questions and wonderings– not to answer them but to explore them. Alice's reflection about the curriculum, the teacher, the students and the parents/carers being in dialogue, is thinking which is clearly influencing the figured world of her classroom and the identities and experiences of everyone within it. The dialogic encounter where children shared their Atlas projects highlights that they are developing their identities as active agents in their own learning through the improvisations Alice made to re-imagine her practice.

An emerging pedagogy of listening

Documentation of children's thinking is a developing pedagogy within East Catholic School, emerging from the preschool where there are many traces of children's thinking available as provocations for teachers, families and community members. The traces were sourced through scribing oral language during group discussions and collecting drawings and artwork to capture children's representations and thoughts.

Nina, a Reception teacher, also placed great value on listening to children and acknowledging their "hopes and dreams" as part of the learning process in her classroom. On the first research visit to the classroom, this value was evident in a range of ways. The classroom was set up with a range of provocations on different tables and areas. During the daily Discovery time, a part of every morning's routine, children could freely choose resources from accessible, low storage. Resources included a stage, dress ups and musical instruments; flowers for still life drawing, set up so that children could find, add to and reflect on their previous drawings; a lizard from the Nature Education Centre, brought in as a link to children's interests in learning more about lizards; and piles of books that were placed on or at the back of children's chairs.

Upon wondering out loud about the significance of these books, children told the researcher, "They are there for Liam because he wants to know more about space." Nina described later that while children could move around and work in any areas of the room according to what they wanted to work on, they did have a home chair. She used this home chair as a base for placing books that she knew would extend children's thinking. Through this process, children also became more attuned to each other's thinking and passions.

Parents from Nina's class acknowledged the efforts made by Nina to listen to their children and also to them as parents:

Olivia's mum: I teach Italian and so Olivia knows quite a bit of Italian songs and things and so Nina and I didn't say anything to Nina and then she emailed me and said, "Could you give me the songs and come and do it as a thing with the class" because I think Olivia has been teaching the children some songs so she honed in on that, she knew that Olivia loved it and so she promoted it and she got me to help as well with the language so that they could do it together.

Floyd's mum: In particular Floyd is very interested in science, stones and bugs and whatever. I think that Nina is very good at tailoring those interests into other subjects as wel.. You know the books he is bringing home tend to be quite science based, so for him to be doing his reading about things like that, I think she is really, really good at catering to individual children and not just expecting I'm going to throw this to the entire class. And I think that's probably a big difference in children coming here to coming to a mainstream school because it seems there's a bit more investment in individual children here.

Deidre's mum: I feel like we are invited all the time, and I as I'm sure you all do, I work quite a few hours so my connection is quite limited in terms of that I can't really do reading and those kind of things, but I feel that Nina really tries to make an effort to always find ways of involving us. The Hundred days was a great opportunity for me to book some time off and that was the first time that I had really seen those different areas at work which is great to see how she manages you know everyone doing the different activities, but it's not chaos you know like you said it's very organised and there is still a lot of learning taking place and for us to be part of that kind of learning is really nice. The

other day I got an email from Nina. I run a boarding school, so she was saying can I come in and talk about the boarders to the children, so she is always trying to find ways of involving us without pressure.

The interplay of children's thinking was observed by the researcher when she was invited to the continuation of a class discussion about thinking. Children's conceptions of thinking ranged from thinking about morality and the influence of emotions, to the connection between thinking and learning and ways of understanding the neurological process. It was evident through their conversation, that children sought to clarify and really understand each other's meanings, adding their own interpretations. At times, Nina reflected back to the children what had been said, interpreting another child's comment. She did not, however, screen any child's contribution. All of the children's offerings were typed as they were said, so that children could see their words on the electronic whiteboard. Several times a child stopped and corrected something that had been written so that the documentation would be accurate. This was not the first discussion about thinking that had been documented in the class and children's past comments were reflected upon as the documentation built. The tone of the group discussion signalled that children in this Reception class were familiar with the process of dialogue. Rather than dismissing ideas that may have appeared tangential, they tried to delve into the meaning, seeking understanding through clarification.

Nina was also attuned to children's feelings regarding the experience of school beyond the curriculum and learning of her classroom. She related an experience and the subsequent documentation of one child's reaction to the school bell from 2016. Georgia's mum described the beginning of the story in this way:

> *What happened during reception was, do you know the bell, I think it's the same one, and coming from Kindy, you know there was nothing like that and then all of a sudden there is this blaring bell like a trumpet blaring, and Georgia, you know she is very sensitive, that was like really invasive. It just seemed to upset her a lot. And I was talking to Georgia and I said how did it actually happen that the ball was rolling with this change of the bell? I think she just mentioned it to Nina and Nina kind of really didn't say, "Oh don't worry about it, you get used to it". She actually said, "Okay so what do you think we could do about that? What changes, what would you like to see happen instead?"*

At the time, Nina's class spoke a lot about the bell and what could be done, they wrote a letter to the Principal, suggesting that music could be used instead of the loud bell. The principal at the time said that he would look into changing it, however he had since left, and the bell remained. Georgia recalled the situation:

Georgia: I think I said, is it a good idea to change the bell and that's how it all started.

Researcher: So, it was just a suggestion.

Georgia: Yes, and it was such short notice – just a tiny, weeny word and something so big can start from just a tiny, weeny word. I wasn't prepared for all of this, I really wasn't.

Researcher: So, Nina took that little suggestion.

Georgia: Yeah, that little suggestion to a humungous suggestion.

Researcher: And actually, something might still change.

Georgia: And then I got to the time when I was in year one, and the bell was still the same, and it never really happened.

Researcher: Why do you think that might be.

Georgia: I don't know exactly – I think Mr (Principal), I don't think builders… I think he might have forgotten or something and some of the builders might not have been available to change the bell, or something. And Mum said, or maybe someone in our family said that all the grown-ups and the children could look up the music to change the bell – relaxing music. And another thing it's such a small space for such a big bell for tiny ears."

Nina chose to relaunch the concept of children's feelings about the bell this year by documenting the 'bell story', which she then shared with others, seeking their thoughts, including about voting process

about a possible change to the bell. Nina also shared her documentation of her current class' responses to the bell story, including feedback from the CESA Re-imagining Childhood team, with the researcher. The children's comments in the documentation revealed their thinking about how Georgia might feel, about how change happens in the school and their suggestions about the change that they would like to see. Their comments showed their understanding that different people have different opinions and points of view. Feedback about the documentation from the CESA Re-imagining Childhood team suggested thinking about the meaning of democracy as a possible following line of inquiry.

Georgia's and her mother's remarks show their sense of surprise and appreciation of Nina's response to Georgia's feelings about the bell. Nina's choice to dig deeper into not only how Georgia perceived the bell, but also how other classmates thought about the issue, links to the Reggio Emilia principle of schools as sites for social action and negotiation. By highlighting Georgia's feelings about the bell, presenting this to the class community for their thoughts and then working with the class community to take the issue to the school leadership, Nina was supporting what Forman and Fyfe (2011, p.262) call "social consciousness about the rights of all young children".

The relaunching of the 'project' with Nina's current class, showed the value of documentation to assist children to both revisit their own thinking and take up the thoughts of the other children who had inhabited their classroom in previous years. The approach of listening to a single child's point of view and using this as a provocation for a group is part of a teacher's role within the Reggio Emilia approach. Edwards (1998, p.156) suggests, "With the help of the teacher, the question or observation of one child leads others to explore territory never encountered, perhaps never even suspected." What is more significant than the specific consideration of the rethinking of an everyday school ritual such as a school bell, is the concept that young children are possessors of rights, and as such are able to know about and contribute to democratic processes of change in an institution such as a school. Certainly, within any school community, individual teachers will have diverse passions that will influence their pedagogical choices. Nina's enthusiasm for provoking children's thinking and bringing individual's ideas to the fore was tempered by reflection on how to balance group interests, and how to manage her role as a teacher. Nina explained, "So that's the thing, it's learning how much to stand back and how much to guide. So I just keep juggling and trying, and I'm open to constructive criticism." This tension is indicative of the ever-evolving nature of re-imagining pedagogy, in this case the pedagogy of listening. Nina's reflection highlighted the struggles of adapting and working with ideas over time, and also the importance of feedback in the process of re-authoring her role as a teacher.

Jill from the preschool described the process of working with emergent interests in her curriculum:

> *I think that is something that people get really bogged down in because if you've got 40 children [with] 40 interests it's not possible, but you will always find a common thread and really over the course of the year that we have the children now you will find this group doing something, thinking in a similar way, another group thinking in a different way. Later on it might be a combination of the two thinking about something else and having that relationship with each other, so you are not going to wear yourself out. The children learn about listening and respecting other ideas as well and you need to make decisions, good decisions, not always good decisions, but never a bad decision. It always takes you to a different place. There's opportunities for the interests to be somehow acknowledged and built on.*

Nina described her passion for projects which have a real purpose, and also reflected on her belief in the spiritual dimension of learning. This passion was represented in an artefact which Nina shared from the CESA's Re-imagining Childhood project about the transdisciplinary connections between a conceptual idea, chosen area of investigation and prospects of relaunching. She shared her connections via email:

> *The spiral is in response to Tiziana's explanation of Malaguzzi's expression of how learning is no longer forced upon children, it's more than just teachers imposing learning upon children and then the next stage of children responding for us to take action, but a further step to the understanding of the approach where a continual spiral effect is in place. Henceforth we aim to work in relationship with one another, continually growing together in respect for one another. It is not merely the educator doing something to the children and the children doing something to the educator but intertwined.*
>
> *This coincides beautifully with my sincere belief of striving to create a Community of Inquiry, welcoming families and friends to contribute. However, it doesn't make my role any easier but is worth the effort. The Reggio Emilia approach forces us to remember that learning is slow and*

accumulative. It can't be rushed and needs to be trans-disciplinary. When we acknowledge this and respect this truth for all members of the Learning Community it becomes a Spiritual process of love, kindness and change that being learning and understanding.

Nina's beliefs about the process of learning, which were clearly shaped by both the Reggio Emilia principles and her Catholic identity, illustrated the significance of an emerging pedagogy of listening in her re-imagined practice. The identity of a teacher as a connector with, rather than a provider of, content for learning, as noticed with Alice in the Atlas project, was also evident in this example. Nina used her agency as an individual teacher to connect children and families with each other's interests and concerns. Parents acknowledged the active ways that Nina sought to connect children's interests and passions with their learning in her classroom. The rituals and artefacts of Nina's classroom also served to connect children not only with their own hopes and dreams but also with the hopes and dreams of others in the learning community. As a school leader, David's aspirations of building stronger collaboration in staff teams as they bring their diverse understandings of the pedagogy of listening into play, meant that there was a need for further dialogue about the balance between individual and group interests across the broader context of a whole school.

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy

The two illustrations show the negotiation of the Reggio Emilia principles with the school's Catholic identity to inform a local approach. Also significant in this example is the extension of the Reggio Emilia principles beyond their usual prior to school context into the context of schooling – particularly in the example of the Year 2/3 teacher, children and families.

Table 9: Data analysis – East Catholic Primary School

Incidents from illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy	Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts	Catholic identity
Allowing time for children to develop their own investigations	• Pedagogy of listening • Image of child as competent and capable	• Doing justice to the value of childhood… seeing God's grace in children's sense of wonder…their enquiring minds…their search for knowledge…. CCTMG p.7
Connecting children's, families' and teachers' interests and passions to support learning	• Pedagogy of listening • Making learning visible • Transdisciplinary learning	• The educational endeavour to foster children's flourishing is an expression of God's grace...All of us together—children, parents, carers, teachers, school leaders, and our communities—can be caught up in the grace of God. CCTMG p.9 • How do you see families, church communities and Catholic schools best fostering the eternal love of God present and at work in children's hearts? CCTMG p.10
Tuning in to children's questions and wonderings	• Documentation to make children's learning visible • Proggetazione – possibilities for inquiry	• Children bring a world of experience and questions to the learning process, which should begin with that experience and those questions. Here, listening requires us to seek to be open to the variety of ways in which children express themselves. CCTMG p.9

Building a community of learners through sharing ideas and projects	• Co-construction of learning – learning being an active and reciprocal exchange • Teacher as researcher	
Questioning the status quo	• Democracy: children as citizens • Pedagogy of listening • Children as capable and competent	• Jesus saw children having a special place and role in the Kingdom. CCTMG p.7 • How are you challenged by Jesus' view of children as models of how to receive the love of God? What connections do you see between Jesus' view of children and the Re-imagining Childhood initiative's vision of children as citizens and bearers of rights? CCTMG 10

The table above demonstrates how leaders and teachers brought their Catholic identity into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles. In particular, we can see how teachers' engagement with the image of the child through the Reggio Emilia principles and through their Catholic identity directly align to inform an image of the child as a competent and capable community member. In drawing on the Stimulus Paper, *Children: Close to the Mystery of God* (CESA, 2015), the leader and teachers at East Catholic School have partaken in their own journey to reflect upon how they value children within their own context. The table shows reflection on how children are listened to, valued and included in making important decisions that impact their lives. It represents the intention that the educators have as voiced by the school principal to move from the practice of "teachers imposing knowledge…to understanding the process of learning".

The comments about learning from both teachers uncover a key difference between the Reggio Emilia principles as they are enabled in the place of Reggio Emilia and in the way they were negotiated in the contexts of this research. In the Reggio Emilia infant child centres there are no set curricula (Malaguzzi, 1998) for teachers to adhere to, whereas in the contexts of this research, the Australian curriculum for schools was a key artefact which must be used in planning. The exact way that the Australian curriculum must be used is not specified however, and both teachers in the illustrated examples of practice and reflection showed some thinking about how this could occur.

Alice described the place of the curriculum as running alongside, not on top of children's thinking, as a player in the negotiation between children's and teachers' thinking. While Nina did not explicitly use the term curriculum in her description of learning, she expressed a desire for learning to be seen as transdisciplinary and not 'imposed' on children. This certainly had implications for a move away from a traditional view of pre-planned lessons to satisfy curriculum objectives. In both teacher's practice, the more open approach to curriculum was not at the expense of intentional planning. It was the focus of the planning that was different. The planning became the intention to deeply listen to and notice children's wonderings and how they could spark further thinking. This intention was shown in the choices made about how to set up both a physical, temporal and a relational environment for inquiry and learning. The planning was supported by documentation of children's thinking to uncover not only the content of the learning but also the children's understanding of the process of how they were learning.

Summary

East Catholic School has begun its journey of re-imagining pedagogy. What started from the inspiration some teachers found in the Reggio Emilia principles through individual connections is growing through the school's involvement in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and the CESA Re-imagining Childhood initiative. A key support to this growing appreciation of the Reggio Emilia principles is the clear link to Catholic identity which is shared across the school. The illustrations from East Catholic School provide insight into the impact these principles have on shifting teachers' and children's identities as co-constructors of knowledge.

