The Pennsylvania State University
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DWELLING MIDST COMPLEXITIES:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE MIDDLE CURRICULUM OF A
REGGIO EMILIA INSPIRED SCHOOL

A Thesis in
Art Education

by
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Abstract

As a qualitative case study, the purpose of the research is to understand the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool and to explore the ways in which Reggio Emilia inspired approaches to early childhood education have been taken up by the Delitto Preschool, an early learning center located on Susquehannock land in State College, Pennsylvania, United States. Although Reggio Emilia’s philosophy is historically and conceptually rooted in the municipality of Reggio Emilia, in Italy, and foregrounded by specific sociopolitical conditions, from the standpoint of a particular culture, history, and environment, as well as local knowledge and practices, it continues to be translated by and for other contexts. However, as this thesis will address, Reggio Emilia is a place-based philosophy and approach. As Carla Rinaldi, the president of Reggio Children says, “you have some key principles that drive you. But, in each culture, in each place you have to develop something different. Never will be possible to have Reggio in other land… and you can have your own strategy” (Thinkersinresidence, 2012). This suggests that we cannot have Reggio Emilia outside Italy, but we can have Reggio Emilia inspired centers. A Reggio Emilia inspired center takes inspiration from Reggio but is grounded in the local context and culture where the inspired center is located. With this in mind, this study explores the following questions: In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia? Moreover, how do curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool, when these inspirations meet and become entangled with the realities of the center’s local requirements and emplaced knowledges, practices, and cultures? Using an ethnographic methodology and drawing on the work of curriculum theorist Ted Aoki, this study provides a phenomenological account of the curriculum of the Delitto Preschool, specifically the various ways in which Reggio Emilia inspirations are enacted and negotiated in daily practice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## List of Figures

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................... vii

## Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................................... ix

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1

- Context and Background ......................................................................................................................... 1
- Purpose of the study ............................................................................................................................... 3
- Statement of the Problem and Research Questions ............................................................................ 5
- Theoretical framework .......................................................................................................................... 6
- Methodology ........................................................................................................................................... 8

## Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2: Literature review ........................................................................................................................ 9

- Reggio Emilia Schools: Historical Background .................................................................................... 13
- Core values and concepts of Reggio Emilia Schools ............................................................................. 15
  - Emergent Curriculum, Negotiated curriculum and Project-based learning .................................. 15
  - The Image of the Child ...................................................................................................................... 18
  - The Image of the Teacher ................................................................................................................ 19
  - The Environment as the Third Teacher ............................................................................................ 19
  - Pedagogy of Listening and Relationships ....................................................................................... 21
  - Pedagogical Documentation .............................................................................................................. 22
  - Atelierista and Pedagogista ............................................................................................................... 23
- Reggio Emilia: A Globalized Philosophy ............................................................................................... 25
  - Reggio Emilia’s Popularity ............................................................................................................... 25
  - Reggio Emilia as Capital .................................................................................................................... 27
  - Reggio Emilia Inspired ..................................................................................................................... 27
  - Early Childhood Education in the United States ............................................................................. 30
  - The Discourse of NAEYC ................................................................................................................. 31
  - Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) ............................................................................... 32
  - Institutional Influences ..................................................................................................................... 33
- Cultural Beliefs ...................................................................................................................................... 34
- Folk Pedagogy ....................................................................................................................................... 35
- Summary and Implications .................................................................................................................... 36
- Delitto Preschool History ...................................................................................................................... 37
**Chapter 3: Critical Encounters: A Curriculum of Multiplicity and Complexity**

- Dwelling in the Midst of the Middle Curriculum
- Delitto Preschool’s Curriculum
- The curriculum-as-plan
- The curriculum-as-live (d)
- The Middle Curriculum

**Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

- Rationale: Justification for the Study
- Researcher’s Local Position
- Research design
- Sample
  - Participants
  - Key Demographic
  - Type of sampling
  - Ethics
- Data Collection: Instrumentation
  - Interviews
  - Researcher’s Role: Observer and Participant-Observer
  - Researcher’s Positionality with Teachers
  - Participants Categorization
  - Data Analysis

**Chapter 5: Findings**

- Reggio Emilia inspiration
  - “Reggio Emilia is Nature”
  - The Environment
  - Reggio Table: Loose parts
  - Project-based learning
  - The emergent curriculum
  - The Desire to be Reggio Emilia Inspired
- Delitto Preschool Lived Experiences
  - Early Childhood Teachers lived experiences at Delitto Preschool
  - Teachers Challenges at Delitto Preschool
  - Children’s Lived Experiences
- Local Requirements: “Get them ready for ABC’s and 123’s”
  - “We are able to ‘marry’ all of these things”
  - School Readiness: Literacy
Assessment tools................................................................. 114
Pedagogical Documentation: Kinderlime App .........................116
Branding Reggio Emilia Approach........................................... 120

“Teaching from the Environment” ...........................................121

Teachers beliefs............................................................... 122
Behaving well with each other: Daily Ritual............................ 125
Assigning children in stations .............................................. 128
The Holiday Curriculum.................................................... 131

Discussions.......................................................................... 133

Discussion 1: Indwelling Midst Tensions: Discourses of Instrumentalization........133

Discussion 2: Neoliberal Market Economy and Reggio Emilia.........................148
Who does/doesn’t Reggio Emilia inspiration serve? .....................150
Can and should Reggio Emilia be recreated? .............................158

Conclusion ........................................................................ 165

References ........................................................................ 173

Appendices ........................................................................ 194

Appendix Screen Shots of Delitto Preschool Website.................... 194
List of Figures

Figure 1. Wormery..........................................................76
Figure 2. A Reggio Emilia inspired indoor space for Delitto Preschool. A picture shown by Director Laurie..........................................................81
Figure 3. Loose parts at the Reggio table..........................................................83
Figure 4. Apple project..........................................................86
Figure 5. Apple project..........................................................86
Figure 6. Creative ways to teach alphabets..........................................................107
Figure 7. Anna asking Cameron to write..........................................................110
Figure 8. Cameron refusing to write..........................................................110
Figure 9: Anna writing children’s names..........................................................112
Figure 10: Mahal practicing the letters of her name...........................................113
Figure 11. Tanin working on the worksheets....................................................113
Figure 12. Worksheet samples..........................................................113
Figure 13. Worksheet samples..........................................................112
Figure 14. Documenting children’s activities and development on Kinderlime app..................................................119
Figure 15. Documenting children’s activities and development on Kinderlime app..................................................119
Figure 16. Kinderlime app a private documentation tool..................................120
Figure 17. Christmas holiday craft..........................................................132
Figure 18. Shamrock for St. Patrick’s Day..........................................................132
Figure 19. Easter eggs..........................................................132
Figure 20. Discourses at play at in the middle curriculum..................................133
Figure 21. Blob art..........................................................161
Figure 22. Uniformed art..............................................................161

Figure 23. The complexity of a Reggio Emilia inspired center in State College…………………165
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Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, a ladder
Help someone’s soul heal
Walk out of your house like a shepherd

- Rumi-

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reggio Emilia is a place-based philosophy; not only in name but because its essence and form are inspired by the city of Reggio Emilia and its surroundings. As Moss explains (2019), “The education undertaken in the municipal schools is best understood not as an ‘approach’, implying a generalizable model, but as a local cultural project that has emerged from a very particular time and place, the time being the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 67). Moss does not see Reggio Emilia as an approach but rather as a local cultural project that grew out of the broader social, political, historical and cultural conditions in Italy. As such, the philosophy of Reggio Emilia is local to the city of Reggio Emilia, a place that is acted upon by local forces. Despite being a local cultural project, the philosophy of Reggio Emilia has inspired many early childhood centers outside Italy. What constitutes the middle curriculum of a Reggio Emilia inspired early childhood center in the United States? How do local places make sense of approaches—or local cultural projects, as Moss says—from other contexts? In this thesis, I discuss the middle curriculum of a Reggio Emilia inspired school by employing Ted Aoki’s theoretical framework and using a qualitative case study approach and an ethnographic methodology. Aoki (1986/1991) sees curriculum coming to life when teachers dwell between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d). He uses the word middle curriculum to refer to the space in-between the two curricula. The middle curriculum constitutes the living experience of children and educators.

Context and Background

I walked into a Reggio Emilia inspired center in the United States, informed by my familiarity of Reggio Emilia inspired centers in Canada. I wondered if a Reggio Emilia inspired center in the United States would be different from Canada. I told myself that it should be
different because Canada is not the same as the United States — Reggio Emilia inspiration heavily relies on the culture and the context of the place where it is situated. As Carla Rinaldi, president of Reggio Children, says, “You have some key principles that drive you. But, in each culture, in each place you have to develop something different. Never will be possible to have Reggio in other land… and you can have your own strategy” (Thinkersinresidence, 2012). As Reggio Emilia philosophy is derived by being in dialogue with the local—i.e., the particularities of a center’s place—Reggio is neither a method nor a prescribed curriculum (Stremmel, 2012). There is no fixed curriculum model or outlined approaches to Reggio Emilia, but rather principles. What does it mean to be inspired by Reggio Emilia and how does an early childhood center negotiate these inspirations with other discourses and forces acted upon the curriculum of the early childhood center? Moreover, how does an early childhood center continue to be inspired?

A Reggio Emilia inspired school embraces certain principles while also responding to the sociocultural context of the school. As a result, there are mixed interpretations of what inspiration from Reggio Emilia means. For some, it is a philosophy that can be interpreted in a variety of ways (e.g., Wurm, 2005), yet for others it is strictly bound to the principles and philosophies of Reggio Emilia (e.g., Stremmel, 2012), as understood and practiced in the schools in Italy. In this way, to be Reggio-inspired is to see your own place as an encounter, a dialogue with and about the children and their communities (Stremmel, 2012).