As shown in the story of the Atlas investigation and the emergence of a pedagogy of listening, such transformation in identities happens over considerable time with the support of trusting and collaborative relationships.

As leaders and teachers shared strategies for including the voice of children in decision making about classroom environments, developed processes for inquiry-based learning and rethinking rituals such as the 'school bell' , the challenge was to build this approach through the fabric of the school so that it is consistently available for all children and parents/carers. In the words of the teacher leaders' in their conference presentation for Re-imagining childhood – "the only way to make deep change is to normalise it."

Coastal Catholic Primary School

Context

Coastal Catholic Primary school is a reception to year 7 Catholic school located 400km from the CBD. There are approximately 210 children enrolled, with a small percentage of Aboriginal children and children with disabilities. Families are largely English speaking and from Anglo Celtic background. The families enrolled at the school represent a considerable diversity of socio-economic circumstances including families without stable employment moving through the area, established farming and fishing families and families employed in local industry.

The school has gone through three extensive renovations over the past nine years. These renovations include new learning and administrative facilities, multipurpose hall, renovations to the primary classes, development of a nature play learning space, a building and construction centre and a science/environmental centre.

Coastal Catholic Primary is guided by the Catholic identity and the Mercy Key traditions and has a strong focus on ecological sustainability. The following programs and learning spaces have been developed as part of this focus: Outdoor Learning Garden, Frog pond, Chooks, Orchard, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, a Butterfly Garden, a recycling program, involvement in Nature SA's Youth Environmental Leadership Program and the school's environmental group, "The Tree Shepherds" (80 members).

Data collection

Data collection at Coastal Catholic Primary school included individual dialogic encounters with leaders and teachers, and small group dialogic encounters with children and parents/carers. The participant informed methods are highlighted below.

Table 10: Data collection methods – Coastal Catholic Primary School

	Individual dialogic encounters	Group dialogic encounters	Participant informed methods
Leader	• Annette* (principal)		• Preliminary meeting before interview • Conference presentation: Re-imagining Childhood • School tour
Educator	• Teachers · Susie* (Reception) · Margo* (Year 2/3) · Nanci* (Year 2/3) · Jackie* (Year 2/3)		• Conference presentation: CESA Early Years Symposium • 2 class observation visits • 2 play time observations • Preliminary meeting before interview
Parent/Carer		• Reception children worked with their teacher and the researcher to create maps of their learning	
Children		• Children in the Year 2/3 class made maps to show changes they had experienced in their outdoor learning area	

*Pseudonyms

Perspectives that inform pedagogy

The learning program across the school is inspired by a variety of contemporary educational perspectives and their Catholic identity. In particular, participants spoke about the Reggio Emilia principles and their Catholic identity informed by the Mercy Key principles.

Reggio Emilia principles

Principal Annette's interest in the Reggio Emilia principles was first sparked by a family member who as an early years educator, had been engaged with the Reggio Emilia principles prior to Annette's involvement. Annette said:

> *When I was over at her house and she's sitting there, and she has all this documentation and this is going back even 6-7 years ago, and I was just so inspired by how she was listening to the child. So that very much was an inspiration for me, and she was working with 3 and 4-year-olds and I was looking at and listening to what the 3 and 4-year-olds were actually talking about and discussing, and the ideas that they had, and I was just blown away.*

Since then, Annette and the educators at Coastal Catholic Primary have been a part of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and the CESA Re-Imagining Childhood Project. Each year of involvement they have elected different teachers to represent the school in each project. Annette described this as a strategy for building culture:

> *I'm very purposeful in naming – we're doing the project again next year, but my team is changing and I'm asking different people to be involved because I want this. It's like spreading the good news so to speak, because if we're going to keep it, if it's going to be sustainable, when team members move on, school leaders move on, if it's that important it's got to be sustainable and it can't be reliant on people. It has to be reliant on a culture, and so you've got to be very obvious in how you're going to work with everybody, to develop that.*

Each of the projects involved an element of teacher research. Teachers involved shared this research both with the project groups as well as their school colleagues as part of the staff professional development.

Catholic principles and beliefs

Building a strong Catholic identity is an important part of being in the Catholic education system. As indicated in the school website, "We encourage respect and value human dignity, the questioning of the society in which we live and the ability to look beyond self-interest and help those in need." In the spirit of Catholic tradition, the school identified six Mercy Key core values they aim to embed throughout the school and in their engagement with children and families. These core Mercy Key values are Integrity, Loyalty, Compassion, Justice, Mutual respect and Responsibility.

They also draw on the CESA Stimulus Paper, *Children: Close to the Mystery of God* (CESA, 2015) which was inspired by the Rinaldi residency and the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project. Within this document the image of the child and the pedagogy of listening is brought into dialogue with the Catholic tradition, "that every child is of inestimable value" and seeing, "the Mystery of God's love revealed in children's experiences, even amidst life's brokenness and limits." (p.5). The paper stresses, "our recognition of the ultimate value of each child has educational implications; children are subjects and agents of their own learning" (p.9). This is reflected on the school's website: "We aspire to realise the potential of all students and their families."

The links to the Catholic identity were a key lever for teachers at the school to re-imagine their practice, as it had been previously felt that the Reggio Emilia principles were more an early childhood methodology. Maintaining whole school dialogue and focus on reflection and redesign of practice was an important priority for Annette:

> *I want to move this through to our school culture, not just being early years, I want to move it right away from having an understanding that this is an early years pedagogical practice. This is an amazing pedagogical practice for all of us, and it's developing such rich understanding of children, of educators, of learners, of adults, of community.*

Other influences

In addition to the influence of the Reggio Emilia principles and Catholic identity, there were other perspectives, some named, that served to inform the curriculum and pedagogy at Coastal Catholic Primary School. A description of all the different perspectives is beyond the scope of this report. The two that have been shared were those that consistently emerged throughout multiple interviews and were also reflected in shared artefacts such as the school website, conference presentation and information provided to families. It is important to mention that multiple perspectives were being explored as it sheds light on the engagement and negotiating of multiple perspectives that is needed to re-imagine practice.

Illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy

The following illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy provide a window into the experiences of children, educators and families through the stories they shared. These illustrations demonstrate how educators and leaders understood and negotiated the Reggio Emilia principles with their contextually situated perspectives to re-imagine their pedagogy.

Voice and agency in the learning environments

The learning environments at Coastal Catholic Primary were recently redeveloped. The first development was the work to open up classrooms to each other and to the outdoor environment. As you move through the classroom spaces now there is a visual line of sight between classrooms via large glass sliding doors which provide the option of opening or closing to enable either cross class collaboration or times for focus as one class. Class spaces are uncluttered and furnished with neutral colours. The class spaces are configured differently but what is common through the Junior corridor are the different options for seating – at kitchen table level, at child desk level and cushion or floor level. The carefully arranged displays of current inquiries and wonderings are also a noticeable feature across the class spaces.

As you enter the rear outdoor areas, wide verandahs lead from the classroom spaces to the outdoor nature play space. At the beginning of a school day, the researcher noticed clusters of parents/carers and children both moving through and also engaged in elements of the nature play area… looking at the fish pond, chatting on outdoor seating, observing the rock crushing work in progress by the creek area. The atmosphere felt relational as parents/carers greeted each other and the school principal and teachers who were preparing their classrooms or chatting by their back doors.

The story of the transformation of the learning environments at Coastal Catholic Primary is a powerful example of their journey in re-imagining education. Annette, Margo and Nanci shared how the transformation of the learning environments began with an interest in de-cluttering and grew as they observed the impact that involving children in the process had on children and their learning. Margo, a year 2/3 teacher, described how her interest in exploring the learning environment sparked after attending a professional development session presented by South Australian educational consultant, Lisa Burman. Margo described this particular professional development as being focused on de-cluttering:

> *We came back and just started. I remember even the following week I just decluttered and just asked the question "what is the purpose of basically everything in my classroom?". It wasn't just for, because things look nice or loose parts look pretty or whatever, it was actually asking what the purpose was. But then I think we went into it probably halfway through the year so then by the end of that year we started afresh. Once we'd obviously decluttered everything, everything that went back in was why, why is it going back in there? All the pre-made posters and things come away and the children were part of that. So, at the beginning of the year I didn't have the number charts up. We made them on the first day of school. I didn't make their, our tray labels, they made their tray labels, and conferencing with them about what they want to see in their classroom and just starting afresh, from helping them to see themselves in the classroom I think, instead of obviously just seeing the teacher, because a lot of it is about the teacher.*

Nanci as year 2/3 teacher similarly described how she started with a focus on decluttering the classroom:

> *That was the first thing – I just wanted to clear our room, get rid of everything, and start afresh but you can't do that unless you get the kids on, talk to the kids. So who uses this? Have we used this? Do we need this? Are you happy with this? Those sorts of things. Talking to them about how they learn best and how are they comfortable in the classroom, what makes them feel safe and that was where it all began, and that learning environment changed.*

The involvement of children in transforming the learning space grew. Principal, Annette, described the how the children took responsibility as active agents by writing a letter to the Governing Council:

> *There [were] wonderful conversations happening with the reception to 2s. They looked at their environment, they had discussions, they had their team meetings, they included me, and so one day they [the children] had written me a letter, and they asked if they could present to the school board. So, they presented this letter to the school board which talked about their learnings through the very beginning of re-imaging project, and that they would like to look at changing their environments. Well they straight away got the community on-board. So very slowly they started to take away all the square desks, well not all of them, opening up to variety of bean bags, low tables, dining room tables, the round tables, the rectangular tables, stools, chairs, wooden blocks, a reading area, which they've always had, but they really calmed it down, and they toned it down, the natural – so takeaway lots of the bright colours that they had and were putting in the natural tones. Looking at how we have an amazing wall that we covered up with coloured cardboard. So instead they went and got very calming material, so whether it be the hessian, or the calico or the, the very soft colours. And they immediately noticed that the children themselves just had this sense of calmness about them, and they weren't all hyped up and came in excited, but there was a real calmness about them.*

The attention to the learning spaces was initiated by teachers who re-considered the spaces first aesthetically to clear clutter and then relationally to consider how the spaces reflected the joint ownership between teachers and children. This process had a profound effect on the experiences of children and flowed on to the opportunities for learning. By removing ready-made posters and labels, children were 'doing the thinking' to construct the artefacts for learning in their classroom, rather than having these artefacts of knowledge presented to them for uncritical consumption. This links with the bigger concept of the co-construction of knowledge and learning and is a consequence of the teachers' changing their perception of children's competence both through the image of the child in Reggio Emilia principles and in their Catholic identity. The changing of the environments led to re-imagining pedagogy:

Annette: Interestingly what happened is their environments changed and it was a real wow factor. Everyone went wow. They were talking to the children about what was missing or what they would like to see, when they were doing units of work, and integrated units of work. Instead of the teacher sitting down for hours planning what it should look like, they started to involve the children.

Margo: We started using provocations. I feel so silly saying what we were doing but you'd have a wheel of these activities and each table would just change each day (a rotation). So, we made it a little bit more free flowing and open-ended and all of that stuff. And so every morning the children would come in and have that time and that's when you'd obviously get to hear some of those amazing conversations about what they're talking about.

Nanci: Because the learning environment changed, actually, the teaching had to change. So, because the children were sitting differently because they were working differently in the space because instead of sitting in rows or in little pockets of groups, they could sit where they chose to and they went to different kids at different times to work with them because they knew that that was who they wanted to work with.

What is common to the approaches to the environments and pedagogy is the concept of deconstruction, reflection and critique. The teachers and leader, seeing the effect of their reflection on their physical learning spaces, took the critical processes into the curriculum. The questioning about children's ownership and agency in the learning spaces thus led to the questioning about the ownership and agency in the processes of learning. The teachers continued to reshape their identities from controllers to negotiators of learning.

The impact of transformed learning environments and pedagogy led to involving children in making other decisions that impacted their lives, such as the curriculum. These changes were noticed by other teachers within the school. Annette shared how this prompted others to re-imagine their learning environments and pedagogy:

> *So, a couple of the staff up in the upper school, they said, "Well can we bring our children through?" So, they took their children on a tour down to the junior primary classes, to show them just the learning environments and the different learning spaces. Took them back to their classroom and said, "Have a look at our classroom. Are there things that you would like to change? What's working well for you? How do you like to learn? Does everyone actually like sitting at chairs and tables?", because they said we'd never actually asked them that, how do you learn best, do you learn best sitting on the floor,*

leaning up against the wall, do you like working at small tables? And so that was a whole discussion about that. There was a discussion about decluttering from Lisa Burman's work and what one of the educators had learnt from her presentation, and she presented that to the whole staff. So, then all of a sudden, I had emails, letters from the students, saying Mrs P, we'd really like to, we were wondering if we could actually get a dining room table for our classroom, and this is why. Some of us prefer to actually sit on the floor, and we were wondering if we could have a lower table. Would it be okay if we got some bean bags? So of course, I wrote back and said fantastic idea, I think that's a great idea. So slowly, without any direction, so to speak, it started to filter, and it was the learning environments that actually changed first, and all it was about was the environment, decluttering, bringing the calming down, making it a child's learning environment, not the educators' learning environment. So that now, after three and a half years, in the majority of areas we now see that much calmer, much student-driven learning environment. We had areas like, our specialist areas, so they, you could see the change occur there.

Parents spoke fondly of changes to the environment and believed it had a positive outcome on children's connection to school:

Fiona: Like the unstructured classrooms now, they can sit on the floor if they want to, these desks if they want to work that way. I think that's brilliant.

Fran: Yes, they can sit down on a couch or a cushion, so I feel comfortable here.

Aaron: Yeah, I think the biggest one that I've noticed that in [my child's] room he's got bean bags and a dining table, a palette table. It just encourages you as a student I think, to think differently, you know oh cool, this is something different.

Fiona: And they are so happy to come to school, like we have never had an issue with him not wanting to come to school. It is a happy welcoming school environment.

The experience of changing environments led to an opening of the processes by which decisions and changes to the environments could be made, both for teachers in the senior years of the school and children themselves. As a leader, Annette's openness to the communication and proposals from children shows a way forward towards a listening community where "the school invites an exchange of ideas; it has an open and democratic style, and thereby tends to open minds" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.66).

From indoor to outdoor

Participants also spoke about the changes made to the outdoor environment. Annette reflected on how their questioning of class learning environments and pedagogy expanded their thinking about their outdoor spaces:

We started talking about play and what play looked like, and one of the conversations we were having with educators and children was what they can do outside the classroom and it was like learning was just in the classroom and then they would go to recess and lunch and just play. But when we actually looked at what we had out there for them to play, my goodness it was really boring. So, we decided to open up areas and particularly looking at some of the areas where the children would be able to dig, and where the children would be able to create and imagine and be creative and create their race tracks or create their fairy gardens or create their cooking schools or whatever they wanted to. So, we started to bring in, listen to what the children would like, and we started opening some of our areas and it was an absolute disaster, because we really didn't think much about it. We just went, oh this is really exciting, let's just let them go up to the end where there's some mud and there's some dirt and there's some trees and flowers and, well before you knew it, we had areas completely destroyed, and we just thought what have we done?"

She described how the educators continued to contemplate how they might re-imagine the outdoor area and how they engaged the children in a dialogical process to create ownership and respect for the outdoor environment and materials:

So, we just took a deep breath. Our immediate reaction, right close it all off, stop it. But what we did in doing that is that we got the children together, and the classes to hook the children up to the area and said look what's happened. We made a choice to look at, to listen to what you would like, and to look around our school. We've opened up their areas and look what's happened. Well,

all of a sudden, the children realised, together we all realised, and we came up with, if we're actually going to do this we need to be respectful and responsible and compassionate to our world. Not just to each other, but to creation. And we decided – and when I say we, I'm talking about the children and the educators – and there were some things that we had to say, right, we've gone a little bit too far here, maybe we needed to do things step by step. So then what happened is that we had an area where we just, we got some crates in, we went hunting for loose parts, we created areas where the children were able to then build and create and whether it be with logs of wood, whether it happened to be the crates themselves, whether it happened to be little bits of wood and gum nuts and leaves and pine cones and sticks and – and we took them through a process of if we're going to have all this, how do we play safely. So instead of having, don't do this, don't do that, we asked the children to think positively. So it was actually talking about how they were going to play with their sticks, how they were going to play with the rocks, and they came up with some great set of [principles], to be successful really.

The aspects of negotiation in the outdoor learning spaces are even more significant than in class learning spaces as teachers share responsibilities for supervising children's safety during break time play. The consistency of teachers' rules in supervision at such times was a dominant discourse used in staffroom discussion. The process of engaging with children's voices to inform the outdoor learning environment challenged taken-for-granted notions about outdoor play, risk, teachers' image of the child and teacher identity as the enforcer of rules. Engaging children in dialogue to scaffold their learning rather than giving them free range or reverting to a teacher-controlled, rule-bound approach was vital. A group of year 2/3 children shared their experiences of the evolving outdoor play space. Walt, a child in Year 3 explained:

We were doing things we weren't allowed to do like jumping rocks and stuff. Because they didn't know how capable we were and things, so they didn't know. And lots of people were using those crates to carry wood, so then they thought they [the children] are actually capable of doing stuff and so then they thought of that idea and designed it and then they came up with it and they did it.

Annette similarly described the story about the crates as an example of how their thinking about the outdoor area continued to evolve, resulting in engagement of Nature Play consultants to extend the dialogue:

We had these crates that were storing things, and all of a sudden everything was taken out of them, the crates were moved and as educators we went, "No, they're going to jam their fingers, they're going to stub their toes, no they can't do that", and so that opened a new dialogue at staff meeting of, well then what's that actually saying to these children. We've got these things out there, we've put them there, as a storage container, they have taken them now as their truck, or their aeroplane, or their racing car, and they were trying to move it from A to B and they were looking around and they were having discussions with each other, and how are we going to – if it doesn't have wheels, how are we going to move it? So straight away, we as educators stood back and watched, okay, we are learning here. If we stop all this, look at the creativity, look at the imagination. So then as a result of that, we realised we needed to look at our nature, what our play spaces, our learning spaces, so we engaged consultants and we brought them in and they spoke to the children about what they'd like to be outside, what excited them in their learning, and hence we had a new nature learning space developed and now a play space out the front is in consultation with the children. So now we're just about to finish this space, which has got lots of choice, lots of experiences, lots of opportunities.

In sharing a description of the two nature play learning areas, Annette reflected on how much the team has learned throughout this process:

We've got ropes they can climb, we've got stepping stones. We'll have a loose parts area. And now we're thinking, oh we've going to have crates, and we've going to have rocks, and we're going to have hammers, and we're going to have nails, and we're going to have material, and, which is so different to what we originally had, and when we first opened our play spaces up, thinking that we were doing the nature learning, we didn't provide any scaffold with that. So, it proved to us that, no matter what we're doing, there needs to be scaffolding, and that scaffold of discussion and learning together. Originally, we said, okay we'll just open it. We didn't involve the children in any of that discussion. Once it turned absolutely into a diabolical mess, we realised, hang on, we need to pull back here and scaffold it and we involved the children and it just, there was a real scaffold now. And as a result, we've also opened our classrooms up to the outside, so the teachers were saying, we're in these boxes, there's no natural light, we've got one doorway

Figure 10: Artwork by Tim

Tim: I want to learn how you go on a treasure map.

Researcher: I can see an X on your map.

Tim: The X means there is treasure there.

Researcher: do you think there are any places in your school where you can find treasure?

Tim: In the butterfly garden.

> *that leads to a corridor, we've got a veranda there, can we get some windows and doors. So now we're going to have this beautiful space which opens straight up to full of natural light. That natural learning environment inside that will then open to these, this amazing natural learning space outside. So, learning is going to be inside outside, not restrictive to the bells of during class time and that play time so to speak. But that was a huge learning for us, of what we were stopping, when we gave these children, this material and we put it there as a storage box and they completely upturned it, and, but there was so much learning for us that came from that.*

Engaging with children as competent, capable and holders of rights has implications for the structures or scaffolds by which we work together with children to realise new ways of 'doing school'. Malaguzzi (1998, p.58) expresses this as, "If the children had legitimate rights, then they should have opportunities to develop their intelligence and be made ready for the success that would not, and should not, escape them".

The development of the outdoor nature play areas has expanded teachers' thinking about where learning happens. Susie, a Reception teacher, provides an example of how the outdoor nature play area has provided opportunities to extend children's learning in meaningful ways:

> *And when the nature play area first opened, we said oh my gosh, the amount of water that's coming out that water pump, and yes, there was a crazy amount of water coming out the water pump for two weeks, and that was because it's brand new. Everyone wants to try the water pump, you know? And then we started to talk to our children about, and it just so happened that it was around Project and Passion time, you know, the talking at Caritas and people in other countries. And my kids were even saying, we were talking about the water pump, about that's a lot of water, and they go yeah but it just comes from the tanks, and I said yeah, it just does come from the tanks, but do we need to be using it? And some kids said well, if the kids in Africa have to get their water out the well, why are we wasting our water? So, it's also those things about understanding, it's the understanding of responsibility, and the understanding of expectations. It's not here's the expectations, it's here's the expectations and a reason why. So far since nature play area has opened, we haven't really had to talk to anyone about their choices. Yeah, we might have had to say that's actually enough water, no more please. But there's no arguments, no fights, no nothing compared to if you go and you're supervising out the front and there's a game of handball, or they're playing soccer or they're playing footy, there's always disagreements and things like that. But in this area, it just seems that everyone's [content].*

This teacher's understanding of the possibilities of the outdoor learning area shows strong connections with both the Reggio Emilia principle of the environment as a teacher and their embodiment of the Mercy Keys, looking beyond self-interest to understanding of others.

The children in the Reception room created learning maps to share their learning. Tim, Mary, and Sara's maps, shown at Figures 10, 11 and 12 (scribed by the teacher), and corresponding conversations with the researcher, show their understanding of the learning happening within the nature play space.

Parents also reflected on the impact the changes of the learning environments have had on the children. Kim, for example, was pleased that the children were no longer lining up in the mornings but had freedom to play. She was also pleased to see how the teachers have "relaxed":

Kim: Now they are out there running around and it's interesting to watch the teaching staff out there too. For the first little while it was like, "Don't pick that, don't, and now they are more relaxed, and I think that is wonderful and so it is interesting even to watch since that has come, how things have evolved, how there is evidence of play out there.

Jess: Like I went past the crushed rocks and I'm a bit of a touchy person and [my daughter] said, "No don't touch that mum, that's a work in progress, its someone else's." You look this morning, there are things lined up, the fish are still alive and most of the plants are too. So, there is evidence that things are working.

Kim: And there is a big respect thing, between everyone, teachers, parents, kids.

Jess: And the environment. The respect for the environment and sustainability.

The positive experiences of these children and parents/carers indicate that activating children's and teachers' agency and voice in re-imagining shared learning environments resonates with Malaguzzi's description of an "amiable school, where children, teachers and families feel at home" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.64). The process of consulting with children and parents/carers in decisions about these changes represents a pedagogy of listening that is key to the next illustration of pedagogy.

Sara : It's the back play area – that is our class and the numbers get big and that's how you know what class you're in.

Researcher: Fantastic … so what is the part of the playground that you like to learn in the best?

Sara: The pond … I watch the fish.

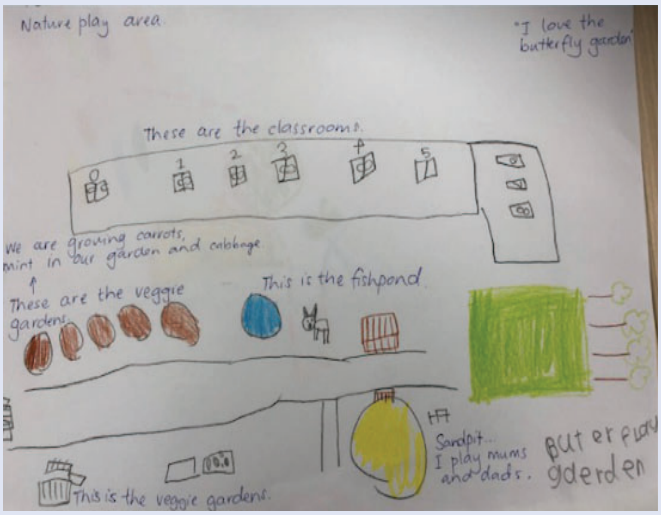


Figure 11: Artwork by Sara

Figure 12: Artwork by Mary

Mary: I drew a garden.

Researcher: is this your garden at home or your garden at school?

Mary: At school we learn about plants.

Researcher: What have your drawn next to your garden?

Mary: A box full of treasure.

Listening and learning community

Critical to re-imagining education at Coastal Catholic Primary has been how they have re-imagined their community as a listening and learning community. Like the story about the changing learning environment, their journey in becoming a listening and learning community also grew over time as they engaged in deep critical reflection of their practice. The integrated story of becoming a listening and learning community shows how an exploration of their image of the child as competent and capable led to explorations of the image of the educator and a pedagogy of listening.

Image of the child as a community member

As part of the leader's and educators' engagement with the Reggio Emilia principles, they explored their image of the child as a collective. Annette describes their process of exploration:

> *I'm talking to them about them being capable and competent, how are they then looking in their classroom and working with the children as capable and competent. So, we then came up with statements. So we worked through what we believe we would see, we worked through what we believe were key words. So, words like risk takers, independent, provocateurs, researchers. So, then it was like, well what does that look like.*

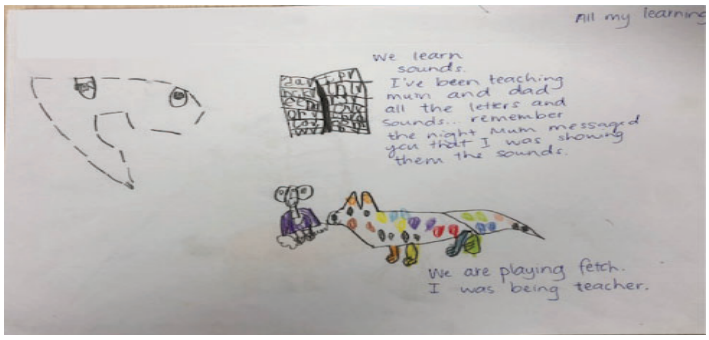


Figure 13: Artwork by Mallory

The teachers at Coastal Catholic Primary School began to reflect on how their image of the child was reflected in their practice. Nanci, a teacher, spoke about how the image of the child as competent and capable provoked her and her colleagues to engage in a pedagogy of listening that has impacted the culture of the school:

> *What has happened from an understanding of that principle of listening in – and the child's voice is actually that – our relationships with our students are different and I think that this has now gone all the way through our school right up to our year 7 teacher. The relationship that I have with the children now is very different to the relationship that I had with the children that I taught 5, 6, 7 years ago. I know that our team could see something really valuable in the way that children were listened to and the whole idea of children's voices and being heard and then responding to what the children are actually saying and that's something that, as a junior primary. To actually doing some deep listening and also that whole getting to know them, instead of putting everyone in the same box, every child as being unique, and I guess this also comes through the work that we've done with our Catholic identity, most definitely. And that whole looking at each child as an individual and made in the image of God, most definitely having an understanding of what that actually means. So, yeah, I would say that that has completely changed our culture.*

Within these examples we see traces of participants' Catholic identities being brought into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles. Annette and Jackie described how they have re-imagined the way they plan the curriculum to include children's voices:

Annette: We've got some amazing educators who are documenting, listening to the child's voice, documenting the child's voice, then using the child's voice and the learning to plan their next week and two rather than – and that's changed too, where educators – we've gone from planning a whole year in advance, to, well actually, we can have a vague overview, which we need to have, however, the path and the journey it takes us can change week to week, but certainly day by day, and they're getting – we're getting used to not being so regimented in, writing our program three weeks in advance, our day program and oh my gosh and no, it's 1 o'clock I need now to stop and do that. Letting that organic learning happen and not having that bang, bang, bang, bang, which we still do. We've still got that, but it's about learning how to be a lot more fluid I think, in the learning that's taking place.

Jackie: So, the butterfly inquiry, I've started pulling that together because the conversations that came out of that! I [previously] questioned whether 2/3s would be able to help me plan but there are

really big conversations they had. For example, someone said oh we could make origami butterflies, and they had this amazing debate about whether origami was art or maths. And I think these are 8-year-olds and they are explaining to each other and articulating and having this incredible discourse with each other. I'm irrelevant in the room – they couldn't have cared less whether or not I was there, so I was just handy so I could write their stuff down for them.

Origami was very good for accuracy because that's where we – we did go to just in learning to rule up maths books and they were a bit well whatever – I don't really need a ruler I'm fine. I think I did a good job and they are quite pleased with themselves and I go well that's pretty straight. I am going, please use a ruler. So, we made our origami butterflies but my focus for that was then accuracy – if you don't line up your corners it doesn't fold right. So, I think always trying to recognise if they're reluctant – it's because they don't have the purpose or the motivation and trying to make sure the motivation isn't because Mrs P said so.