Delitto Preschool, an early childhood center located on Susquehannock land in State College, Pennsylvania in the United States, utilizes an approach that is inspired by Reggio Emilia approach. Its location in Center County Pennsylvania brings its own set of requirements that

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1 All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms
early childhood schools have to meet. In addition, the local context for Delitto Preschool cannot be reduced to the small town of State College. Local places are not only coherent, communal and beautiful but also messy, fractured, and as a result of their differences. Many other forces, including human and non-human entities, state and national policies, and differences in terms of language, culture, race, religion, and class impact the curriculum of Delitto Preschool. As such, Delitto Preschool becomes an encounter—socially, culturally, politically and educationally.

“Encounters that are not necessarily good or bad. These are risky, worldly encounters that affect us, provoke us to think and feel, attach us to the world and detach us from it, force us into action…bring us into questions” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2017, p. 1). How might an encounter with Reggio Emilia inspiration affect Delitto Preschool? To understand the encounter between Reggio Emilia inspiration and Delitto Preschool, I examine what forces encounter each other and what their encounter might require. As Smith and Sobel (2010) remind us, “no school should be an island, but rather a peninsula – off to itself a bit but connected to the wider worlds of first the community, then the region, the state and finally the big wide world” (p. 155). Delitto Preschool is a space of encounter where children, families and educators with diverse background gather from across State College. The preschool is connected to and reflect the broader community, state and national system. The local knowledge and beliefs in addition to national and global influences, which Delitto Preschool adhere to, are important to children’s lived experiences of the school.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how and why schools outside of Italy have been inspired by Reggio Emilia philosophy and how do teachers negotiate Reggio Emilia inspiration in their middle curriculum practice. The middle curriculum is a space where multiple
curricula indwells, and many forces are at play Aoki (1986/1991). Recent research and theory in early childhood education has exemplified the Reggio Emilia approach as promising, a model for the world to consider (see, e.g., Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Edwards et al., 2012; Hall, 2010; Moss, 2016; Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2004; Thornton & Brunton, 2010; Vecchi, 2010). Reggio Emilia inspiration has gained popularity outside Italy and particularly in North America. With its emphasis on art, aesthetics, creativity, democracy, project-based learning, emergent curriculum, and experimentation, Reggio Emilia schools have earned a reputation as an innovative approach and philosophy for early childhood education (Moss, 2016; Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2004; Vecchi, 2010). Given that Reggio Emilia is a place-based approach to early childhood education, it is important to ask how other countries, with sociocultural conditions and values that are different from Reggio Emilia, develop and use practices that are inspired by Reggio Emilia.

I also wondered, given the wide range of policies, standards and regulations which guide early childhood centers in the United States, how Reggio Emilia inspired practices live(d) in relationship to the policies and regulations that inform the everyday educational practices of Delitto Preschool. The purpose of this study is to address these tensions that exist in the middle curriculum of early childhood centers, like Delitto Preschool, which draw inspiration from Reggio Emilia. How does the center director, for example, as well as the teachers, negotiate a globally recognized philosophy and approach in context with a wide range of local policies and regulations? How and why does the curriculum of this negotiation live at Delitto Preschool? This study draws on the work of curriculum theorist Ted Aoki, especially his concept of middle curriculum as it helps to see the relationship between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d).
Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Reggio Emilia inspiration has offered a new perspective to early childhood education. The principles of Reggio Emilia emphasize democracy, inclusion, co-construction of knowledge, a didactic relationship between children and teachers (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Edwards et al., 2012; Moss, 2016; Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2004; Vecchi, 2010). Reggio Emilia philosophy aligns with the reconceptualizing movements in early childhood education because they think of children as social and cultural beings instead of individuals confined to the scientific image of the child as informed by the psychology of child development. With its emphasis on art, aesthetics, creativity, democracy, project-based learning, emergent curriculum, and experimentation, Reggio Emilia schools have a reputation for being innovative, child-centered, and community-facing. Given that Reggio Emilia is a place-based approach to early childhood education, how do countries with different sociocultural conditions and values from Reggio Emilia develop and use practices that are inspired by Reggio Emilia?

As a promising alternative to standardization of early childhood education, many countries outside Italy are inspired by Reggio Emilia. While the socio-cultural, economic and historical conditions of countries may not be the same as Italy, how does the inspiration from Reggio Emilia work with required national and state standards and regulations? The discourse of school readiness and standardized assessment is still prevalent and dominant in state policies. There is a higher demand from state and parents to prepare children academically in particular in reading and writing comprehension skills. The United States values and sociocultural conditions are a lot different from the Reggio Emilia city in Italy. As such, I question what does it mean to be inspired by Reggio Emilia in the United States? What values from Reggio Emilia is taking up in early childhood centers in State College? Drawing on the work of curriculum theorist Ted
Aoki, the purpose of my research is to understand how Reggio Emilia inspired practices are understood and live(d) in Delitto Preschool's curriculum and pedagogy.

This thesis project is guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia?
2. How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool?

**Theoretical Framework**

Aoki’s theoretical framework will help to frame the encounters between Delitto Preschool and the Reggio Emilia inspirations it takes up. Aoki (2000) conceptualizes curriculum into two branches: the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d). The curriculum-as-plan originates from outside the classroom (Pinar, 2005). An example of a curriculum-as-plan is the state and national early learning standards. The curriculum-as-plan is predetermined which comes in the form of a package; with a predefined scope, as well as goals and outcomes which can be delivered to learners. Much emphasis is put on implementing an already prescribed set of ideas that was created beyond the context of the classroom to instruct children. As Pinar (2005) notes, Aoki questions when the goal of curriculum becomes simply implementing a curriculum-as-plan without considering the children and the school’s lived experiences.

Aoki proposes the concept of curriculum-as-live(d) to conceptualize and contextualize curriculum. According to Aoki (1993), the curriculum-as-live(d) is situated in the live(d) experience and the collective reality of the children and educators as they live their lives in an early childhood setting. To better understand the concept of live(d) experience, Aoki (1996) suggests seeing experience as a hybrid concept which includes “past experiences" (lived experiences) and "ongoing experiences" (live or living experiences)” (p. 418). The curriculum
attends to how is the experience lived (Van Manen, 2002). The live(d) curriculum is holistic and encompasses different dynamics of a child which include their identity and positionality in a given time and place. Each child is a living curriculum (Aoki, 1992). Children enter the preschool setting with their diverse lived experiences. There is a mutual relationship between their lived experiences at preschool and at home. Thus, the term live (d) experiences consider children’s holistic experiences. The concept of the live(d) indicates a living situation that is drawing from past experiences while always being in the process of becoming a different kind of experience. Instead of having a predetermined outlook in a curriculum, the middle curriculum is attuned to emergent encounters.

Aoki (1991) sees curriculum coming to life when dwelling between two curriculums: curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-live(d) happen. He also uses the word milieu or the middle curriculum to describe the zone where the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d) dwell to constitute living experiences. Living pedagogy happens “midst Curriculum-as-Plan/Curriculum-as-Live(d)” (Aoki, 2003, p. 425). Teachers who have to draw from various discourses such as state and national standards, assessments tools as well as Reggio Emilia inspiration, they reside in the space in-between the curriculum-as-live(d) and the curriculum-as-plan. The enactment of Reggio Emilia inspiration can be seen in the midst of a curriculum as planned and curriculum- as-live(d). This is the zone where multiple curriculum dwells as many forces get entangled. Aoki (1993) writes that the diversities which exist among children and educators create multiplicities in curricular planning. At Delitto Preschool, children are composed of multiplicities so do the teachers, the environment and the materials surrounding them. To practice the curriculum-as-live(d) is to respond to these multiplicities.
Aoki (2000) shares stories of teachers who are living in tensions within and in the middle of the “plannable and the unplannable, between the predictable and the non-predictable” (p. 2). The early childhood educators unlike K to 12 school system do not have preplanned yearly lesson plans with a textbook. In the same vein, it seems problematic to think of Reggio Emilia inspiration acting as a curriculum-as-plan because Reggio Emilia is not a model that can be exported from Italy. However, Reggio Emilia inspiration as an approach requires a particular theoretical, pedagogical and curricular approach. As such, Reggio Emilia can be seen as a curriculum-as-plan. Seeing Reggio Emilia inspiration entangling with the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool, a curricular zone of multiplicity, makes us think that it is not easy to draw a line between what is Reggio Emilia inspiration and what is not Reggio Emilia inspiration at Delitto. Many other factors are at play when it comes to understanding Reggio Emilia inspiration or the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool. Delitto is focusing on some of the principles that define the philosophy of Reggio Emilia approaches. However, sometimes these principles work in harmony with the culture and the context of the school and while at other times it may not. Thus, it creates tensions for teachers as they live the curriculum together with children. Through everyday experiences with children, they are trying to make sense of inspirations from Reggio Emilia in relation to other discourses. Thus, Aoki’s theoretical framework will reveal the live(d) realities of drawing inspiration from Reggio Emilia.

Methodology

This qualitative case study was conducted at Delitto Preschool, an early childhood school in State College, Pennsylvania, in the United States. The participants in the study consisted of 32 children. There were three programs at Delitto Preschool, a summer camp program (6 to 12 years old), a preschool program (3 to 5 years old), and an infant and toddler program (1 month to 3
years old). I spent the majority of my time in the preschool classroom and the summer camp classroom. During the month of July and August in 2018, one of the preschool rooms served as a summer camp for children, ages 6 to 12. I obtained consent from the teachers, parents, and directors. Ten teachers participated in the study. I interviewed 8 teachers because the other two teachers left Delitto Preschool for other opportunities. Moreover, the two directors at Delitto Preschool; the main director, Laurie who is also the owner of the school and the associate director, Chloe, also participated in the study.