Jackie's description of the butterfly inquiry demonstrates how she reconciled an emergent inquiry pedagogical approach that aligned both with the value of the child as competent and capable and with the demands of academic performance. She promoted accuracy, a skill she believed was needed for academic performance, within meaningful engagement in the experience of origami, suggested by a child. She also demonstrated her recognition of children as competent when she described their theoretical debate. Jackie described the changes in her relationship with children and their self-confidence since the change in her pedagogy:

> *We have noticed that with the 3/4s last year we had a noticeable shift in them not needing our approval all the time, and so that I think is a wonderful thing because then they go into being risk takers and they are driving their own learning and they are certainly more empowered, have a greater sense of achievement, all this wonderful stuff that we don't measure.*

Jackie read the signs of children's developing agency, reflecting on the importance of this for their learning but also reflecting about measurement – alluding to the familiar question challenging the dominant paradigm of measurement in education – do we really measure what we value?

Dialogic encounters with the reception children show their experiences within a listening and learning community. Mallory's picture (Figure 13) shows a collaborative relationship between parents/carers, teachers and children. As Mallory said, "I've been teaching mum and dad all the letters and sounds, remember the night mum messaged you that I was showing them sounds?" At the bottom of the page Mallory draws a picture of her and her dog. She said, "We are playing fetch. I was being teacher." In both descriptions, Mallory demonstrated confidence in her abilities to contribute to a learning community as she positioned herself as the "teacher". Mallory's casual reference to "the night that mum messaged you" is also significant in her recognition of the open communication between parents/carers and teachers.

Educators as community members

In focusing on understanding their image of the child, the staff also began to reflect on their image of the teacher. Annette spoke about how the changes in the learning environments and pedagogy prompted changes in how the staff worked together as a listening and learning community:

> *I think that that whole stewardship and particularly with our Catholic identity and looking at our core for ecological conversion and action, again what is our action, and what we're finding now is that move to caring for living and non-living things, the care that we have for our world and how are we engaged in both, but also now how do we involve the community, or how do we work with the community.*

One strategy used to bring the staff together as a community was to change the focus of staff meetings. Annette explained how staff meetings evolved to provide more opportunities for teachers to share their thinking and pedagogy to learn from each other:

> *Our staff meetings started to look different. They were very much administrative, so we changed that. Now how it looks is we have half an hour of admin, because teachers still need that, and they need that time and you have to give agency to that, like we do to the children, the staff need that time. And then what we did is, the next part was professional learning, and it always had to be about learning, and different people would run it. We've decided now that we still don't share enough of our good practice, and there's so much good practice happening in the school, so next year we're going to do a lot more sharing in that professional learning, because they're starting to*

learn a lot more from each other. We're all learners and as an adult learner, if I'm given choice in my learning, if I'm very comfortable in my environment, if I'm listened to, if I'm respected, if I am made to feel that my rights and responsibilities are valued, and I'm valued as a person, then I'm going to flourish as a learner. Now I have that, that's my image of an educator, whether they be zero years of age or 110 years of age.

Annette's description of the changes made to staff meeting times relates strongly to a sense of optimism and potential within the shared intellectual capital of the school and its teachers. As noted from the US perspective, this optimistic view is often missing in educational reform initiatives, where deficit views of schools, children, teachers and families are prevalent (New, 2007). The Reggio Emilia principles provide a view of the possibilities for schools as places "where people are responsive to current interests and emerging understandings, supportive of relationships and provocations and characterised by collaborative activity" (New, 2007, p.11). It is these possibilities which are seen in Annette's vision for professional development and her improvisations as a leader to make this happen in her school.

Through their involvements within The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project, teachers had been engaging in inquiry into their own practice. The image of the educator as researcher has been important in contributing to their development as a listening and learning community. Annette explains:

We now have our professional learning communities – we have become researchers, we have a research question. It's based on improving teaching and learning, the focus at the moment is on numeracy, and they're questioning, they're gathering data, they're talking to the children, and that's been really beneficial for, I think, our educators, particularly in the upper years, to really, yeah well actually this whole pedagogical practice, regardless of where the child is, with our professional learning community, they've taken the data that they are collecting about their students as numeracy learners, and they've come up with their own questions. So again, I suppose, [teachers] as researchers, and so therefore it's really role modelling what we're asking them to do back in the classroom.

Margo, a teacher, described how the changes to the staff meetings have contributed to teachers feeling valued:

I think it's got a lot to do with the staff and I think it comes from leader, the leadership as well. Whenever we are discussing things it is a discussion and we as a staff feel very valued and that's very clear in that as well. And I think it's only natural when you feel like that to then carry that on in the classroom to and try and make sure that your children are feeling that sense of value and that they are involved in this, this is their learning, it's not just about us.

Re-imagining their staff meeting to include opportunities to discuss their inquiries, wonderings and challenges was important in informing their image of the educator and creating a listening and learning community. While each staff member was "at a different place in their journey and understanding", they were bounded by shared fundamental beliefs that served as a catalyst for their dialogue, which both the leader and educators described as robust and challenging.

Families as community members

As their understanding of the importance of creating a listening and learning community developed so did their understanding of the importance of including families as valued community members. Annette explained:

Our box is our classroom, that's grown, we're now working a lot more collaboratively together as a staff, we're working a lot more collaboratively in our learning spaces and sharing those learning spaces and working together. Well now it's time to branch out to the community.

Annette described a shift in thinking about parents/carers and their role in the community. Rather than seeing parents/carers as outsiders to be invited into the school and as recipients of knowledge from teachers, they began to see the parent as a welcomed community member who contributes to knowledge construction:

As far as the learning goes with our parents, we have moved very much from inviting parents in when we want parents to be invited in as an educator, to being open to parents all the time. Please we would like you involved, any skill that you have, any time that you want to pop in. Yes, we might be doing literacy activities at this hour, but if you can only come at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to listen to reading, then that's fine by us. Looking at the ways children learn, so the image of the child, so sharing a hundred languages with the parents, sharing Catholic education, re-imagining prayers with the parents, looking at the statements that we're making about how a child learns, what is

the parents' image, having a discussion at a parents and friends meeting, what's your image of your child, how do you give them experience of capable and competence. So, we've done that. Now reflecting on it, there's probably so much more that we can do, but they've loved the idea.

Annette and Margo described how sharing information and including parents/carers in the consultation process was important to make sure everyone in the community had a say in the development of the outdoor learning environments:

Annette: So, when we went through the consultation, particularly when we were looking at our new learning spaces, parents were invited in to have their say, to learn, but also to talk to us about what they would like to see. So, they've always been very much involved.

Margo: We've had a lot of support. We've tried to be really careful and have information sessions and bits and pieces about things to really tell parents why, why we're doing things. I always say I feel like we're very lucky we do have a very supportive parent network, but I also think that we keep them, try to keep them as informed with what we're doing.

Annette: And when we're sharing, why we're opening up the classrooms, why we changed to a lot more, it's a calmer environment, just inviting them to walk through and a lot of them will say, "Oh it's just so calm". So, they're actually feeling it, they're living it, they're seeing it, they're breathing it, so that they can see the change. Now as well, I feel that we do, when we're making a change or we're looking at changing something we'll involve them, invite them, everyone's very busy, some will attend, and some won't. They're loving what they're seeing.

Parents have felt involved in the development of the outdoor learning environments and are still thinking about their involvement and children's involvement in the next steps, ensuring that the next steps of planning take account of children's and teachers' experiences. Kim talked from a school board perspective:

We've talked about that at board, and we've talked about the master plan for the front and I've said I don't want to go ahead with that personally just at this point. I want to see how you use that. The kids have been involved in the planning of that, but they haven't had the experience. Let's see what they do, let's see how the teachers feel, let's just roll with that, and the teaching staff have been amazing with that as well.

Nanci described the changes in the way that community is perceived at Coastal Catholic school and the deeper understanding of these processes in the wider community:

That is the biggest shift with us here at [Coastal] as a whole school and so the way that we listen to the children, the way that we listen to our community, the way that we listen to the wider community, and then the considerations from that listening – so, what are we hearing and then – so, what's – if that's data for us, of what we're hearing, then what are we doing with that?

Well even with the consultation that's happening with the [nature play spaces]. They're doing a nature play space in the community. I live in Pleasant View (pseudonym) and travel down and I know that's a process they went through up there with a few of the Kindy's and childcares. I just think that's great to even have community members on board or people in charge of those projects coming and talking to Kindy's about what they want to see and to the children about what they want. And I just think that's even, I think that's a big step in itself?"

Nanci's reference to data in this excerpt is a useful one as it is a sign of recognising community dialogue as an important source of data for schools to listen to and respond to. The concept of dialogue as a continuously evolving process is also a challenge to current more managerial approaches to evaluating education (Moss, 2016).

Parents noticed other changes which signaled that their school was listening, changes such as negotiated homework and also changing the name of parent/teacher interviews:

Kim: Even the whole this year parent teacher interviews, it's called conversations instead, and that's so beautiful, to change from parent teacher interviews – so full on – to conversations because a lot of it is just a conversation about how they are going, especially in term 1 as well. Of course it is a conversation.

The change of terminology and reconception of the rituals of schooling such as homework and parent/teacher interviews are further examples of the improvisations by which power relations are reframed in the figured world of Coastal Catholic Primary School. They signal changes in both teacher and parent

identity from a relationship where teachers hold the power as 'experts' to a more equal partnership where parents/carers and teachers can negotiate and share information in support of children's interests.

How experiences and perspectives that are culturally situated in South Australia are brought together with Reggio Emilia principles to re-imagine pedagogy

From the two illustrations above we can see the negotiation of the Reggio Emilia principles and Catholic principles to inform a local approach. The table below highlights the traces of each perspective found within the two illustrations.

Table 11: Data analysis – Coastal Catholic Primary School

Incidents from illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy	Reggio Emilia principles and key concepts	Catholic principles
Including children in conversations about their learning environments **Children writing letters to principle and governing council to change learning environments**	• Child as competent and capable • Learning as a process of individual and group construction • Democracy	• Mutual respect • Justice • Responsibility
Changes made to the indoor learning environments	• Environment, space and relations	• Mutual respect • Responsibility
The development and use of outdoor nature play learning space	• Environment, space and relations • Organisation of space and time	• Mutual respect • Responsibility • Justice
Listening to children and families	• Hundred languages • Child/families as competent and capable	• Mutual respect • Compassion • Integrity • Justice
Engaging in inquiry into own practice and sharing in staff meetings	• Research • Progettazione • Documentation	• Mutual respect • Compassion • Integrity
Emergent inquiry-based projects with children	• Child as competent and capable • Progettazione • Learning is a process of individual and group construction	• Mutual respect • Responsibility • Justice
Exploration of the image of the child	• Child as competent and capable • Research	• Children close to the mystery of God

The table above demonstrates common threads where participants brought their Catholic Identity into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles. Across many of these common threads are the use of the Catholic Mercy Keys. The Mercy Keys are core values from which children are encouraged to live their lives and, while the Reggio Emilia principles do not directly reflect the Mercy Keys, they provide contextual examples of where the Mercy Keys can be enacted. The image of the child from Reggio Emilia principles as competent and capable connects directly with the Mercy concept of children being close to the mystery of God. This connection was significant as a spiritual reinforcement directly linked to the Catholic identity, which calls on all Catholics to re-evaluate how children are involved in their communities and how are they valued for their capacities.

Summary

The leader and teachers at Coastal Catholic Primary school have shown their capacity for enacting their spiritual beliefs in concert with their community. This was shown in tangible ways through the re-imagining and reconstruction of their learning spaces as well as in more abstract ways as they reconsidered and opened the processes of dialogue and decision making to children and parents/carers within the community. The illustrations provided within this case align directly with Malaguzzi's notion of a school as a living system which "expands towards the world of the families, with their right to know and to participate" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.63).

Within the case summary there are many acts of improvisation which challenge taken for granted notions about schooling. The school leader, Annette, has made clear choices to favour a relational view of the children, families and educators in her community rather than a managerial view (Moss, 2016) and as such has developed processes for authentic participation, recognising that participation comes in a diversity of ways. Acknowledging diverse ways of participating has opened dialogue as an important source of feedback and provocation to spur further thinking. Encouraging dialogue and robust debate in staff forums has also ensured that the school is moving together on a shared journey. The concept of debate and contestation of ideas rather than uncritical acceptance of change reflects the rigor for self-reflection and critique noted in the Reggio Emilia Educational Project. Sharing is also enabled by the strategic leadership choice to offer different teachers across the school, involvement as project leaders within the school, thereby sharing important professional development opportunities as well as challenges.

The case summary of Coastal Catholic Primary School illuminates the possibilities for creating an "educating community" (Rinaldi, 2013, p.21), one where teachers, children and families collaborate to create a shared world where all feel competent, capable and connected.

Conclusion of case summaries

There is considerable interest from a range of stakeholders regarding how individual educational settings engage with Reggio Emilia principles and how they employ them as provocations to re-imagine thinking and practice. Together these case studies provide insights into how five early childhood sites undertook this process and the transformative impact on the educational experiences offered to children, staff and indeed families.

Educators and leaders re-imagined their local figured worlds by bringing various perspectives and experiences into dialogue with the Reggio Emilia principles. From the illustrations of re-imagined pedagogy, we have mapped educators' and leaders' engagement in dialogue between Reggio Emilia principles and other perspectives they drew on. Participants drew from a range of other perspectives such as those stemming from theory, prescribed state or sector priorities and preferred consultant/researcher. They all designed their approaches drawing from a range of discursive resources, including the Reggio Emilia principles while taking into account their context including, staff, location, children and families. These examples of participants' engagement in dialogue with multiple perspectives demonstrate how the Reggio Emilia principles have at times directly aligned with other perspectives, and, at other times, how they were used in tandem to inform leaders' and teachers' understandings and re-imaginings of their figured worlds.

Through each of the sites we can see how pivotal engagement with the Reggio Emilia principles was in provoking deep reflection and subsequent transformative action to their figured worlds. The Reggio Emilia principles provided a provocation for participants to re-consider the meaning of education and the meaning of our existence as humans within social worlds. Through their engagement with the Reggio Emilia principles, participants explored their values and beliefs about the image of the child, the role of the educator, the role of the environment, making learning visible, how knowledge is constructed and the significance of relationships. Deep exploration into such questions is critical to the co-construction of cultural models within figured worlds. Figured worlds are formed and re-formed through the everyday practices of those who inhabit them (Holland, et al. 1998). They run the risk of being socially reproduced in the absence of critical reflection. The Reggio Emilia principles provided an impetus for such critical reflection which became the inspiration for their re-imagined pedagogy.

The case summaries highlight examples of how five different learning communities drew on the Reggio Emilia principles to critically reflect upon their values and beliefs. We also see leaders, teachers, families

and children coming together to re-write, as co-authors, their figured worlds anew (Holland, et al. 1998). Holland and her colleagues (1998) suggest that figured worlds consist of power relations. In the five case summaries we see participants' re-imagining of their figured worlds working to break down hierarchical structures of power. In valuing the process of co-constructing knowledge, leaders and teachers acknowledge their colleagues, children and parents/carers as competent and capable of developing local approaches which foster children's learning.

Each case summary demonstrates the distinctive journey on which each site embarked to re-imagine early childhood education. While the illustrations represent a range of different examples they are united by common beliefs about children, educators and parents/carers as being competent and capable, the importance of democracy in education, knowledge as being socially constructed, the role of inquiry and research to learning and the importance of making learning visible. Further research is needed to understand if the common beliefs across these five sites are representative of the broader population. Conducting such research would be important to developing quality early childhood education across South Australia.

This pilot study indicates that the experiences of participant children and parents/carers have been strongly positive. Further research focused on understanding the perspectives from a broader range of community members is needed. For instance, what are the perspectives of primary teachers who have early childhood teachers added to their teams? What are the perspectives of other staff members? Furthermore, in exploring the multiple perspectives leaders and teachers are drawing on to inform their pedagogy we see only one site drawing on local Aboriginal perspectives. If South Australia is to create culturally responsive early childhood education, it must do so in dialogue with local communities.

SECTION 3

Cross-case analysis of challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education in South Australia

Introduction

This section of the report presents a cross-case analysis of the challenges and supports encountered in re-imagining early childhood education in South Australia. It is important for future planning and policy directions that both challenges and supports are outlined. The broad description of challenges and supports may provide important insights for sites that are in the process of re-imagining, enabling reflection on their own thinking and pedagogy. The data from each site and the interpretations of this data from the case summaries were analysed to identify common factors across the sites. Significant in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and reflected in this pilot research, is the cross sectoral involvement of different systems of education in the process of re-imagining early childhood. Despite the small number of pilot sites involved, there were some clear and common threads which can be seen through the experiences of participants. These threads will likely be illuminating for systems, leaders and educators who seek to continue work on the provocations declared in the Professor Rinaldi's Thinker in Residence report (2013) for South Australia, to become the vibrant state of quality education.

Challenges to re-imagining early childhood education

The predominant challenges experienced by participants in the process of re-imagining early childhood education concerned negotiating dominant discourses of education. Dominant discourses are the shared languages, practices and ways of being that are used to promote particular values and beliefs. Dahlberg and Moss (2004) describe dominant discourses in early childhood education as:

> *…inscribed with the assumptions and beliefs of modernity: for example, a desire for objectivity, universality, certainty and mastery, through scientific knowledge. It embodies, too, particular understandings including, for example, of childhood, learning, evaluation and institutions for children (such as the image of the institution as an enclosure for producing outcomes). This [dominant] discourse offers a regime of truth about early childhood education and care as a technology for ensuring social regulation and economic success, in which the young child is constructed as a redemptive agent who can be programmed to become the future solution to our current problems (pp. vi-vii).*

As described in section one, dominant discourses are powerful, as they are often taken for granted as unquestioned truths (Holland, et al. 1998), making it difficult for alternative discourses to inform innovative pedagogies and practices within the figured world. Moss (2013) suggests that while disrupting dominant discourses is challenging, the ability to see them as a matter of perspective and critique them while also imagining alternatives, not only highlights the urgent need for transformation but also creates the conditions for transformation to become possible. Participants' engagement with alternative perspectives from the Reggio Emilia Educational Project provided them with an opportunity to

understand their challenges. They described the challenges they encountered as a result of unquestioned dominant discourses as:

1. hierarchical views of power and knowledge
2. standardised approaches to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy
3. fragmentation.

These unquestioned perspectives illuminated the prevalence of dominant discourses in early childhood education, making visible tensions between the status quo and participants' visions for re-imagining early childhood education in South Australia. Each of these challenges are presented below with evidence from participants and provocations for further thinking.

Hierarchical views of power and knowledge

Dominant discourses are usually taken for granted 'truths' and thus usually left unchallenged, making it difficult to imagine figured worlds anew. For participants within this case study, dominant discourses that promoted hierarchical views of power and knowledge production were challenges for them in re-imagining their pedagogy. A teacher explained:

> *I think one of the challenges is bringing everybody along with you. So, having everybody in your team on the same page but also just that dominant discourse around learning and what it looks like.*

Participation within other figured worlds that were aligned with and maintained dominant discourses proved difficult as participants said they often felt marginalised because they had differing views. A leader described feeling like this in system leader meetings, while another discussed their attempt to re-imagine reports:

> *The chairperson, she had raised about one of the sites having this amazing data and then basically had every principal then having to talk for five minutes about what they'd learnt from [their] particular site. And so, three of the principals had spoken about it, it got around to me, and I said well actually we're heading in a different direction and that's when I talked about the running records data. Our data is showing that what we're doing is making a massive difference and we can see that it will continue to go forward in that direction, because the trajectory is so rapid. And a minute and a half in to me talking about that, I was cut off and it was like we'll have to watch that really carefully, let's move on to the next person. And it was just this moment in time, but it was symbolic of the last 13 years of my life where the people that you need to pay attention and listen, don't. And in fact, they sort of shut you down.*

> *We never use to grade our kids but now they're making us. We make it as insignificant as we can, a bit of paper with the grade and nothing else because the real assessment or reporting is in the learning stories not in A to E.*

As these examples show, artefacts such as standardised testing and the quantitative data they produce are symbols used to mediate human identity and action (Holland et al., 1998). An accepted construct of the dominant culture (Hatt, 2007), they serve as powerful markers for making judgements about worth (Holland et al., 1998). The differential treatment of the leader who presented an alternative form of data and the requirement for particular forms of reporting shed light on the marginalisation of those who draw from alternative discourses, and the impact this side-lining has on innovation.

Provocations:

- How can we notice and come to an understanding of how power and knowledge are exercised within our pedagogy?
- How can we challenge the way that power and knowledge are viewed within our site, systems and culture?

Standardisation approaches to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy

While standardisation is promoted within the broader figured world of education, participant leaders, teachers and parents alike were concerned about the impact this standardisation would have on their settings' re-imagined pedagogy. Primary teachers spoke about the challenge of re-imagining under the pressure for achievements on standardised tests. They described NAPLAN as infringing on their abilities

to create authentic representations of children's learning and adding pressure to focus on content coverage rather than deep and meaningful learning. Several teachers spoke about this challenge:

> *I do think that schools are trying [authentic forms of assessment]. I just think NAPLAN is the thing that is holding it a bit to ransom because that's a structure that's very foreign to what we're talking about. That test is set up to test the things that we don't necessarily do in that format.*
>
> *I think that the testing needs to be thrown away, I think that dictates a lot more than we think, it really does and it sets that whole first half of a year, it sets that up in a real negative way because teachers feel like they've got to [do] X, Y and Z because of this test instead of…*
>
> *I'm still finding the pressures of the curriculum, content and standardised testing and lots of different things like that and finding out where my inquiry pedagogy still fits into all of that. And I'm now 3-4 years into this type of thinking and I'm still very much evolving.*
>
> *Still in the back of their head there's this niggle around assessment and rating and what's going to happen there.*

One teacher described her concerns about the ability to capture a wide range of children's competencies through standardised testing. She described the discrepancy between the results of the NAPLAN and individual children's strengths, suggesting the narrow focus of the test promotes deficit views of children:

> *I've got a son who fails every single NAPLAN test ridiculously. And do I show him his test? No way, why would I do that? How would you like it if you had to sit a test and failed every single thing? And then why would you want to see that you failed that? He's a brilliant child, brilliant, understands so much, [he] has such an amazing creative mind, he can problem solve, you give him a problem, he'll find a thousand solutions to any problem you have. But you ask him to write it down, or to read, he can't do that. And that's not a failure in the school system, it's just the way he is, it's him. Now why should I make him fit, or try to be something he's not? And that's what the [system] wants, isn't it? They want everyone to be a square, and he's a circle. And there's so many circles in every single school.*

Although formal testing was not a part of the current practice in early childhood settings, participants had legitimate fears that this dominant practice would be pushed down into the years prior to school. One leader described her fears about the introduction of standardised phonological testing for 5/6 year olds: "That just horrifies me because that's about a standard system that can drive change instead of what really matters." The standardisation of assessment and practice was a growing concern for leaders and educators:

> *There are constant murmurs coming out from [within our system] about inappropriate practices being pushed down into preschool and the early years of school. Many [system leadership groups] have [leaders] who have no idea about early childhood pedagogy and instead of seeing children, they see numbers or data. This is incredibly damaging and reduces learning to measurable content. The learning that we talk about and what we are learning from the research of the Reggio Emilia Education Project is much deeper and richer and regards children as competent and capable and full of knowledge from birth. This is built on, and children are encouraged to notice and wonder, create their own theories in relationship with others. In effect, it is supporting children to become active protagonists in their own learning rather than simply filling children with knowledge. It is difficult to spend many hours of professional learning – study tours, visiting lecturers from Reggio, reading, participating in conferences and networks – researching the principles of Reggio Emilia and applying them in our context only to have individuals within the [system] purport ideas that are in direct contrast to the research.*

Teachers working within the early years of early childhood were concerned about the impact such dominant discourses had on parents' perceptions. One teacher described their worries about how their focus on building children's sense of belonging, being and becoming within their community would be viewed in light of values promoted through dominant discourses focused on individual performance and standardised measurement:

> *I'm sure parents expect a certain type of way of presenting their children's learning that would be different to how we do it purely because they would have been educated in the different time. … I think that's the biggest challenge of our work is that dominant discourse around the image of the child and around what learning and education does or has or can look like.*

Participating parents also felt trepidation from the pressures of the dominant discourses. Many of the parents chose their sites because they offered a counter narrative to the traditional story of schooling. These parents were concerned that their sites would have to revert under regulatory pressures to maintaining the status quo:

> *A girl friend of mine, her son was back down to level three [reader] again the next year. So, then there's issues with him feeling like he's not good enough. It's all because a seven-year-old's not doing what they're meant to do? It's too much fear of not being at the right level at the right time and comparing to everybody else I think.*
>
> *So, speaking about my own and my family's education is that it wasn't okay to be anything other than what they were teaching. And so, you tried to fit in as best as you could but it didn't create brilliance. It didn't create curiosity, it created a lot of fears and that I'm not okay with.*
>
> *My concern is why is the government pushing so hard for these measurable objectives. Shouldn't they be looking at the actual wholeness of the child and the quality of their learning rather than the intellectual way in measuring?*
>
> *It's not like we're breeding this brilliant society. We've got these sheep. I don't want [my child] to be a sheep. I don't want her to stand in the line, not thinking. I want her to think outside the box and encouraged to do that.*

The pressure from dominant discourses to maintain the status quo raises questions concerning the possibilities for South Australia to become a state dedicated to innovation in education.

Provocations:

- How might systems promote creativity in education and support teachers engagement in critical reflection of practice, with a focus toward improving the experiences of children and families?
- How might systems work to re-design structures for reporting progress in learning that honour children's multiple capacities?
- How might what counts as evidence be broadened to capture a wide range of children's learning, thinking and learning processes as well as teachers' analysis of these processes?
- How might system leadership groups be reconceptualised to become innovative think tanks that welcome multiple perspectives and engage in respectful critical dialogue?

Fragmentation

Participants described fragmentation as a challenge to re-imagining early childhood education. As one of her provocations for South Australia, Rinaldi (2013) suggested that early childhood services are fragmented, with young children experiencing different settings with different care givers possibly every day. Fragmentation was a concern for all participant leaders:

> *We've got all these people working with children but it's in such a fragmented way. So how do we bring a focus to early childhood which it's actually a way of giving priority to an early childhood and it's a way of bringing us together as a researching educating community. How do we collaborate?*
>
> *One of the things that [Rinaldi's] report has got me thinking about is if we didn't all work in isolation, if we were united, we would be more powerful. I wonder if we were united what impact we could have!*

Participants described the ways they were working to decrease children's experiences of fragmented relationships. They also shed light on the pedagogical fragmentation they experienced within particular sites.

Fragmentation in relationships

Rinaldi's (2013, p.37) report described, "each early learning site (as an) 'island' with a number of systems: preschool, early learning centres, primary, long day care, occasional care, and family day care". Her concerns focused on children's rights to "build long lasting consistent relationships" and "educational quality" (p. 40). Leaders understood and had worked with their teams in a variety of ways to limit children's transitions between different contexts and thus decrease fragmentation for children

and their families. For instance, some restructured the preschool 15-hour week so that there were consistent groups of children and educators attending on any given day. Others held extended hours in the preschool classroom to reduce children's transitions between spaces, while others employed fulltime teachers and used primary care groups:

> *So one of the first things I did was negotiate and work with the management committee to fund for that teacher to be fulltime.*

> *I think we'll have to shift that back to Friday afternoons. The principles of the project have been a wonderful compass for how we're going to move forward and to honour the needs of our children and families, being open 8-5, but not lose what we think is critical to our identity and our philosophy about who we are, for example, the pedagogy of relationships. I didn't want it to feel that children were having to encounter more educators in a day than necessary. That children be left with one pair of educators and be picked up with another if we could help it. So, we've been through some very rigorous and at times challenging conversations, but the staff have been great, because we've kept coming back to what is this like for children? We need it to work for all of us, so our co-educators are extending their day, but going to four days a week. Our teachers will be there, what is normally considered the after-school commitments – we're not going to be going to junior school staff meetings, they're not going to be doing co-curricular, [instead] one afternoon a week they will work until 5 with the children, [and] I will work till 5.00 on two or three afternoons a week.*

Fragmentation in pedagogy

Participants found that fragmentation existed in other ways that continued to present a challenge to their own professional lives. In particular, sites that were still working on developing a whole school approach described the fragmentation that existed between different pedagogies being used within a shared context. Parents viewed the democratic approach to pedagogy used by teachers engaging with Reggio Emilia principles as desirable. They expressed concern about such practices not being consistently used throughout the school:

> *They did have more of a say in the classroom and her spirits lifted. She was a different kid in the classroom because she felt that she was being heard and she had some power over what was going on in the classroom, where you sit. They were all sort of more responsible for their actions like they weren't going to get consequences for the behaviour of others.*

> *I suppose along the way of the learning we're talking about today that's year two and three, does that stay through the older years or does it become more directed learning? It's that old school teaching of teaching at a class, rather than with an individual and with a class because it can be overwhelming when they start going back to those old teaching ideals and I don't think that always works.*

Leaders were aware of the fragmentation between pedagogies being employed, and each were at different points in time in working with their staff to re-imagine their settings to reflect democratic pedagogies. A leader shared her vision for her school:

> *Families come in with their babies or whatever age group we can start at and straight away are connected for a very long time to a community and the family grows in that community and the community grows. All the values they experience as babies are the same values that they experience as year seven students. So, there is not well okay you have done that little kid play stuff and now you are in year four we don't do that anymore. I don't want that. I want that lovely continuity and I think that would really influence the way that people see children; see learning; see relationships in family and community because if you have had experience for 13 years as your child leaves then you're going to be in society saying these are important values that we need to have.*

One teacher recognised inequities in levels of participation as contributing to the fragmentation between pedagogical perspectives. Participation in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and other forms of professional learning about the Reggio Emilia principles were often reserved for selected teachers. Participating teachers shared their learning during staff meetings, however, variations in schedules and staffing arrangements made it difficult for all to participate:

> *Some staff do not have non-contact times so are out of the documentation conversation. One person in this category said she was keen to know more about what was happening. Another said that [Ida] who worked in the kitchen had picked up knowledge about it from there.*

I don't know too much about The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, you know, like what's been spoken about, but I feel you don't really know much until you go. You know, like when before about the CESA Re-imagining Project, you know, people would come back and talk and share these bright ideas, but then when you go, it's completely different. So yes, we've done sharing about how [they] were involved in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project but yeah, I don't really know too much about it.