Because my research approach is a qualitative case study, I was able to focus in-depth on Delitto Preschool in order to better understand the dynamic between the children, teachers and pedagogical situations unfolding between them. Yin (2018) suggests that a case study is appropriate for ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions. Aside from my research questions beginning with ‘how’, a case study seemed most relevant given the need to consider the interplay between the local specificities (Geertz, 1973) of Delitto Preschool and the more abstract role of Reggio Emilia as a source of curricular and pedagogical inspiration. Additionally, a case study approach enabled me to take focus in on “description and explanation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Teachers’ and the director’s orientation, disposition and decisions regarding the inspiration of Reggio Emilia are influenced by many other factors outside the school, such as state regulations and educational policies. Employing a case study allows me to see the lived experience of the school holistically instead of focusing on one aspect of it. By using a case study approach, I present an in-depth view of the complexity of the ‘context’ and its curricular and pedagogical ‘culture’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I examine the context of school from the state and national level to better understand the emplaced reality of Delitto Preschool.
As a case study, my unit of analysis is the Delitto Preschool, a place, specifically the three classrooms I observed while conducting fieldwork. I began my study from the summer camp classroom and then moved in between the preschool and infant toddler program.

I used ethnographic methods to collect my data to inquire about teachers’ practices, children’s experiences, parents’ perspectives and the directors’ experiences. The study was conducted for a period of 17 weeks, 2 to 3 days per week for a period of 3 to 2.5 hours per visit. I visited Delitto Preschool at different times of the day to understand the children and teachers experiences during the different times of the day. I conducted semi-structured audio recorded interviews with parents, teachers, children and directors to obtain their perspectives and experiences.

I employed thematic analysis to analyze my data. My first step in analyzing my data was to read my field notes, transcripts of audio recorded interviews, transcripts of video recorded events occurring at Delitto Preschool, and analyze the content of artifacts and still images from my research site. After transcribing interviews, and videos, I reviewed and questioned my data (Merriam, 2009) to determine whether it was relevant to my study or not. Then, I used open coding to arrange my data in different themes and categories based on my research questions (Miles et al., 2014).

I provide further information on my methodology in chapter 4.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The inspiration from Reggio Emilia has been influential in informing curricular and pedagogical frameworks as well as reconceptualizing previously held beliefs about early childhood education (Callaghan et al., 2018; Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019). Moss (2019) views Reggio Emilia as an example of an alternative narrative to early childhood education because it challenges the now ubiquitous story of quality and high return. Reggio Emilia is a place-based philosophy, not only in name but because its essence and form are inspired by the city of Reggio Emilia and its surroundings in Italy (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards et al., 2012, Hall, 2010; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2006; Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019; Tobin et al., 2009). Reggio Emilia philosophy is a local cultural project, situated in the city of Reggio Emilia. The project grew out of the broader social, political, historical and cultural conditions in the city of Reggio Emilia in Italy. Outside of the city of Reggio Emilia, it is often understood and practiced as an approach or education philosophy. Some of the literature from Reggio Emilia identifies Reggio Emilia philosophy or inspiration as an approach (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Edwards et al., 2012; Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019). While Reggio Emilia inspiration is sometimes referred to as a model or approach (Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019), Moss (2019) argues against that, suggesting that “the education undertaken in the municipal schools is best understood not as an ‘approach’, implying a generalizable model, but as a local cultural project that has emerged from a very particular time and place, the time being the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 67). As such, the philosophy of Reggio Emilia is local to the city of Reggio Emilia, a place that is acted upon by local forces (Edwards et al., 2010; Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2006; Thornton & Brunton, 2010). How might Reggio Emilia inspiration become a local culture project instead of a
generalizable model outside of Italy? Those inspired centers dwell within their local context and yet at the same time inspired by Reggio Emilia inspiration. What is the curriculum and pedagogy of the Delitto Preschool, when these Reggio Emilia inspirations meet and become entangled with, the expressions and realities of the center’s local requirements and emplaced knowledge, practices and culture?

Early childhood education in the United States is highly influenced by Western European educational approaches and ideas. Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and Waldorf schools are a few examples from Europe that have gained popularity in the United States (Edwards, 2002; Tobin et al., 2009). All three approaches are seen as an alternative moving away from traditional education toward more progressive education (Edwards, 2002). As such, Reggio Emilia's inspiration as an alternative way of thinking about early childhood practices brings its own kind of discourses about education, teaching and teachers.

How do early childhood centers marry the inspiration from Reggio Emilia with their local beliefs? How can these inspirations become a new aspiration? What happens when things are translated in places with different educational philosophies from Reggio Emilia? What is the impact of this philosophy on early childhood educators’ practices? Does inspiration from Reggio Emilia challenge the story of quality and high return? In this chapter, I offer a review of the literature and research relevant to this study. In part one, I discuss the characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach and its principles. In part two, I discuss how Reggio Emilia became globalized. In part three, I discuss early childhood education in the United States, particularly State College, Pennsylvania. I discuss the relevant literature in relation to the following two research questions:
1. In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia?

2. How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool?

Reggio Emilia Schools: Historical Background

Reggio Emilia schools and their philosophy originated from the city of Reggio Emilia in the region of Emilia Romagna, in Italy, which has a distinctive history, politics, and culture. The establishment of the schools was a response to a specific set of social and political conditions in Italy during the 1940s. Together, educators, parents, and children worked to rebuild after 20 years of authoritarian rule (Mussolini and the Nazis), which devastated many aspects of Italian life and community (Thornton & Brunton, 2010; Moss, 2019). After World War II, parents in Reggio Emilia (mostly women) came together to plan their way forward from a fascist regime. To do this, it was decided that a system of municipal preschools and infant-toddler programs would be built (Stremmel, 2012). The earliest preschool was founded in 1945 (Thornton & Brunton, 2010). With Loris Malaguzzi as the founding director and with the parents’ cooperation, Reggio Emilia preschools became city-run. Since, Reggio Emilia’s approach has served as an example of early education to Asia, Australia, North America, and other parts of the world (Edwards, 2002).

It is worth noting that the formation of Reggio Emilia was influenced by previous and contemporary educational pioneers, such as American and European strands of progressive education, Piagetian constructivist and Vygotskian sociohistorical psychologies, Italian postwar left-reform politics, and European postmodern philosophy (Cadwell, 1997; Moss, 2019). Similarly, Stremmel (2012) suggests that some of the ideas from the United States scholars have highly influenced the practice and thinking of Reggio Emilia's approach - Vivian Paley, Bill
Ayers, Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, Eliot Eisner, Dewey, Hawkins, Bruner, Gardner, and Bronfenbrenner. Their thinking about “children as active and competent learners, teaching as an intellectual and ethical endeavor, and schools as places for democratic conversation, critical thinking, and caring relationships” are similar to Reggio Emilia’s educational philosophy (p. 134).

Though Reggio Emilia schools were in part a response to the social and political conditions of the time, they were also driven by Italian core values, which viewed education as a collective process of knowledge and every child’s right (Stremmel, 2012). As Moss (2019) writes, a participatory democratic movement took place when the city’s local authority (the commune) came together to discuss what they wanted for the future of their children and how they could make it happen. Not only the historical condition of the city was important for the emergence of Reggio Emilia schools, but also the local commitment for change and democracy. The foundation of Reggio Emilia schools is a participatory democracy, which means that “people can and should speak out ‘as protagonist’ on behalf of themselves and their group, on the bases of their own experience, and at their own level of consciousness” (Cadwell, 1997, p. 9). The culture of participatory democracy is inviting in the sense that it welcomes various perspectives in the Reggio Emilia schools. What is remarkable about Reggio’s story is the responsibility that the people took on for the education of young children, without the presence of state action. Rather than accepting the dissatisfaction brought about by the approach of the church schools, they worked together to develop a more inclusive solution, that reflected the values and voices of the broader community (Cagliari et al., 2016).
Core Values and Concepts of Reggio Emilia Schools

Reggio Emilia is founded on certain principles that guide the curriculum of the school and educators’ pedagogical orientation. Some values of Reggio Emilia for teachers and children include uncertainty and wonder, research and experimentation (Moss, 2019), pedagogy of listening and relationships and pedagogical documentation (See Rinaldi, 2006; Rinaldi, 2012). Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) see the centrality of art in Reggio Emilia school’s curriculum. They write that Reggio Emilia schools “have engaged with the arts, not as an add-on or extra, a subject of study, or even a brief experiment, but as a deep, sustained commitment to artistic ways of knowing and being” (p. 11). Art is embodied in teachers’ pedagogical approaches and their process of knowledge-making and meaning-making with children. This understanding of art views art as more than materials that can be placed on a table to illuminate children’s inner self-expression. Art is a language for children, educators, atelierista (artist in residence), pedagogista (pedagogue), and the school. Instead of using the word kindergarten, childcare service or substitute home, Reggio Emilia uses the word school for early childhood education, holding the view that it is a public space and institution (Moss, 2019).

Emergent Curriculum, Negotiated Curriculum and Project-based Learning

Reggio Emilia schools do not follow any prescribed national framework or pre-planned curriculum, standards or framework, but rather an emergent curriculum (Edwards et al., 2012). There are different interpretations as to what the emergent curriculum means. For Edwards et al. (2011), emergent curriculum centers on children’s interests. This implies a child-centered approach to a curriculum where children with teachers explore the relationship between people, materials, and languages (Cadwell, 1997). However, as understood by Nxumalo, Vintimilia and Nelson (2018), “the intent is to engage with the concept of emergence as that which can bring
ethical and political engagements with curriculum and pedagogy; complicating understandings of an emergent curriculum as simply following the lead of children” (p. 433). They advocate for the reconceptualization of emergent curriculum, suggesting that Aoki’s (1993) concept of the live(d)-curriculum and decolonizing curriculum theorists’ perspectives be considered. The aim of the emergent curriculum is to resist a standardized curriculum or any other mode of curricular approach that governs children’s learning (Nxumalo et al., 2018). Emergent curriculum, in this case, becomes intentional in response to emergent situations affecting the lived experiences of children. Emergent curriculum is entangled with the concept of progettazione, which is often translated as project-based learning.