Participants' descriptions about their experiences of fragmentation within early childhood education showed how they have responded to Rinaldi's (2013) 'diagnosis' of South Australian early childhood as a fragmented system. These findings add further understanding regarding how fragmentation was experienced within and between sites, and highlighted the need for a whole school approach to developing shared beliefs and values and support in enacting them.

Provocations:

- How might systems work together to support continuity for children and families?
- How can we strengthen professional learning to expand opportunities for leaders, teachers and educators interested in innovation?
- How can educational systems work with site leaders and community members to ensure continuity of the school's priorities and practices?

Changes in leadership

Figured worlds are dynamic, with multiple individuals moving within and between them bringing their histories in person into dialogue with others (Holland et al., 1998). Throughout the course of the project it became evident that changes in leadership were a concern for many participants. Three of the five sites had faced leadership changes over the past two years. One site experienced a change in leadership before the beginning of this research. During the project, a second site experienced a brief change in leadership with the possibility of a permanent change, and a third site learned that their leader was taking a leadership position at another school in the next year. As leaders played a critical role in the re-imagining of their figured worlds, teachers and parents alike expressed trepidation with the uncertainty changes in leadership posed. In one site parents circulated a petition expressing their concerns that a change in leadership would result in a change in the school pedagogy. Parents from this site explained:

[The petition] was for when the principal left to support that the new principal coming in was supportive of the ideas already in place.

It was a bit of a bummer to see [the principal] go recently.

Parents were concerned that the education system did not support leaders to re-imagine their figured worlds. Two parents spoke about another local school where they believed the principal who was leading pedagogical change was "forced" out by a system manager who did not support challenges to the status quo:

Parent 1: It happened at the X school as well. The principal was almost forced to leave.

Parent 2: He said it was a constant struggle.

Parent 1: Yeah, because they want stats and data whereas it's the same- I work in the nursing industry and person-centred care and all the Government want is the stats and the tick the boxes. They don't ever look at how happy the person is or the feedback.

These parents were concerned that a new principal would standardise their schools. Leaders and teachers also discussed their concerns about turnover of staff. Building and maintaining a shared vision is difficult when key members frequently change. One teacher described the struggle in re-establishing a shared vision with a new leader and staff:

We were all speaking the same language but there was a disconnect. Individual interpretations were interrupting the vision. We need to go back to established common beliefs, trust in each other and support for each other.

Losing key players in the re-imagining of pedagogy within a site made it difficult to build culture and shared understandings. A leader spoke about her fears of losing a teacher who she considered to be leading in the space of re-imagining pedagogy:

> *I'm always a little bit frightened that we'll lose her to something else if we don't give her enough challenge.*

Changes in leadership, whether they be a principal, early childhood director or pedagogical teacher leader, were a challenge for participants in sustaining their visions for re-imagining their figured worlds. This sheds light on the significance of relationship in re-imagining figured worlds. Malaguzzi (1998) describes the site of early childhood education as:

> *…an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children. We think of school as a sort of construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself. Certainly, we have to adjust our system from time to time while the organism travels on its life course, just as those pirate ships were once compelled to repair their sails all the while keeping on their course at sea (pp.62-63).*

The case summaries provided some examples of sites adjusting to include new members while also continuing to travel along the course. What participants feared most, however, were changes of leaders in positions of power, as new leaders could re-direct forces toward aligning with the dominant status quo. Malaguzzi (1998) argued:

> *What counts is that there be an agreement about what direction the school should go, and that all forms of artifice and hypocrisy be kept at bay. Our objective, which we always will pursue, is to create an amiable environment, where children, families and teachers feel at ease (p.63).*

Provocations:

- How can systems and site support continuity of relationships and sustainability of leadership in the process of re-imagining?
- How can systems and sites acknowledge and support dialogic relationships with communities?
- How might the process of leadership selection be re-imagined to align with a community's culture and pedagogical vision and aspirations?

Supports to re-imagining early childhood education

Those engaged in a sustained re-imagining process require considerable support to continue what is very challenging intellectual as well as physical work. Research participants identified a number of supports that they found to be critical to their re-imagining. These supports included:

1. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and organisational support
2. Leadership
3. Parents/carers.

Each of these supports are described below.

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and organisational support

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project arose from the recommendations made by 2012 Thinker in Residence Professor Rinaldi. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project was identified by those participating in this research as a major support to the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia:

> *[The] South Australian Collaborative [Childhood Project] is an organizational way of continuing and furthering the work that began in the residency.*

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project was significant in uniting educational professionals from across the State to re-imagine childhood through a range of different public events. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project is a collaborative network guided by the Reggio Emilia principles and objectives outlined in the report. The key role in this initiative was to deliver on the recommendations of Professor Rinaldi's Thinker in Residence report, *Re-imagining Childhood* (Rinaldi, 2013) and assist South Australia to enact its membership of The Foundation Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project has been significant in uniting educational professionals from across the State to re-imagine childhood. In February 2016, a range of 18 early childhood services, preschools and schools from across government, Catholic education

and independent education systems along with cultural institutions were established as prototypes. Prototypes are services that are identified as being committed to researching the Reggio Emilia principles within the South Australian context. The services agreed to participate in ongoing research led by their organisations, to engage with other services identified as 'prototypes' to develop a strong learning community and to report quarterly to the governance group and share their ongoing research across the state. Prototype services provided leadership throughout the state in order to demonstrate the pedagogical approaches based on the Reggio Emilia principles.

In October 2016, Professor Rinaldi strongly recommended that The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project support up to 4 of the 18 prototypes to become Project Quattro. These four sites demonstrated a high-level of evidence of:

- A deep commitment to research the principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project to develop a local approach that has traces of the principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project
- Documentation that makes their research visible
- The ability to share their ongoing research beyond their services.

Project Quattro receives support through The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project to continue their research (a small grant and pedagogical leadership). Each site within Project Quattro has committed to participate in ongoing research, professional learning and documentation of their research, and sharing their research with others. To do this, these sites must have the ongoing support of their services/organisation.

Data collected reflects participants' experiences as part of the prototype sites and their various engagement in re-imagining projects emerging around the state. Participants described The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project as supportive in bringing educators across the State together to reflect upon a shared vision, in providing professional learning opportunities, and inspiring collaboration across educational providers.

Developing a shared vision for South Australia

Participants spoke about The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project as instrumental in organising space and time for professionals to come together to re-imagine childhood in South Australia. Participants said:

> *The prototypes are unique as is the project's partnership group as it brings together a wide cross-section of organisations who are willing to work together for the children of SA.*
>
> *I think there's lots and lots of wonderful bits of the re-imagining childhood project. I was really pleased to hear that it's not stopping, because this is probably [just] the beginning. I don't know what the big plans are for long term but I think we're kind of at the very beginning and at the moment I feel not disheartened, but if I think oh my goodness, we've got so far to go, that's okay, in Reggio they've been doing it for 50-60 years and this is why they are where they are at. So, that's okay.*
>
> *It's a way of bringing us together as a researching educating community.*

Participants' involvement in The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project provided them with a sense of community ownership they had longed for and the opportunity to work in a way that aligned more closely with their vision of early childhood education. It positioned them as constructors of knowledge rather than as technicians who implement knowledge constructed by others. As a result, many of them felt hopeful for the future.

Collaborative shared learning across organisations

The participants within this study described The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project as significant in empowering organisations to contribute to the re-imagining of childhood in South Australia. One participant's description captured the broad scope of collaboration happening within different organisations:

> *Our professional associations have been doing that. And I think they're doing some wonderful, wonderful work. I think that one of the things that Carla's report has got me thinking about is if we didn't all the work in isolation, if we were united, would we be more powerful. And even, we*

have differences, so Reggio Emilia Australia has their core role, you know, EChO do some fantastic stuff, slightly different but connected. ECA do some wonderful stuff, different but connected.

The local professional organisations were highlighted by participants as being significant contributors to state professional learning regarding the Reggio Emilia principles. In particular, participants named the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange, EChO and educational consultants. Participants shared examples of how they were supported to rethink their practice with the support of these local organisations:

[Colleagues] beautifully nurtured me and embraced me. We became friends and started to go to REAIE (Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange) network meetings. I'm only where I am now because of all those other steps along the line, and wonderful opportunities to work with exceptional educators. They help you understand.

The EchO project is outstanding in that we have a full day every term to explore principles. Lisa Burman (educational consultant) generally runs those days and brings in guest speakers and videos and things like that and lots of resources that she's got because she's been over there a couple of times. I think exploring with a site and helping them to transform is really, really exciting. We've had some sites that have been in it for a while who we don't see that they've actually made a lot of changes where as others make huge changes. The other thing about it is sometimes it's not only the early years, it goes right through. We had a year 6/7 group in one year and they made changes to their environments, to their pedagogy and it was really quite exciting.

The project work with the prototype sites and also within the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project also provided a wide range of learning opportunities for South Australia and beyond:

With a focus on strengthening early childhood across the state and a commitment to working to achieving the recommendations provided by Professor Rinaldi, the Project works in close collaboration with both Reggio Children Company and The Foundation to provide opportunities for South Australian citizens to further research and understand the Reggio Emilia Approach. The schools have been developed in direct response to the beliefs held about the purpose of education, and in response to the specific cultural, geographic, political, economic and historical experiences of a small city in Northern Italy [Reggio Emilia]. This combined with the fact that the theories, ideas and practices in the schools are constantly changing and evolving, means that the schools cannot provide a model for practice in South Australia. Rather, they offer inspiration and a provocation for thinking and practices in South Australia. The [South Australian Collaborative Childhood] Project has invested in a number of strategies for citizens to access professional learning, including three study groups to Reggio Emilia and hosting pedagogistas, atelieristas, the President of Reggio Children Company and the President of The Foundation in Adelaide, which provided professional learning opportunities for the 18 prototypes, Project Quattro, The Project's governance group and the public.

A highlight for The Project was hosting the Re-imagining Childhood International Conference in Adelaide where members of the Scientific Committee and nine prototypes shared their research. It was a three-day learning opportunity where participants were challenged to re-imagine childhood.

One of the smart things we did as an organisation during the residency was to form a reference group, including school leaders, curriculum and religious education consultants and our parent community was represented. The reference group met before the residency to consider possible systemic benefits for our participation in the residency and strategies for including all our staff and families. The group planned and reviewed alongside the residency. The minute that the residency finished, the reference group wrote a proposal to our leadership team in the Catholic Education Office expressing a strong sense of solidarity and shared endeavour throughout the residency and suggested ways for this to be supported and continued. The reference group identified emerging shared language and that this was strengthening for them at a time when principals and teachers felt pulled in many different directions—you know NAPLAN was a very big focus. I think the residency provided an opportunity for school leaders and teachers to rethink the purpose of education and their role in it.

We had an events strand and there were consultants and team leaders in here who looked after the events. The events were with Reggio Children…they were with REAIE, they were with people from the state. Jan Millikan and I [ran] Saturday morning [sessions]. Most people from childcare centres [came] and they really wanted to know about the image of the child. We opened it up [beyond our organisation] so that was beautiful.

The wide range of learning opportunities provided by different organisations was significant in bringing individuals together across various sectors. These opportunities were important in challenging individuals and organisations to re-imagine their figured worlds in ways that reflected their values and beliefs about children, families and educators.

Participants also reflected upon their opportunities to work closely with educators and scholars from Reggio Emilia through their involvement as a prototype site and/or in the CESA Re-imagining Childhood Project.

> *I was able to build a really strong relationship with Carla Rinaldi herself. And sometimes that's a blessing and sometimes that's a curse because, whenever I see her, she offers a new provocation.*
>
> *Carla said, "You must find a way for your teachers to talk together." And I thought what does she mean? And she goes, "No they have to talk, they have to share their documentation with each other." So, because we'd be showing her our learning story portfolios and it was all very individualised information. So, they [Reggio Emilia teachers] challenge each other and that's the culture that we've tried to build up, is that one of welcoming challenge rather than being annoyed by challenge.*
>
> *One year, Carla brought out a pedagogista and by then we had four prototype schools [from our organisation participating]. The pedagogista spent an extra week with Carla [at CESA] and she worked quite intensively with those schools. She was amazing, spending time watching her in action, I know that I can't ask questions in a way that gets to the heart of the matter, that gets people thinking and interrogating as deeply as she does. She never imposes, it's masterful – it was never imposing a value or an idea, it was truly enquiry, deep curiosity, deep investigative work. I remember she was in a classroom with a year seven teacher who prepared a really open ended tasks for the children and I think he was pretty proud of it and we were too and she said, "Who prepared this really interesting task?" and he said "I did." And she said, "Was that because you didn't think the children could prepare it?" And of course, he just went, [gasp!]. She didn't say that rudely but she said it in a way that centred on the child and he said, "Of course they could have, that would have been amazing thinking thing for them to do for each other." And she just left it at that.*

The inquiry-based approach to professional learning used by the educators and scholars from Reggio Emilia pushed participants to think deeply about their practice. The provocations were provocative yet respectful in nature, an approach that not only reflects the Reggio Emilia principles but is also necessary in creating a safe space for professionals to re-imagine their pedagogy.

As the comments show, The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project has been very influential in uniting educators across the state to re-imagine their figured worlds. Malaguzzi (1998, p. 68) argues, "The strength of our system lies in the ways we make explicit and then intensify the necessary conditions for relations and interactions". In this way, The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project has strengthened our systems by bringing professional organisations and individuals together in dialogue to inform a shared vision for children in South Australia. This collaboration has inspired the continued support from these educational systems and sites to support the development of a culture that values children as citizens with rights through a variety of forums.

Provocations:

- How might the learning of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project become more widely available?
- How might organisations and systems continue to strengthen their collaborations to support professional learning and innovation?
- How might the state support the sustainability and growth of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project?

Leadership

Figured worlds are social spaces consisting of individuals coming into relationships of practice. Particularly in institutionalised structures like those in education, the individuals inhabiting these spaces, "take on an element of rank and status according to this relational hierarchy" (Holland et al., 1998, p.58). These positional identities provide individuals with a sense of their social position and power. Within in the figured world of education, sector and site leaders hold a relatively high position of power and thus play an important role in how others understood their positional identities. A leader described her role in initiating the need for change in her site:

The Centre [didn't pass accreditation assessment 12 years ago] was a really good opportunity for me then to say to the committee and to say to staff, "Look you're, you're not okay, things need to change.

In what follows are the descriptions of how leaders provided support in the re-imagining of pedagogy within their sites through giving educators permission to take risks, modelling agency and improvisation themselves as leaders, and creating space for staff dialogue and collaboration.

Giving permission to take risks

The support and interest of site and sector leaders was critical to teachers feeling that they had permission to take risks, to challenge the status quo. Teachers spoke about the importance of this permission to their work. It helped to build their confidence to re-imagine their pedagogies to improve the experiences of children and their families. This is expressed in the following examples from teachers:

> *I think it has the momentum that it has is that full support all the way up. I am very aware of all of that, coming onto the project I was very aware, I was a little bit surprised at the volume that it gained in such a short period of time, but I think that's because if the people up the top are saying go, then we can get something happening quickly rather than slowly plugging along I guess.*
>
> *Yes, we did, we did re-imagine our way into it. And certainly there was great acceptance and recognition for that, and if anything it was only through this re-imagining project that when we're finalising our presentation for the conference, and we were wanting some other critical friends to share our work with before we shared it. We went to our assistant head of learning and teaching excellence, who's the curriculum person from R-6 and said look can we share what we've done, we'd love some critical feedback and she was just blown away. She said oh I need you to share that with the staff team. We haven't done it yet, so there is kind of that linking in. And I think it's just the business of a school, it's not that they didn't want to know, or they weren't interested, it's just how does it fit? So, I'm sure there'll be the opportunity for us to share with others.*
>
> *So, in my world people like [Christina] in Catholic Ed being so passionate and so knowledgeable and then really giving us permission. I think coming into the project a lot of my worries and concerns – I don't know if I am allowed to do this, I don't know if I am allowed to do that – the fact that probably not only is my principal kind of said try, take a risk but then also that [Christina] did as well.*
>
> *Having people high up in Catholic Ed say take risk it's okay, the kids are still going to learn. We will just know more by the end of it [about how children learn and what they want to learn]. So I guess for me and what I have been doing over the last few years of my particular research I've probably gone off on my own a little bit more and I've been really nervous about that about where that sits with the Australian Curriculum – what I am – from an accountability point of view – what is okay and what is not okay and I've kind of grappled with that and I think the support not only at a school level but then also at a systemic level of going, "try, tell us what you learn and that gives us all more information".*

The act of giving permission to take pedagogical risks provided teachers with opportunities to openly challenge the status quo and to share their thinking and learning with others. Previous research shows that teachers who disagree with the status quo will often find covert ways of enacting agency (Sisson, 2018). In providing permission leaders created a safe space where teachers thinking and practice could be more visible and thus used to support the learning within the site.

Role modelling agency and improvisations

Leaders were also important in role modelling agency and the importance of active listening to multiple perspectives in re-imagining practice. In the following examples leaders spoke about the importance of being creative, bringing people together to create a shared understanding and empowering other staff to take on leadership:

> *I think that creativity has been the biggest asset in leadership because there's always a number of ways to solve something. For instance our roster, we advocated for all these teachers and then it was like how do we roster that, when the teachers all go home at 3:30pm. Some of the staff here couldn't imagine any other way to roster but we've created a way to roster so that each team has 4 people, 4 core people now.*
>
> *At the same time, our involvement with the Re-imagining Project started, we had two new staff*

join our team. It was an opportune time for us to go okay, let's really be quite analytical of our practice. Victoria (Whitington) gave us a question in one conversation, "Can you be an educator and not know?"

[In giving staff freedom to make decisions] what I had to do was give up a lot of control, which was really hard for me.

In these examples, as well as others throughout this section, leaders showed how they were creative in re-imagining their figured worlds and thus their identities as leaders. At times they challenged the notion of leader as having control and employed a more democratic approach. Such acts of agency provided others with the courage to also re-imagine their figured worlds.

Creating time and space for dialogue and collaboration

Designated leaders were also instrumental in creating space for individuals to engage in dialogue and collaboration. These leaders created teaching teams and altered the architecture to promote collaboration between teachers. One leader described the importance of bringing people together in a shared space:

Real collaboration happens when you're actually in the same environment because we can collaborate on a very collegial level and it doesn't actually make a difference to our practice but it certainly does when you've got two teachers in the same room. The teachers being able to learn from each other because they have different strengths and able to shine as well in front of each other and also having the children being able to see two adults in a relationship and that's really really important modelling I believe. That's what's driven me there and they come from homes where there is generally more than one adult in the home so they are used to seeing people in relationships and if they're not used to seeing people in relationships, they need to see it.

Some leaders also restructured rosters to promote equitable opportunities to attend staff meetings. The advice given to one leader by Professor Rinaldi was, "find a way for your teachers to, to talk together. They have to share their documentation with each other". In consultation with staff, meeting structures were also changed to reflect learning as a community:

I create twice in one term a time for each team to come together, we had a staff meeting scheduled and we talked to them about what the purpose of that was, and that's become an embedded part of our practice now because of our involvement with the principles from Reggio Emilia and valuing the documentation of daily life. So, and valuing the opportunities to invite new perspectives.

[Our] staff meetings started to look different. So, they were very much administrative, so we changed that. Well now how it looks is we have half an hour of admin, because teachers still need that, the next part was professional learning, and had to be about learning, and different people would run it. We still don't share enough of our good practice.

Leaders also believed that bringing teachers together from different areas was important in enacting shared pedagogical values and beliefs in congruent ways. Four leaders across three sites re-positioned staff to organise opportunities for collaboration in reconceptualising pedagogy across the school. Participants described how preschool and primary teachers were repositioned in teams, how one site positioned a primary school leader's office within the early years context, and how another leader organised for the early childhood art teacher to work across both the preschool and primary classes. In the case study of re-imagined practice at City Centre Childcare Centre we see an example of the changing of the role of the chef to become a pedagogical role. The impact of bringing individuals together to engage in dialogue and collaboration was described by leaders and teachers:

When we rewrote [and] redeveloped our philosophy statement and everybody was a part of that, that actually helped I think to bring us all together and that's very much based on the principles of Reggio Emilia and their running right through that. So that was a process in particular where we've all had to work together in ways that perhaps we haven't before and it did I think enable some of the educators to become more open in sharing their ideas and in knowing that they would be heard and it would be valued along with everybody else's words and voices.

So, working together as a collective rather than isolated islands, vessels, people, teachers, educators and I think that's been a really good thing, but it's also been empowering as well, I think, to staff. So collegially they've built stronger teams of teachers and I think with that

combined knowledge, shared understanding, shared language, shared meaning that's transpired into being able to have deeper more well-informed conversations with parents as well.

[The chef] has been critical in terms of engaging the families. She makes sure that she's here quite early in the morning to get the smells going but also to talk with parents about food in general.

The role of leadership is significant to the enactment and sustainability of pedagogical change. This pilot case study sheds light on the role of leaders in informing teacher's identities as change agents. By providing permission to engage in innovative pedagogies, role modelling creative improvisations, and providing space for dialogue and collaboration, the leaders within this study have contributed to the development of a culture of participation. Rinaldi (2013, p.32) suggests, "Participation generates and nurtures the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility and inclusion; it produces change and new cultures that contend with the dimensions of the contemporary world and globalization". The ways in which leaders supported teachers informed their relational identities in ways that made them feel connected and empowered to enact agency in re-imagining their figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). These findings are consistent with research suggesting that quality collaborative engagements between individuals are critical to building a sense of community in early childhood settings (Comer & Ben-Avie, 2010). As illustrated throughout this research, the building of community is a continuous and emergent process that requires an openness to engaging in a dialogical process with others (Davies, 2014).

Provocations:

- What structures and conditions can systems create to support site leaders in developing innovative pedagogies?
- How can systems support and acknowledge the rich diversity of leadership practices that enable the re-imagining of pedagogy?

Reciprocal relationships with parents/carers

Malaguzzi (in Gandini, 1998) was very concerned about the quality of relationships between educators and parents/carers. He said:

It has also always been important to us that our living system of schooling expands toward the world of the families, with their right to know and to participate. And then it expands toward the city, with its own life, its own patterns of development, its own institutions, as we have asked the city to adopt the children as bearers and beneficiaries of their own specific rights (p.63).

Participants highlighted the importance of the participation of parents/carers toward a whole school community approach. Leaders and teachers described parents' and carers' involvement as supportive in building a shared sense of belonging and in promoting the site within the broader community. This sense of support is evident in the words of several teachers:

Just that sense of alright, we're all in this together, you know, we'll help each other out. And I think ultimately there's this real sense of community that's been developed. And the fact that our parents feel that there's an opportunity for them to find a place that they can be an active member of the community.

The school was building quite a strong reputation in the [broader] community for the changes that we had made and so our [enrolment] numbers were increasing.

We have moved very much from inviting parents in when we want parents to be invited in as an educator, to being open to parents all the time.

Including parents/carers as valued participants provided opportunities for learning and co-constructing knowledge in ways that may have not otherwise been considered. Leaders and teachers described how they engaged with parents/carers in a learning community where sharing knowledge was reciprocal:

The teachers did a lot of the work around that with just conversations with families – inviting families into playful learning time to see what they were doing – at the beginning of the year running little information [sessions] about what are you doing when you are playing with blocks – that sort of what are the children learning and the mathematical concepts that are connected to it. We have done a few different brochures around play as well. It's a part of our current handbook so all parents get that information.

We've had a literacy night where we talked about bookmaking and writer's notebook as it becomes when they're about grade 3 so we worked with small groups of parents and talked about that whole pedagogy which was fabulous, really fabulous and then we had one on assessment and reporting.

Working with our Aboriginal children, our Aboriginal community members and Elders, as well as our non-Aboriginal children and our staff to develop this notion of how is it that we can teach through culture rather than just only about culture.

We've got a parent that is particularly passionate about gender and sort of un-gendering teaching practice and so forth. And so she's been given space to work with our staff and trying to influence our thinking as well.

We went to our parent body and we asked for permission to not do the documentation that we had been doing [but to re-design a new approach]. The parents were very supportive and when presented with the new approach, the families fell in love with it.

That reciprocal nature of the relationship is really important and all of these things that I talk about now, about gifts and reciprocal relationships and the groupness of the Centre and the community of seeing parents as a critical part of the learning that's happening, we see really differently since we've started really thinking about the principles of Reggio Emilia.

Parents/carers were valued as competent and capable contributors to the learning community. This image of the parent/carer was important in promoting a shared understanding of the values and beliefs behind the re-imagined pedagogy employed at each site. Parents'/carers' identities within a whole school community approach were positioned as active agents in informing the direction of the setting. This agentic notion of parents is contrary to notions of parent/carer participation that positions them as passive receivers of knowledge such as one-directional communication offered through reports and newsletters, and parent/carer perspectives being limited to 15-minute interviews with teachers. Inviting parents/carers to share their perspectives and expertise in co-constructing knowledge is what Spaggiari (1998) identifies as important to the nature of schools as being a place for belonging. Families "need a network of shared responsibility and solidarity that is of benefit and support to them" (Spaggiari, 1998, p.110). The various ways in which sites participating in this case study were working to include parents/carers were not only supportive to families but were also supportive to the sites.

These examples of re-imagining participation of families demonstrated how the inclusive processes developed by sites enabled them to become true members of each setting's learning community. Malaguzzi (1994) sees a fundamental role of parents in their children's education, of building 'strong alliances' with them by sharing the education setting's goals so that parents understand and support them. Similarly, Miskeljin and Sharmahd (2018) argue for partnerships amongst all in educational systems, including with parents, as democracy in action.

Provocations:

- What image of the parent is visible in our interactions, policies and pedagogy?
- How can systems and sites make the competent parent visible?
- How might systems and sites engage with parents differently or in a new way to enable the process of knowledge co-construction?

Conclusion

The findings presented within this section of the report highlight the challenges and supports participants experienced in re-imagining their figured worlds. The challenges shed light on the hegemony of dominant discourses used within early childhood education and the influence they have on the experiences of leaders, teachers and educators, children and families. Pedagogical fragmentation and changes in leadership were symptomatic of the discourses of standardisation and hierarchical views of power and knowledge. The pressures concerning children's future performance on the NAPLAN was something about which parents reported high levels of concern. Parents expressed a desire for their children to have an educational experience that reflected more democratic and engaging approaches to education.

The examples of supports show leaders' and teachers' powerful improvisations to author their own identities as professionals with the capacity to work with complexity and diversity rather than to read their identities as a technical role. These leaders and teachers are curriculum and cultural workers. They

are not passive recipients of knowledge constructed by others but co-constructors of knowledge in relationship with colleagues, children and families. What has been striking is the focus and continued creativity and efforts by these leaders and teachers to see their ability to cross boundaries and bring community together in an everyday, every decision, deep and meaningful way. The leaders and teachers created structures which supported the sustainability of re-imagining pedagogy within their figured worlds. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project was instrumental in bringing professionals across organisations together, leaders worked to create supportive environments for diverse educational approaches including that of Reggio Emilia, to be brought into relationship with each other. They valued families as co-constructors of knowledge with all participants contributing to the creation of a culture that sought multiple perspectives and engaged in the process of communing.

SECTION 4

Conclusion

The investigation of the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia followed as a response to the 2012-2013 Thinker in Residence Professor Carla Rinaldi and her subsequent report. The Rinaldi report recommended that South Australia engage with the Reggio Emilia principles to develop a unique contextual approach that is reflective of the local culture. The use of cultural models theory (Holland et al. 1998) as a framework for this pilot research enabled this exploration of how early childhood education is being re-imagined in South Australia.

Findings presented within the case summaries provided illustrations of how five early childhood sites re-imagined their pedagogy and the transformative impact this change had to the experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders within these sites. These illustrations provided insight into how sites brought a range of different perspectives into dialogue to re-imagine educational worlds in ways that reflected the shared values and beliefs of their local communities. They also highlighted the significance of creating communities of learners who engaged in deep critical reflection and transformative action to re-imagine their figured worlds in democratic ways. The Reggio Emilia principles provided an impetus for such critical reflection. While findings highlighted the unique qualities and processes of re-imagining early childhood education which occurred within sites, they also illuminated common values and beliefs that were seen across sites. They included, the belief in the competence and capacity of children, educators and parents/carers, the importance of democracy in education, the understanding of knowledge as being socially constructed, the role of inquiry and research, and the importance of making learning visible to informing future policy and practice.