Reggio Emilia follows an in-depth and long-term investigation that is referred to as progettazione which can be translated as “to project ahead” (Vecchi, 2010). The term project is attributed to an extended in-depth investigation or study of a particular topic (Katz & Chard, 2000). Vecchi (2010) defines progettazione as “work in which adults (teacher, atelierista, pedagogista) make initial hypotheses and seek to have a deeper understanding of an area or topic but where key elements for moving forward come from work with children and careful analysis by adults of what is happening along the way” (p. 120). Through project work, children and adults work collaboratively to question, hypothesize, observe, discuss and explore their ideas and understandings (Stremmel, 2012). A project-based approach encourages children to collaborate and participate in the learning process (Arbouet Harte, 2010). Children’s questions, ideas, and interests lead the curriculum and guide the inquiry project (Arbouet Harte, 2010; Mac Naughton, 2003) and they are given ample time to pursue a project, test their hypotheses, reflect, and revisit their ideas and learning processes (Katz & Chard, 2000; Vecchi, 2010). Curriculum content is thus embedded in projects (Edwards et al., 2011; Mac Naughton, 2003). With an emergent
curriculum, the teacher does not know how the project will unfold or where it will end up. As such, an emergent curriculum adds a level of difficulty as well as excitement in teachers (Cagliari et al., 2012). Instead of answering children’s questions with scientific answers, educators are encouraged to ask the child for their explanation and for what they think (Cadwell, 1997). This implies that educators and children negotiate their ideas to create knowledge.

Acknowledging children’s agency and respecting their ideas are exemplified in ways in which the curriculum is negotiated between children and educators. A project-based approach and an emergent curriculum approach strongly rely on the negotiated curriculum. A “negotiated curriculum is neither child-centered nor teacher-directed; rather, it is child originated and inspired and teacher framed and supported” (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p. 240). As such, the educators listen to children’s ideas to co-construct their understanding of an inquiry project. “Investigations or projects are flexible, dynamic, and fluid, involving a continual negotiation between children and adults regarding decisions and choices of what to do and where to go next” (Stremmel, 2012, p. 139). This demonstrates that children and adults negotiate curriculum instead of following pre-planned lesson plans as they engage in project-based learning. The culture of Reggio Emilia schools supports a community of inquiry where children, families, and early childhood educators actively negotiate their knowledge. This is because Malaguzzi, the founder of Reggio Emilia Primary Schools, has worked to maintain an ongoing dialogue within the Reggio Emilia schools, in which children, parents, teachers, administrators, politicians, and educators gather to question and challenge contemporary dominant scientific, philosophical, and education discourses and resist any forms of domination regarding the conceptualization of children and childhoods (Soler & Miller, 2003).
Reggio Emilia schools use the term image of the child to show the lens which affects how we see a child and our approach to teaching practices (Cadwell, 1997; Malaguzzi, 1994; McNally & Slutsky 2017; Moss, 2019; Tarr, 2003). The image we have about children is affected by our culture, beliefs, education, knowledge, and values. Whatever image of the child we hold will direct our relationship and our behaviors toward them (Malaguzzi, 1994). In Reggio Emilia schools, children are seen as “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected with adults and other children” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10). Instead of looking at children as immature or being at all times on the pathway to development, even young children are acknowledged for who they are and the complexities they bring to learning and education. In Reggio Emilia schools, the view of children as social actors is rooted in a social constructivist perspective, wherein learning is understood to occur in a social context (Rinaldi, 2004). Children are viewed as protagonists with unique personal, historical and cultural backgrounds and values (Cadwell, 1997; Edward, 2012). Reggio Emilia schools believe that “instead of always giving children protection, we need to give them the recognition of their rights and their strengths” (Edward, 2012, p. 5). Children are the subject of rights, not needs. The emphasis on children as the creator of culture shifts our thinking about children as consumers of mass culture only (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Wien, 2008). As co-creators of knowledge, identity, culture, and values, children’s rights and their uniqueness are respected.

Children’s differences in abilities are valued under the slogan of the “hundred languages of children” (Edward et al., 2011; Rinaldi, 2004; Vecchi, 2010). The metaphor of the hundred languages describes the many ways children express themselves to communicate their ideas. Gandini (2005) think of “the hundred languages as the endowment of the individual, as a
metaphor for the construction of knowledge, as democratic participation that goes beyond the single voice by giving a positive force to diversity and to the different languages” (p. 71).

**The Image of the Teacher**

The teacher is a co-constructor of knowledge with children, in addition to a researcher, listener, assistant, and facilitator of the learning environment for children (Cadwell, 1997; Gandini, 2012; Vodopivec, 2012; Moss, 2019). “A traditional, instrumentalized idea of education, where the teacher is seen as a neutral transmitter of a body of predetermined and societally sanctioned knowledge and the child is constructed as a passive recipient” is problematized by the Reggio Emilia approach (Dahlberg et al., 2013). In Reggio’s view, knowledge becomes an act of co-construction when it is socially constructed by individuals in relation to others (Rinaldi, 2006). The job of the teacher is to engage in intellectual dialogue and create an environment that nurtures wonder, curiosity, excitement, and experimentation (Edward, 2012; Moss, 2019). The teacher is neither directive nor a passive onlooker, but rather a protagonist who is actively engaged in children’s learning (Gandini, 2012; Moss, 2019). “Intellectual conflict is understood as the engine of all growth in Reggio. Therefore, teachers seek to bring out, rather than suppress, conflicts of viewpoints between children” (Edward et al, 2012, p. 160). Teachers try not to impose their ideas but work collaboratively with the students to find problems that are hard to solve. Tied with the democratic values of Reggio Emilia, the teacher is a democratic professional who embraces a diversity of ideas, understanding, and values (Moss, 2019; Vecchi, 2010).

**The Environment as the Third Teacher**

Reggio Emilia philosophy views the environment as the third teacher, the parent being the first teacher and the classroom teacher the second teacher (Cadwell, 1997; Strong-Wilson &
Reggio schools emphasize the aesthetic elements as well as the emotional aspects of the environment (Cadwell, 1997; Giamminuti, 2007; Giamminuti, 2013; Rinaldi, 2004; Schwall, 2005; Vecchi, 2010). In addition to the effect of sensory qualities (light, color, sound, smell, micro-climate) of the environment on children’s perception, how much the environment helps children think creatively and critically is also considered (Kang, 2007). As Vecchi (2010) argues, “we must evaluate in everyday life how much environments allow or forbid, how much they encourage or censor, how much they educate ways of seeing, exploration and sensibility” (p. 8). Thus, the school gives special consideration to the arrangement and design of the environment. The environment transmits values to children, fosters creativity and invention, makes learning meaningful and responds to the needs of teachers and children (Biermeier, 2015). Learning is socially constructed and thus the environment is understood to encourage social relationships, which is important for learning and for creating meaning.

Reggio Emilia schools mirror their people and their community. The school as a community promotes strong interaction and communication among educators, children, parents (Gandini, 2012). As Rinaldi (2004) argues, school must respect children’s diversities. The classroom and school are the cornerstones of the educational and cultural values of the community. Not only individual differences are valued, but as Vecchi (2010) writes, the Italian values of the community are also shown in the architecture of the school. For example, piazzas are a gathering place in the community. In school, the classroom becomes a place of gathering for teachers, parents, and children. The walls make the stories from the program visible to the parents and the community in the form of documentation (Giamminuti, 2007; Giamminuti, 2013;
Rinaldi, 2004). As such, walls become historic sites of the program. Each classroom environment is planned carefully to ignite creativity, interest, and curiosity.

**Pedagogy of Listening and Relationships**

The pedagogy of listening and the pedagogy of relationship guide teachers’ disposition at the schools in Reggio Emilia (Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2006; Rinaldi, 2004; Rinaldi, 2001; Rinaldi, 2012; Vecchi, 2010). Actively listening to children allows teachers to engage in a reciprocal dialogue and to not only listen for obtaining a message but also interpret, make meaning, and evaluate it (Rinaldi, 2006). Teachers not only listen with their ears but also through many senses (Rinaldi, 2001). Rinaldi (2001) goes on to suggest that by listening to each other, our differences are valued, and no child remains anonymous. She points that when you listen to someone, you are validating their unique views and opinions, and giving them an identity. In this way, “listening produces questions, not answers” (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 2). Listening demands active participation and ongoing dialogues. As Vecchi (2010) writes, “one of the foundations of our work is the careful, respectful, tender ‘listening’ with solidarity to children’s strategies and ways of thinking” (p. xvii). To embrace a pedagogy of listening is to be attuned to children holistically and to attend to children’s processes of engagement with ideas and materials. Davies (2014) writes that Reggio Emilia schools ask for emergent listening, which is different from listening as usual. Emergent listening pushes us to listen beyond fitting “what we hear into what we already know” (Davies, 2014, p. xi). As Davies (2014) notes, Reggio’s concept of emergent listening attunes her to many ways of understanding children and their context. Emergent listening “opens one up for new ways of knowing and being, actively resisting closure and being curious about the void of any situation” (p. 28). From her perspective, emergent listening is different from listening as usual because it creates encounters that affect us. Listening as usual is a repetitive
form of listening which confirms what we already know without making us think about what we do not know.