The cross-case analysis shed light on the challenges and supports to re-imagining early childhood education which are significant to informing future policy and practice. At the core of these challenges were dominant discourses about education such as deficit views of learners, hierarchical relationships and linear perspectives about learning, which were often unchallenged. The nature of dominant discourses is that they become naturalised and as such accepted as the way things are. Such unquestioned truths made it difficult for sites to re-imagine their worlds, but not impossible. Cultural models theory (Holland et al., 1998) was useful in uncovering the acts of agency that participants engaged in as they re-imagined and re-authored their figured worlds and consequently their identities and roles within them. These acts of agency were made possible through supporting structures such as The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project, other professional organisations, professional learning opportunities and supportive individuals, such as principals, early childhood directors and sector leaders. Other improvisations such as expanding the concept of a learning community to include parents/carers also increased sites' ability to re-imagine their pedagogy. These findings highlighted the importance of bringing people together in dialogic relationships to co-construct knowledge through a process of communing.

The literature is evidence of a growing interest in the Reggio Emilia principles around the world and also brings to light the struggles experienced in pedagogical transformation. The findings presented within this report contribute to this literature by providing an understanding of how teachers and leaders from five sites brought multiple perspectives into dialogue with Reggio Emilia principles to reconceptualise their figured worlds in culturally reflective ways, and the conditions needed to do so. As these findings derived from a pilot research project, further research into the ways in which South Australian sites are re-imagining childhood is needed. Such research will be important in the continued re-imagining of early childhood within South Australia and beyond.

Re-imagining early childhood education requires the realisation that "...what we took to be self-evident and necessary is not in fact so, and that there are quite different ways of thinking available to us" (Moss 2013, p.48). This report not only provides a window into the processes of re-imagining early childhood within South Australia and the experiences of leaders, teachers, children and families, but also serves as an alternative narrative for readers to engage with as they re-imagine their own possibilities.

SECTION 5

Recommendations

The aims of this pilot research project were to develop an early understanding of how early childhood education is being re-imagined and reconceptualised in South Australia, and to trial and develop research tools for engaging with the perspectives of leaders, teachers, children and their families. The recommendations presented here are based on the findings from this pilot research and are in keeping with the philosophical and theoretical nature of Reggio Emilia principles. In acknowledging and valuing each context and learning community as unique, the recommendations have been written to provoke deep engagement and reflection by those who choose to enact them. The case summaries provide some inspiration into how these recommendations might look in practice.

1. Maintain and extend a collaborative intra and inter systems approach.

1.1 Continue with the expansion and funding of The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project to enable and encourage research, a focus on early childhood education and care, and develop cross-sector engagement.

1.2 Redesign system leadership groups as innovative think tanks that welcome multiple perspectives and engage in respectful and critical dialogues.

1.3 Strengthen dialogue between systems to support the re-imagining of early childhood education in South Australia to enhance the experiences of children and families.

Those who work for change and improvement in education derive considerable strength from frequent and in-depth contact with their setting colleagues, working together on a shared and mutually determined vision.

The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project serves as an organisational hub for state-wide work, as do hubs within systems. Resourcing maintains that work and enables it to expand. Educators, including teachers and principals, derive considerable support from collaborating within their sites, in their own systems, and in cross sectoral work.

Inviting other stakeholder organisations who engage with children and families, either directly or indirectly, to participate in the re-imagining process brings multiple and richer perspectives. For example, universities have a pivotal role in teacher education and in contributing to an international audience through research publication.

2. Foster educational innovation, creativity and cultural responsiveness.

2.1 Allow for time, space and resources to bring multiple perspectives into dialogue to inform innovative and culturally reflective pedagogies.

2.2 Enable sites to be unique and responsive to local contexts and communities of learners.

2.3 Enable sites to engage with alternative forms of assessment that reflect the values and beliefs of the site.

2.4 Design structures for reporting learning progress that honour children's multiple capabilities.

Education settings do well when those who attend, work and visit feel able and welcome to contribute to the creation of a site that is deeply connected to its community in that it reflects local characteristics, is inclusive, and as a result is in many ways unique. Participants in such a setting feel that they have permission and are indeed encouraged to present their ideas, to initiate a dialogic conversation, to experiment, and take risks.

Modes of assessment of learning are locally determined and include the voices of community members. The modes employed are highly accountable, providing authentic evidence and in-depth analysis of children's learning that is shared with children, their families and at times the broader community, and used to inform further planning. Such assessment is broad in scope, capturing the full range of children's capacities.

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3. Establish learning communities that embody a culture of dialogue at the site, organisation and state levels.

3.1 Enable time and space for the engagement of dialogue between cross-sector sites with shared interest in re-imagining pedagogy.

3.2 Create structured dialogue to engage educational professionals and community members in dialogue with key policy makers.

3.3 Establish fora within sites for families and staff to engage in dialogue about matters that impact on their experiences and those of the children that attend the site.

A dialogic culture enables communication that is intersubjective (Newson & Newson, 1975) in quality. Intersubjective communication is two way: the parties involved build meaning together, creating new understandings. A dialogic culture requires all involved to not only share their own perspectives but to also listen with the openness to being changed. Such authentic listening is referred to as a pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2013).

The development of dialogic cultures contributes to the building of learning communities that are responsive to their members. It also provides opportunities for creating and working towards a shared vision, based on the beliefs and values co-constructed within the learning community. Efforts toward challenging dominant discourses require bringing policy into dialogue with practice and research.

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4. Promote pedagogical leadership.

4.1 Reconceptualise all roles to include opportunities for pedagogical leadership, alongside the roles of designated leaders.

4.2 Create site structures that enable learning through dialogue, by giving educators permission to experiment with ideas, try different approaches, allowing time to reflect and evaluate.

4.3 Address the issues of how the selection of designated leaders is aligned with the existing established site community.

4.4 Support the development of courageous transformational leaders, who enable themselves and others to explore and try innovative pedagogies throughout all levels of the site.

4.5 Make research into pedagogy a foundation of site thinking and day-to-day work.

When a site adopts a participatory culture, leadership is a role for all. Everyone, in whatever capacity, children, parents, teachers, educators, as well as those in designated leadership positions are well placed to enact pedagogical leadership. When a leader is to be chosen the community needs to be authentically involved in the selection of a candidate whose own beliefs and record of work are aligned with that community.

Those in designated leadership positions are well placed to lead the creation and maintenance of a dialogic culture in their learning community. Such learning communities are formed when structures such as the physical environment, rosters, meetings, and curriculum development are created, critically reflected upon, researched and re-imagined to ensure that the intended vision for learning and participation is being enacted. When educators see themselves as researchers into their own pedagogy

and work collaboratively and collegially to grow their understanding of their work, the setting becomes a more effective environment for learning.

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5. Reconceptualise professional learning that fosters "teacher as researcher".

5.1 Engage in ongoing professional documentation to critically reflect on learning and pedagogy.

5.2 Provide a range of collaborative and dialogic professional learning, at the level of site, system and across systems.

5.3 Expand The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project and continue its critical role in organising democratic structures to enable professional learning, dialogue and sharing across systems policies, practices, resources and knowledge in re-imagining childhood and pedagogy.

5.4 Continue engagement with multiple perspectives (including local perspectives) to reconceptualise pedagogy.

Educators who see themselves as lifelong learners value the richness that multiple perspectives bring to their own pedagogy and thus strive to understand different points of view by carefully listening to children, colleagues, and families. They also read about education, keep abreast of current thinking, and research their own practice either individually or with colleagues to inform their pedagogy. They see their knowledge not as fixed but as always evolving through their interactions with others and their perspectives. Professional learning is not solely an event activity, but rather an everyday dialogic approach to work and practice in educational settings, and often conducted collegially. Pedagogical documentation is central to an ongoing re-imagining process of reflection and re-thinking, enabling continual dialogue about children's and educators' learning, enabling all to see what has been done. In the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, this process is called making learning visible and directing the way ahead (Giudici, Rinaldi, Krechevsky & Barchi, 2011).

As well as being an individual, group and whole site activity, professional learning enhances learning within and across systems and settings. It can also involve parents and community members, as bringing multiple perspectives together creates richness in possibilities. The South Australian Collaborative Childhood Project is well placed to continue to offer learning opportunities across sectors, as are similar within sector organisations. These professional learning encounters must strive to involve the learning community in the co-construction of knowledge rather than positioning them as passive recipients of knowledge from others. Such structures need to be well resourced.

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6. Reconceptualise early childhood education and care in South Australia by developing a local approach that brings together multiple perspectives.

6.1 Develop policies and practices that recognise the child as competent and capable.

6.2 Engage in a pedagogy of listening to include children in the development and enactment of curriculum and pedagogy at all phases.

6.3 Conceptualise teachers and children as co-teachers and co-learners.

6.4 Expand the view of learning as a process of co-constructing knowledge.

As the Reggio Emilia Educational Project reminds educators, teachers and leaders, the image they have of the child will inform all that they do. Children are able and competent at all ages and recognising them in that way opens a multitude of possibilities. Educators who engage in democratic pedagogies listen carefully to children and include them in important decisions that have an impact on their lives. Democratic pedagogies create a space for transformative learning communities where children and teachers are both learners and teachers. Pedagogical documentation is not only used as a means to share children's and teachers' learning, it is also part of the process of learning that engages children deeply in a rich curriculum. Teachers who see themselves as learners acknowledge the importance of feeling comfortable with uncertainty and at times, 'not knowing', opening a wide spectrum of learning possibilities and creative innovation. Democracy in all is a useful lens through which to re-imagine thinking and practice.

7. Continue and expand research.

7.1 Focus on the understanding to experiences of a wider representation of children, families, teachers and leaders.

7.2 Continue with participant-informed methods.

7.3 Conduct longitudinal ethnographic research focused on following over time the experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders within sites that are re-imagining early childhood education.

7.4 Focus on understanding how cultural perspectives including local and Aboriginal perspectives are brought into dialogue to reconceptualise pedagogy.

Continued research is warranted in order to understand the impact of re-imagining education in democratic and culturally inclusive ways. Such research needs to continue to focus on the experiences of children, families, teachers and leaders, providing an understanding of both depth and breadth. A longitudinal ethnographic research approach would provide insight into impact over time while quantitative methodologies would offer insights into the degree of interest in re-imagining pedagogy and the rate in which it is being taken up. The use of participant informed methods are important in providing a depth of understanding of different experiences, as well as providing rich illustrations of pedagogy and practice to inform future policy.

8. Create a culture that values an image of the competent and capable parent/carer and fosters an awareness of their role as protagonists in children's learning.

8.1. Acknowledge the competent and capable parent, drawing on parent/carers as valued knowledgeable resources.

8.2 Welcome families in all aspects of the development and evolution of the site.

8.3 Engage with families in two-way dialogue and co-construction of knowledge.

8.4 Engage families in the process of pedagogical documentation.

Parents/carers are able and competent. As the holders of family and community cultural knowledges, they are able to contribute richly to learning environments. When parents/carers feel valued and welcomed in education settings as participants and co-constructors of curricula, the learning of all is enhanced.

SECTION 6

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APPENDIX A

Provocations

The case studies in this report provide an opportunity for leaders and educators to consider the diversity of ways that colleagues within the South Australian context have brought the Reggio Emilia principles into dialogue with other perspectives. As can be seen within the case studies, and as is important for all of the examples of pedagogy that have been documented and shared from the infant-toddler and pre-school centres in Reggio Emilia, they are not 'models' of pedagogy which can be directly adapted to other settings. What the case studies do offer though is an interpretive lens on the re-imagining of pedagogy and the experiences of children, parents/carers, teachers and leaders connected with theoretical perspectives from other research.

As such, we invite you to reflect on the following provocations, first in light of the case studies and then to consider your specific local context. Some provocations have been posed in response to specific cases, while others have been posed in response to the overarching concepts across the cases.

In this spirit of co-construction, we welcome you to share the provocations and reflections that arise for you both individually and collectively in your sites and professional associations as a result of your engagement with this report.

The following provocations can be copied and shared with colleagues as a tool in professional reflection and learning.

Overarching provocations

The importance of developing shared language and meanings

- What are some of the processes we may use for developing shared language and meaning within an educating community?
- Whose voices do we listen to in the development of shared language? How are diverse voices reflected in the artefacts such as policies, communication and documentation of our site?

Seeing the opportunities for re-imagining

- How can we become open to everyday possibilities for challenge?
- How can we welcome crises of meaning as opportunities to create culture?

The participatory, democratic educating community

- What were the actions that participants took that brought participation and democracy to life in relevant ways in their contexts?
- Consider the ways in which leaders and educators worked in different layers of the structures and processes of their sites to build educating communities. How might you work in your role to build an educating community at your site?

Provocations from case studies

Westside Primary School

- How have the Reggio Emilia principles been a catalyst and a tool for thinking differently about outdoor learning environments at Westside Primary School? How might this illustration of practice inspire your own thinking about the outdoor learning environment within your context?
- What is the role of cultural and community knowledge at Westside, and how is this made visible in the systems, curriculum and ways of relating? What do you know about the cultural and community knowledge at your site? How can you further engage with these multiple perspectives?
- Where are the points of transition in your context and how can these be interrogated/analysed and reimagined?

City Centre Childcare Centre and Pre-school

- What are the elements that were de-constructed within the system to enable the holistic approach of moving away from a long day care model to a wholistic view of an educating community?
- How was documentation used to challenge and unpack the dominant discourse of routine and everyday experiences? How might you structure the use of documentation to challenge and unpack dominant discourses at your site?
- How did teachers use the pedagogical documentation of children's art making to build their emergent curriculum? How might you engage in pedagogical documentation to inform your curriculum and pedagogy?

Memorial Early Learning Centre

- What does it mean to have a "pedagogy of relationships"?
- If we understand, believe and think we know that children need to learn with and from each other,- how do we use those understandings to build pedagogy?
- What are the perspectives of the 'hundred languages' in this case study? How can we reconceptualise our understanding of "the hundred languages" to consider different perspectives?

East Catholic School

- In the Australian context both pre-school and schools work with a national curriculum. What are the possibilities for bringing the Reggio Emilia principles into dialogue with these curricula in order to make space for children's agency?
- How is the emerging pedagogy of listening being enacted at East Catholic School across the levels of leadership, curriculum and community engagement? Reflect upon how you might engage in a pedagogy of listening at your site.
- Discuss strategies you might use as a site to develop shared principles that can be used to support continuity of children's transitions within context.

Coastal Catholic School

- How did changing the image of the child alter the processes of teaching and learning, people, spaces and relationships within this school? What might be possible in your context?
- How have the Reggio Emilia principles informed the nature of the environments at Coastal Catholic School?
- How might you provide opportunities for children to enact agency in informing the learning environments at your site?