The relationship between different facets of life in the school is carefully planned and nurtured in Reggio Emilia schools. Stremmel (2012) argues that “relation and partnership” is the foundation of “Malaguzzi’s philosophy and pedagogy,” because he believes that educational settings should be places of “dialogue, relation and partnership” (p. 135). Learning at school happens in relationships that exist between people, the hundred languages, materials and the environment. Relationship is also a guiding principle when approaching children’s meaning making, knowledge constructing and learning. As Vecchi (2010) writes, “Knowledge and language resonate with each other, are in reciprocal relationship and empathy, and it is from this relationship that the children’s experiences and knowledge are expanded, increased, modified and enriched” (p. 57). Knowledge bridges across disciplines and frontiers and shoots off in multiple directions with no determined beginning nor ending, rather always staying in between with the possibilities of opening to other directions and places. In the same way, children work and learn in relation to other children and their context. Context is important in learning and in fostering interaction amongst people in a school environment (Fraser & Wien, 2001)

**Pedagogical Documentation**

Pedagogical documentation is a practice and a form of visible listening, evaluation, professional development and a tool for research for educators (Dahlberg, 2012; Giamminuti, 2007; Giamminuti, 2013; Rinaldi, 2004). Unlike the traditional assessments where children are evaluated in developmental stages such as cognitive and emotional development, in pedagogical documentation, children’s development is viewed holistically (Katz and Galbraith, 2006). With pedagogical documentation, educators observe children differently from when observing to
assess children developmentally. “To document is to observe children differently, to be aware of their learning processes, to marvel and wonder with them, to be curious and respectful, to listen, in daily life, every day” (Giamminuti, 2013, p. 38). For Davies (2014), documentation is not innocent but produces affects. Davies (2014) suggests that “it is important to re-emphasize, therefore, the vital role that documentation play in opening up creative movement toward the not-yet-known, and in interrupting the quotidian practices through which life-as-usual is maintained” (p. 28). It disrupts our preconceived notion about children’s theories, urging us instead to listen to the surprises that emerge in our work and experiences with children. Thus, documentation informs educators’ practices and their curricular and pedagogical orientation.

When documenting educators are actively participating, learning and co-constructing knowledge with children (Giamminuti, 2007). Using and experimenting with a variety of technological tools, teachers document children’s educational journeys in order to understand and interpret children’s learning and meaning making processes. For example, at the end of a project, educators often email documentation to children’s families (Mitchell et al., 2009). As discussed earlier, educators also display the documentation on classroom walls. With the help of technological tools, educators communicate what is living at school to families. Pedagogical documentation helps parents, teachers, and children create a strong community in which they can collaborate to construct their own knowledge (Vecchi, 2010).

**Atelierista and Pedagogista**

In 1960, Malaguzzi introduced an atelierista in each preschool (Gandini et al., 2005). Atelierista, an artist in residence, is an organizer, interpreter, and collaborator with the other teachers, children, parents, and community who has expertise in the arts and children’s graphic languages (Chemi, 2014; Gandini et al., 2005; Gandini, 2012; Hanna, 2014; Kind, 2018; New,
An atelierista “promotes an ongoing dialogue between the art world and the pedagogical world” (Chemi, 2014, p. 381). Sylvia Kind, an atelierista in a Reggio Emilia inspired early childhood setting, reminds us that in her practice art is not an add on activity. She sees art as “a puzzle, a question and an encounter”, which is an “integral aspect of children’s daily inquiries, exploration, and learning” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 7). New (2007) writes that the atelierista’s role is to create a “meta-cognitive learning field” that links classroom experiences with graphics and representational thinking. The role of an atelierista is to ensure that children have both the tools and the means to communicate their understandings through various media (New, 2007). The atelierista and the teachers work to plan “the declaration of intent” or the “project base for the year” (Gandini, et al., 2005, p. 11). Projects are a necessary part of the atelier (the studio), where the many processes and forms of learning, are taken into consideration. Observation and documentation make these projects possible and allow responding to children’s creative and intelligent processes (Vecchi, 2010).

The atelierista resides in the atelier and brings learning and teaching together in an intelligent way. An atelier is a fundamental place for children’s learning (Kind, 2018). According to Gandini et al. (2005), an atelier is a place of research and exploration where children test their theories, explore tools, techniques, and materials in rich artistic languages. They recognize that the significance of an atelier can be seen in the idea of a hundred languages. Possible languages that determine an atelier’s work and the cultural aspects of the atelier, encompasses the visual arts, music, architecture, design, dance, and theater, for example, which brings forth both connections and contamination (Gandini, 2005). Malaguzzi’s vision for the atelier is a “multimodal laboratory for cognitive, emotional, and imaginative expression” (Hanna, 2014, p. 289). In this aspect, the atelier is a multi-sensorial place where mind, body, senses and imaginations
interact (Gandini, 2005, p. 20). Gandini et al. (2005) go further in their belief that “the whole school has to be a large atelier” which is a transformative place with research and ongoing reflections (p. 130).

The pedagogista’s role is to initiate discussions, keep an ongoing critical interpretation among the teachers and raise relevant questions to bring out the teachers’ narrative and interpretive abilities on their project (Cagliari et al., 2004). A pedagogista draws from theory and practice in supporting curricular and educational work as well as thinking about the implication of their work in a rapidly changing society (Cagliari et al., 2004). Vintimilia (2016), who is a pedagogista in West Coast Canada, writes that “at the intersection of histories, the pedagogista tries to pose reverberant questions that open space for educators to put-into-question and, indeed, to put the educators themselves into-question” (p. 23). Similarly, Moss (2007) explains that the role of pedagogista is to support dialogue and critical thinking. A pedagogista invites educators to engage in an ongoing critical reflective inquiry practice and work to maintain a culture of dialogue with and among them.

**Reggio Emilia: A Globalized Philosophy**

**Reggio Emilia’s Popularity**

Reggio Emilia schools gained popularity after an American magazine, *Newsweek*, named the Diana preschool, located in Reggio Emilia City, Italy as one of the ten best schools in the world in 1991 (Cagliari et al., 2016). This led to a growing international interest in Reggio Emilia’s schools. In 1994, Reggio Children organization was set up to respond to this interest (Thornton & Brunton, 2010). There is now a Reggio Alliance, an organization that exists almost on every continent, including 34 countries (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020). These organizations are a point of contact for Reggio Emilia schools outside Italy and they also
organize study tours for international participants to Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy. The function of these organizations is to ensure that Reggio Emilia gains publicity and popularity. As Foucault (2003) states, “power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power” (p. 29). The Reggio Alliance is a powerful network which supports the establishment and the expansion of Reggio Emilia’s educational philosophy. Having the power to build alliances outside Italy is adding to the circulation of power. As an example of this, Johnson (2000) points to Reggio’s advertisement strategies at different conferences within the United States, and the profit producing effect of Reggio’s study tour. To this day, Reggio Emilia schools organize tour for those interested in school’s philosophy.

Academia also perpetuates certain ideologies, theories, and epistemologies of childhood and children. Foucault (2003) writes that “the university has a selective role: it selects knowledge” (p. 183). It is certainly not a new thought that academia is the most powerful body when it comes to power, knowledge, truth relation and the production of a particular truth. The history of early childhood education courses in many universities introduces students to European philosophies such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia. Depending on the university, the White European perspectives on childhood is more predominant in academia. Foucault (2003) suggests that it is important to “coupl[e] together scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics” (p. 8). Academia is the venue in which literature and research about early childhood education is introduced to students, for example, aspiring teachers. It is also where outside influences encounter local knowledge. When academia perpetuates and glorifies Reggio schools, it contributes to the flow of publicity and profit. Reggio
gains credibility, power, and truth. Thus, the notion of Reggio Emilia as curricular framework further develops in the field of early childhood education among the educators, directors, and families.

**Reggio Emilia as Capital**

Reggio Emilia is a high capital philosophy in the US which has become a business strategy for attracting middle-class families (Johnson, 2000; Tobin et al., 2009; Wright, 2000). “Some are concerned that the name “Reggio Emilia” has been hijacked by a neoliberal market-economy mentality where it becomes a trendy label to be used to attract more families/clients” (Callaghan et al., 2018). The context of the United States situates in a capitalist country, a neoliberal economy governs its many social, cultural and educational systems and structures (Cho & Couse, 2008; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2019), the inspiration borrowed from Reggio Emilia becomes yet another tool used to serve the neoliberal agenda. As a private endeavor, instead of a public early education service, Reggio Emilia schools in the United States tend to serve those who can afford to pay. Compared to Europe, in the United States, childcare is a family’s responsibility and a private endeavor (Cho & Couse, 2008; Mintz, 2004). Therefore, Reggio Emilia’s inspiration in the United States becomes a commodity to serve and attract middle- and upper-class families (Johnson, 2000; Tobin et al., 2009).

**Reggio Emilia Inspired**

Many countries outside Reggio Emilia are inspired by Reggio Emilia philosophy and simply call themselves a Reggio Emilia inspired school. In the United States, although Reggio Emilia schools in Italy has inspired many schools, it is not possible to quote the exact number of the inspired programs. The North American Reggio Alliance has a list of some schools on their website. Delitto Preschool’s name is not in that list. Thus, this suggests that it is hard to obtain
the exact number of Reggio Emilia school. While U.S is racially and culturally diverse, how do schools adhere to Reggio Emilia inspiration and values in their local context? What does it mean to be Reggio Emilia inspired?

There are debates whether Reggio Emilia is applicable to other countries outside Europe and North America. The way Reggio Emilia inspiration is approached in North America is often concerning (see Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). According to Johnson (2000) Reggio Emilia is a cargo cult trying to colonize early childhood education with its principles. In contrast, Strong-Wilson (2007) argues that “Reggio Emilia crosses geographical contexts and educational spaces because its principles are ones that we can all adhere to and implement, each in our own way” (p. 3). The inspiration from Reggio Emilia can respond to cultural context and can be rooted in another place (Strong-Wilson, 2007). Bringing in the example from a Reggio Emilia Inspired center in Sweden, Dahlberg et al. (2013) discuss the importance of having similar political, social and cultural conditions to Italy for drawing inspiration from Reggio. Instead of taking Reggio and applying it to a Swedish context, they have started with their own culture and tradition. The concept of dialogue and dialogue pedagogy was important for Sweden upon which the child and teacher became important in constructing knowledge. They write that certainly there are difficulties in translating something from one context to the other, but there can be an advantage if the focus is on the process of co-construction. The co-construction between local culture and Reggio Emilia inspiration can possibly allow room for local knowledge. Strong-Wilson (2007) suggests that emphasis on participation makes Reggio Emilia applicable anywhere. For instance, participation occurring between adult and child, school and community and teachers and parent. When a similar ideological, social, cultural and educational context is present, the inspiration of Reggio Emilia works well with the local context. In places where the
curricular framework for early childhood education is different from Reggio Emilia, the inspiration of Reggio Emilia may lose its pedagogical and philosophical intention to fit the local context.

Wurm (2005), an interpreter for international delegations and author of Working in a Reggio Way: A Beginner’s Guide for American Teachers, writes that it is important to understand that “there are no absolutes in the Reggio approach- no single answer or right way to do something. There are multiple ways of doing anything depending on the children and on the context” (p. 6). The inspiration from Reggio Emilia is grounded in the lives of the children, teachers, and the larger context of the school. One might argue that philosophies other than Reggio Emilia are also dependent on the lives and context of the children. As such, why should Reggio Emilia be conceptualized as the gold standard for early childhood education? Stremmel (2012) suggests:

On a practical level, to be Reggio inspired means creating schools where children and adults can develop meaningful relationship as they work together to construct new knowledge and understanding; where children are seen as cognitively and socially capable, not labeled by their deficits; where teachers can develop a professional life with one another, dialoguing and debating in order to maximize learning in the classroom; where teachers and children have some control over the content and conduct of their work; and where parents can be real partners, exercise meaningful choice in their child’s education, and be meaningfully involved. (p. 143)

Thus, inspiration from Reggio Emilia embraces certain principles while also responding to the sociocultural context of the school. As a result, there are mixed interpretations of what inspiration from Reggio Emilia means. For some, it is a philosophy that can be interpreted in a
variety of ways, yet for others it strictly bound to the principles and philosophies of Reggio Emilia, as understood and practiced in the schools.

While there are different interpretations of the meaning of Reggio Emilia inspiration, to be inspired by Reggio Emilia is to embrace the principles and values, pedagogical commitments, and the mission of Reggio Emilia school’s philosophy in relation to the local—that is, the particularities of a center’s place. In this way, to be Reggio-inspired is to see the preschool context as an encounter, a dialogue with and about the multiplicity of the children, their communities and environment. Borrowing inspiration from Reggio Emilia does not mean replicating it, rather engaging with its theoretical framework in ways that inspires creative and innovative thinking.

**Early Childhood Education in the United States**

Given the current tenor in the United States, there are substantial pressures on early childhood centers. Many researchers argue that early childhood centers in the United States are accountable to legislation, regulations, accreditation, standards and policies (Delaney, 2018; Kagan & Scott-Little, 2004; Moss, 2019; Novinger & O’Brien, 2003; Soto & De Moed, 2011; Stipek, 2006; Tobin et al., 2009). These regulations and policies become standards which pressure educators to work towards preparing children based on those regulations (Brown, 2009; Moss, 2019). Moss (2017, 2019) and Tobin et al., (2009) have addressed the policies in the United States by noting that the recent education movement in the United States is concerned with academic readiness and preparing students for national economic competitiveness. The standards-based approach to education is required at the federal, state, and local levels and demands that educators attend to children’s particular sets of knowledge, skills and achievement measures (Brown, 2009; Kagan & Scott-Little, 2004; Stipek, 2006). As a result, as Tobin, Hsueh
and Karasawa’s (2009) study on Japanese and U.S preschool demonstrate, a rise in support for accountability, assessments, and scientifically based practices can be seen in the United States. The standardized notion of early childhood education is a discourse which pressures educators to focus on school readiness and preparing children for the future workforce (Moss, 2019). Educators become accountable to the state officials who observe educators’ performances based on a set of standards (Osgood, 2006).

**The Discourse of NAEYC**

At the national level, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has influenced the system of accreditation and standards for program quality and best practices in the United States (Garrity et al., 2019; Reinke, Peters & Castner, 2019) by guiding the teacher preparation programs (Saracho, 2012). For example, NAEYC (2009) gives credibility to higher education institutions that seek NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) or NAEYC recognition of baccalaureate and graduate degrees as part of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for programs leading to initial or advanced teacher licensure. In addition, the NAEYC sees its role as an organization which set standards for quality in teachers’ practices by outlining different criteria including curriculum, teaching, discipline policies and others for teachers to meet (Garrity et al., 2019; Garrity, et al., 2017). Early childhood settings that meet the quality criteria for NAEYC get accredited by NAEYC. Therefore, the demands to get accredited lie on the shoulder of teachers to reach the bar set by NAEYC. With a focus on regulations and standardized practices, teachers who adhere to NAEYC become subjects who follow a set of plans provided by NAEYC in their teaching practice.
**Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is another nationally influential discourse emphasized in NAEYC (2009) which instructs teachers to follow national guidelines instead of providing a curriculum that is specific to each early childhood setting (File, 2012). As Bredekamp (2014) notes, DAP is “teaching that is attuned to children’s age, experience, abilities, and interest, and that helps attain challenging and achievable goals” (p. 72). Many scholars in the field of early childhood education have critiqued DAP because it assumes and advocates for a universal practice (Mac Naughton, 2005; Moss, 2014; Moss, 2019; Pence, 2011). To implement DAP, teachers use knowledge of child development that is informed by psychology to make decisions about children’s developmental needs and to set goals based on children’s ages and stages (Dahlberg et al., 2013, Moss, 2019; Pence, 2011). Using normative assessments, DAP assesses children based on a set of standardized checklists (Moss, 2019). From this perspective, teachers plan curriculum to help children meet the learning goals and NAEYC clearly outlines ways in which teachers can adhere their practice to DAP (Bredekamp, 2014). Instead of observing children to understand their experiences, teachers use DAP to observe children in order to classify and assess them based on established categories. When teachers draw from DAP their practices become more technocratic and less relational and contextualized, which tends to position children as subjects defined by their perceived needs and abilities. Teachers’ practices and approach to learning tend to center on interventions that aim to help children meet a predetermined milestone. Developmental practices followed by screening and assessments comprise the core value of NAEYC’s (2009) standard for early childhood professionals.
Institutional Influences

Each state has its own early learning standards and requirements for early childhood schools. Many states including Pennsylvania operate quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to evaluate and rate the quality of childcare programs. These standards pressure teachers to directly observe what happens in the classrooms based on established criteria (Bredekamp, 2014). Pennsylvania uses ECER (Early Childhood Environmental Rating), Early Learning Standard (2014) and Keystone STARS for its QRIS. The purpose of QRIS as described by Early et al., (2018) is to aid in quality improvement by providing materials, professional development, funds for infrastructure reform, or subsidies for low-income families. Since it is hard to measure quality, policy makers have developed observation tools known as Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for preschool and primary grades (Bredekamp, 2014). CLASS focuses on measuring children and teachers’ relationship and the strategies teachers use to support learning (Bredekamp, 2014). Moreover, teachers’ and preschools’ quality are also evaluated by Early Childhood Environmental Rating (ECER) scale. The purpose of ECER is to decrease the achievement gap and encourage school readiness (Early et al., 2018). From ECER’s perspective, “the term quality in early childhood education is used to describe the structural and process features of the environment that promote learning and development” (Early et al., 2018, p. 242). In order to be rated as a quality early childhood school, early childhood teachers have to meet the required criteria from ECER, Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania Early Learning Standard and CLASS. The Keystone STARS rate preschools’ quality by rating them from star 1 to star 4. Overall, the measurement of quality as demonstrated by state regulations is to prepare children academically and developmentally for the future, which requires teachers to accomplish those goals. Teachers’ education influences the approach they take in their practice.
Teachers in the United States have taken various routes, inside and outside colleges and universities, to get into teaching (Zeichner, 2013). According to the National Research Council (2010), some teachers enter the teaching path through approximately 130 “alternative” routes. This includes non-college pathways and school district-based teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2014). Zeichner (2013) explains that despite the existence of many non-university programs, 70% to 80% of teachers in the United States have 4 or 5 years of undergraduate education. However, he continues to argue that in some parts of the United States, the number of teachers from non-college and university pathways is almost the same as those entering from college and university. Teachers are prepared in many different kinds of programs, which guide their paths to different kinds of career pathways (Zeichner, 2014). Other approaches that are formally taught are specialized philosophies. They can be acquired by official training and education, but also from work site experiences. Hong and Trepanier-Street (2004) who teach at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, write that “they have been implementing elements of the Reggio Emilia philosophy for 15 years in both our teacher preparation programs and in our on-campus early childhood center, the Child Development Center” (p. 87). Teachers can attend university teacher preparation program or join a Reggio Emilia study tour in Italy to get specialized training in Reggio Emilia approach (e.g., Boucher, 2019; Wurm, 2005). All of these paths to postsecondary education and teachers’ preparation programs are different in their own ways and encourage one philosophy of thought over others.

Cultural Practices

The cultural context in which teachers live also serves as a powerful discourse which impacts their teaching philosophy and approach to curriculum. Teachers’ beliefs and practices are shaped by their culture and background. Whatever the approach, researchers remind us not to
decontextualize practice (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Henward & Macgilliray, 2012, Kincheloe, Pinar, & Slattery, 1994; Tobin et al., 2009; Tobin, 2011). This means that teachers’ practices should be understood from a culturally relativistic point of view. The broader culture of early childhood education in the United States has emphasized a child-centered pedagogy (Henward & Macgilliray, 2012), with an emphasis on individualism, choice, and the pursuit of fun and happiness (Tobin et al., 2009; Tobin, 2011). These cultural influences play into teachers’ practices knowingly and unknowingly. Because these practices are informed by the specificities of the teachers’ local place, how teachers think about and approach these values is normalized and embodied in their practices.

**Folk Pedagogy**

Additional influences in teachers’ practices can be understood as Folk Pedagogy. Jerome Bruner (1996) uses the term “folk pedagogy” to refer to “taken-for-granted practices that emerge from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach” (p. 46). Thinking with the concept of folk pedagogy, researchers suggest that teachers have implicit cultural beliefs and invisible assumptions about their practice (Ilić & Bojović, 2016; Kang & Lee, 2017; Olson & Bruner, 1996; Taber, 2008; Tobin, 2011). These cultural beliefs affect teachers’ thinking and dispositions (Kang & Lee, 2017). This implies that teachers’ concepts of children and childhood are also influenced by folk pedagogy. As Kang and Lee (2017) note, folk pedagogy may not apply to current education trends and children’s learning style; however, it does become a theory that guides current practices. Since folk pedagogy takes root in dominant folk culture, teachers integrate particular culture knowledge in their personal pedagogy (Ilić & Bojović, 2016). For example, among European North Americans, independent culture and individual self are valued in comparison to a collective interdependent self in other cultures (Lee
& Walsh, 2004). This means that despite progressive early childhood education philosophies, such as Reggio Emilia, folk pedagogies and cultural beliefs are still in practice.

**Summary and Implications**

As discussed, early childhood education in the United State is influenced by cultural folk pedagogy, state and national standards and policies. Given these many influences, how do teachers dwell with such discourses in the middle curriculum? How do these various influences hold power in informing pedagogical and curricular practices and decision making? Reggio Emilia inspired schools negotiate the inspiration from Reggio Emilia in relation to local, state and national influences in their middle curriculum. Despite the philosophy of the early childhood schools, some teachers have no choice but to implement DAP, NAEYC and the state Early Learning Standards (2014) because they demand accountability. A system of accountability as Reinke, Peters, and Castner (2019) argue “is often, in reality, a mechanism of control” (p. 192). National and state standards, accreditations and regulations act as mechanisms of power. It becomes teachers’ responsibility to incorporate state and national requirements in addition to the local requirements. For example, as part of the local requirements teachers are also accountable to the director of the school and the parents (Sisson, 2009). Moreover, teachers’ subjectivities and practices are influenced by teachers’ cultural folk pedagogies. Thus, teachers find themselves in the midst of various influences and discourses and are constantly negotiating these discourses as they dwell between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d). Most of these influences encourage a teacher-directed approach. They pressure teachers to intervene in order to ensure children reach the goals of the standard before entering kindergarten. Teaching, in this case, becomes goal oriented (Graue, 2008) instead of being situational and relational (Nxumalo et al., 2018).
Delitto Preschool History

Delitto Preschool was opened in 2017 by Director Laurie. From 2009 until 2017, Laurie runs an early childhood center with a different philosophy in Lock Haven which is another town in Pennsylvania. After moving to State College, she decided to open an early childhood center that draws inspiration from Reggio Emilia. According to her, the context of State College was hospitable or receptive to the concept of Reggio Emilia because State College is culturally more diverse than Lock Haven.

Laurie, the director, and other educators, view State College as a big town with a very diverse group of people. She states in her interview that “you could be walking to a store in here and hear 3 to 5 languages at a time. This is just such a melting pot of the town. I know that they would appreciate it [Reggio Emilia inspired schools] more than the town that I was in. They had no clue what it is, and they wouldn’t care what it is,” Laurie shared. She opened Delitto Preschool when her children moved to State College. The diversity of the town mostly comes from the international students and faculty affiliated with The Pennsylvania State University. Students from various countries live in State College and the University Park area. The director assumes that people in University Park and State College may appreciate Reggio Emilia Schools more than Lock Haven.
Chapter 3

Critical Encounters: A Curriculum of Multiplicity and Complexity

There are a wide variety of ways to approach and think about curriculum. Indeed, curriculum studies is itself a vast and varied discipline of study, informed in diverse ways, with various interests and values at play. Often, curriculum is conceptualized as text and resources with a set of standards that may be purchased outside the classroom for teachers to implement. Some early childhood centers are more subject to standardized approaches than others. In any case, standardization and accountability both orient curriculum towards outcomes-based goals. Aoki’s conceptualization of curriculum offers a different understanding, one that deviates from the idea of curriculum as simply a text or a set of standards which can be implemented, regulated and assessed. Aoki’s theoretical framework allows us to understand the complexity and multiplicity of curriculum.

Aoki (1983) makes a point to reconceptualize the term ‘curriculum implementation’, shifting the idea of implementation as instrumental action to that of situational praxis. In the view of curriculum implementation as instrumental action, curriculum serves the overarching neoliberal agenda of consumer and producer relationships. Curriculum, then, is merely goal oriented, intended to achieve a set of standards. As a result, it mutes and reduces the subjectivities of the educator, making the educator an instrumentalist of knowledge rather than a being who is instrumental to the making of knowledge.

Aoki (1983) proposes seeing curriculum as situational praxis. He borrows the term situational praxis from educator and philosopher Paulo Freire to situate curriculum in the classroom and in relation to students’ experience. In this case, theory and practice are in a dialectic relationship, forming the reality of the lived experience. Aoki argues, “Knowing arises...
not from inward speculation but from intentional engagement with, and experience of, lived reality” (p. 120). As such, curriculum can emerge and transform based on the situation of the classroom.

Aoki (1993) also questions the various ways in which curriculum is implemented. He finds the concept of child-centered, teacher-centered, society-centered, discipline centered curriculum too confining. “Life in the classroom is not so much in the child, in the teacher, in the subject; life is lived in the spaces between and among” (p. 282). To center curriculum on any of them simply suggests giving complete agency to it. A child-centeredness curriculum assumes that “child is an agentic subject in the process of meaning and knowledge making” (Ramjewan & Toukan, 2018). Thus, Aoki sees curriculum acted in the relationship between human and the world as well as human and human relationships. From this perspective, curriculum centers on relation between the self and others.

I employ Aoki’s curriculum theory as an essential part of my theoretical framework in order to understand the curriculum of Delitto Preschool. Aoki’s concept of the middle curriculum and the curriculum-as-live (d) is crucial to understand how Regio Emilia’s pedagogical philosophy live with local education philosophy and the tensions between local curricular emergences and its adaptations across global contexts. His theoretical framework builds upon his lived experience as a Japanese-Canadian. He discusses his hyphenated identity and the way in which he finds himself dwelling between his Canadian and Japanese identities. He lingers between spaces to negotiate who he is in place as a living curriculum. As a curriculum theorist, he embodies curriculum practice phenomenologically. Thus, he proposes the milieu or the middle curriculum where the curriculum-as-plan, and the curriculum-as-live(d) dwell to constitute the living curriculum.
As discussed in the previous chapter, Reggio Emilia schools in Italy do not have a prescribed curriculum, which teachers can use to inform their work with children. Reggio Emilia principles and the importance given to the pedagogy of listening and relationships, as well as the emphasis placed on an emergent curriculum, demonstrates that Reggio Emilia schools in Italy have centered their curriculum on the lived experiences of children, educators, families, the broader community, and environment. Thus, Aoki’s theories will make visible the many curriculum frameworks which are at play at Delitto Preschool in order to demonstrate the tensions between the curriculum-as-live (d) and the curriculum-as-plan.

This thesis project is guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia?
2. How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool?

**Dwelling in the Midst of the Middle Curriculum**

In order to conceptualize the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool and to understand its many curricular frameworks, this study aligns with the definition of curriculum given by Pinar. Pinar (2004), who was Aoki’s student, “employ[s] the concept of currere—the Latin infinitive of curriculum—to denote the running (or lived experience) of the course, in this instance, the present historical situation” (p. xiii). His definition diverts our attention from the understanding of the curriculum as planned with set objectives and outcomes to a curriculum about the self in relation to others. Curriculum as currere requires that an individual engages in an ongoing process of self-understanding “in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual” to participate in social reconstruction with others (p.
37). Pinar et al. (1995) provide further insight into the notion of curriculum as individual lived experiences within a social situation. They write that

The method of currere offers the opportunity to study both the individual's lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience. It seeks to depict and reflectively comprehend the impact of milieu as well as the subject's past upon the educational experience of the individual in the present. (p. 15)

As the lived experiences of the selves come in dialogue with the lived experiences of others, a public space is formed. The notion of currere is built on the relationship between the self and others while allowing their lived experiences to come together to inform the lived (d) curriculum.

Aoki (1993) writes about two distinctive forms of a curriculum: the “curriculum-as-plan” and the “curriculum-as-lived.” Aoki asks for reconceptualizing curriculum from the curriculum-as-plan only and seeing it as both plan and live(d) (Pinar, 2005). The curriculum-as-plan originates from outside the classroom, the ministry of education or school district, and dominates our understanding of the curriculum as a pre-packaged set of ideas (Aoki, 1986/1993/2005). In the case of Delitto Preschool, the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards (2014) can be an example of a plan curriculum. The curriculum-as-plan is a bureaucratic source of a document “often manifested in the syllabus, the course outline, or the course text, typically reflecting objective understandings” (Aoki, 1991, p. 250). The curriculum as plan layout teacher’s goals and the methods for students’ evaluations. The technicality of the curriculum-as-plan attends to skills, structures, instrumentation, and implementation. When teachers simply follow the curriculum-as-plan without considering the lived experience of the students, teacher become a doer who give workshops on “how to do this or that” (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 160). The curriculum-
as-plan is predetermined with specific steps toward achieving an end-goal whereas the curriculum-as-live (d) engages with events occurring in curricular and pedagogical situations.

Aoki (1984) finds it dangerous when the notion of curriculum implementation becomes a business technique to implement the curriculum-as-plan without considering the context of the school and the students lived experiences. Jardine, Friesen, and Clifford (2006) write that teaching is not a technique and as such, curriculum topic and content cannot be bought. Instead of the pre-packaged lesson plans dominating educators’ thoughts, decisions and practice, Aoki (1993) requires seeing curriculum becoming alive in pedagogical encounters between children and educators. Moreover, since the curriculum-as-plan comes from outside a classroom, it generalizes students and often assume sameness. He suggests attending to the lived experiences to develop the curriculum-as-plan in relation to the curriculum-as-live (d).

The other curriculum world which Aoki (1993) proposes is the curriculum-as-live (d). A lived curriculum situates in the lived reality and the collective experiences of the children and educators as they live their lives in an early childhood setting (Aoki, 1993). The curriculum-as-live(d) centers on lived experiences. To better understand the concept of live (d) experience, Aoki (1996) suggests seeing experience as a hybrid concept which includes “past experiences” (lived experiences) and "ongoing experiences" (live or living experiences)” (p. 418). The curriculum attends to how is the experience lived (Van Manen, 2002). Teacher and children are being in the midst of curriculum by coming together in a pedagogical space. As Jardine et al. (2006,) reminds us, “we are always already in the midst of a situation, to which we listen, in which we act” (p. xiii). With the concept of the lived curriculum teachers move away from planning curriculum to meet specific pre-planned objectives and instead attend to the lived experiences of the children and themselves in the classroom to develop their plan. The
curriculum-as-live (d) “opens up space to explore the ways in which the bodies in the room, the
ideologies and beliefs of individuals, the structural (macro and micro) forces at play, influence
what evolves as curriculum” (Tilley & Taylor, 2013, p. 407). The curriculum-as-live(d)
recognize the forces at play in the classroom and respond to them pedagogically.

How might early childhood educators attend to the curriculum-as-live (d)? There is no
single lived curriculum but rather many curricula, as many as the children and teachers (Aoki,
1993). Instead of having a predetermined outlook on a curriculum, the curriculum-as-live(d)
attune to emergent encounters and are always entangled in complex relations with those
encounters. It is concerned about what is happening in the here and now instead of preplanning
for a future outcome.

Aoki (1991) sees curriculum as dwelling between two curriculums: curriculum-as-plan
and curriculum-as-live (d). Living pedagogy happens “midst Curriculum-as-planned/curriculum-
as-live (d)” (Aoki, 2003, p. 425). He also uses the word milieu or the middle curriculum to
describe the zone where the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as- live (d) dwell to
constitute the living experience of the children. The middle curriculum pays attention to
encounters, emergences, possibilities, disruptions, and tensions.

Aoki (1991) exemplify Miss O, an elementary teacher whose pedagogical orientation and
disposition is driven by her curricular framework. Aoki writes of pedagogy in his description of
Miss O:

Even before a pupil walks in, she [Miss O the elementary teacher] silently asks:

“Can I establish myself here as a teacher?” and the classroom’s desks, walls,
chalkboards, floors, books, and resources jointly reply, albeit wordlessly, by what
they are. They respond to Miss O’s intention and presence. And when the pupils
arrive, things and pupils arrange themselves, as it were, around Miss O’s intention. They become “teachable,” “promising,” “difficult,” “hopeful,” “challenging.” The environment ceases to be environment, and in its place comes into being a pedagogic situation, a live (d) site pregnantly alive. Within this site, Miss O soon finds that her pedagogic situation is a living in tensionality – a tensionality that emerges, in part, from in-dwelling in the difference between two curricula: the curriculum-as-plan and the live (d) curriculum. (p. 257)

Miss O has plans, ideas and intention before welcoming her students. She has designed a situation and context for an exploration and inquiry. However, she resides in the middle of the two curricula (the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) before proceeding with her curriculum. Every day is different and thus she reads the situation of the classroom before proceeding with her plan.

The curriculum-as-plan work in relation with the curriculum-as-live (d). Although the curriculum as plan comes from outside the classroom, the educator decides on how to reconcile the planned with the live (d). The live (d) curriculum brings to life the “multiple, shifting, ascribed and self-determined identities” of teachers and children and their influences on the curriculum (Tilley & Taylor, 2013, p. 408). As such, the zone in between these two curricula is not as easy as implementing a planned curriculum. Aoki (1984) proposes a different way of understanding implementation, which is “implementation as situation praxis” (p. 116).

Curriculum and pedagogy from this perspective center on collective experiences within the classroom situation. This kind of implementation invite students and teacher to be present and “co-dwell” in classroom experiences (Aoki, 1984, p. 116). He borrows the term praxis from Aristotle to define teachers’ holistic practice and ethical consideration when living a political
life. Teachers’ orientation and pedagogical disposition with their political and ethical decisions run the course of the curriculum.

Aoki (1986/1991) refers to the zone in between the two curricula as a zone of complexity and tensionality. “Miss O, our teacher, knows that indwelling in the zone between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-live(d) experience is not so much a matter of overcoming the tensionality but more a matter of dwelling alright within it” (p. 163). Miss O resides in the space of tensionality before proceeding with her curriculum. This implies that teachers live in-between moments of tensionality and struggle to make sense of what teaching truly means (Aoki, 1980). However, living in this zone does not suggest teachers’ weaknesses or lack of knowledge. Living in the zone of tensionality for Aoki (1986/1991) means to live in a space of growth, challenges, and hopefulness. “This tensionality in her [Miss O’s] pedagogical situation is a mode of being a teacher” (p. 162). Teaching in this zone becomes "a leading out to new possibilities," to the "not yet" (p. 162-163). In this zone, the curriculum become alive in pedagogical encounters between children and educators.

Ross and Mannion (2012) borrow Tim Ingold’s concept of dwelling to conceptualize curriculum as living and embodied experience in places. Curriculum making is a process of living in the world instead of representing it. Dwelling between the curriculum-as-live(d) and the curriculum-as-plan does not represent a place but is entangled with the experiences of people that live in a particular place. Dwelling goes beyond an outcome-based or product-based curriculum. It is the lived experience of living in and through the world. “From a dwelling perspective, curriculum-making is precisely the process of the coming together of teachers, learners, generations, materials, and places, to remake these relationships” (Ross and Mannion, 2012, p. 312). Being in the space between the curriculum-as-lived and the curriculum-as-planned means
to dwell in a place with its stories, histories, challenges, and knowledge. An ontology of dwelling sees the emergence of being in a relationship and existing in relation to others. For Ross and Manion (2012) a “dwelt-in” world is the only world that exists.

Aoki (1996) think with poststructuralist Homi Bhabha when constituting the space in-between the two curricula as the “third space”. Bhabha (1990) explain that a third space “does not simply revise or invert the dualities but revalues the ideological bases of division and difference” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 58). Living in third space welcomes contradictory ideas. Instead of living in the dichotomy between this or that, teachers move away from binary thinking and enter an unknown space. Jardine (as cited in Pinar, 2005) calls this site “a site of original difficulty, of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty, but simultaneously a site of general possibilities, hope-a site challenging us to live well” (p. 5). It is also an ambiguous space that is often contradictory (Yoshimoto, 2011). This is the space, which allows teachers to question, research for meaning and see possibilities. It is indeed a site that generate newness (Aoki, 1991; Bhabha, 1990; Jardine et al., 2006). Being in this space entails working from within and in the midst of lines of movement (Pinar, 2005). It is “site of being and becoming” (Aoki, 1996/2005). As such, educators and the curriculum are always in the process of becoming. Therefore, Aoki (1986/1991) sees curriculum implementation happening in the tension between the language of the situation and the language of “third space”. He writes about indwelling in the zone in between.

Dwelling between the live (d) and the planned and the complexities within is important for an educator to embody teaching. Attending to the living curriculum requires being present, being thoughtful and tactful, improvising, critically listening and reflecting (Aoki, 1983; Van Manen, 2002). Teaching from this perspective is a way of being that is responsive to children
and their identities (Aoki, 1993). Van Men (2002) echoes Aoki when he writes that “tactful educators have developed a caring attentiveness to the unique: the uniqueness of children, the uniqueness of every situation, and the uniqueness of individual lives” (p. 8). He invites teachers to listen to the uniqueness of what is live (d) pedagogically. To listen pedagogically is to “gain insights into human experiences…as they are lived within the situation” (Aoki, 1978/1980, p. 104). Teachers listen, attend, respond and live in ways that strive for the significance of the pedagogical situation for curricular practice.

The curriculum is neither child-centered nor teacher-centered (Aoki, 1993). Rather, children and teachers work together to compose the curriculum. To decenter curriculum is to suggest giving agency to both children, educators and more-than-human entities. This is where children and teacher become “co-actors as they dialectically shape the reality of the classroom experience” (Aoki, 1984, p. 121). They also become participant in a space of open dialogue (Aoki, 1986). They create a classroom culture guided by “personal and group intentionalities” (Aoki, 1984, p. 121). From this perspective, educators interpret students’ experience as they live in a situation and they see the uniqueness of the situation itself.

In between curriculum-as-live (d) and the curriculum-as-plan, there is a third element which is “curricular landscape of multiplicity” (Aoki, 1993, p. 23). This is a zone where multiple curricula indwell. Aoki raises the question of how to understand multiplicity. He notes that “curriculum-related activities such as ‘instruction,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘pedagogy,’ and ‘implementation’ [have] become derivatives in the shadow of the curriculum-as-plan,” (p 23). He suggests Deleuze’s idea of a curriculum as multiplicity (which grows in the middle) and his notion of “life is constantly in flux” (Pinar, 2005, p. 23). In relation to multiplicity, he notes Lyotard concept that it is not either/or (Pinar, 2005). It is not this or that, rather it is this and that and many other
ways of being. The diversities which exist among children and educators create multiplicities in curricular planning. Children are composed of multiplicities so are the teachers, the families, the environment and the materials surrounding them. To practice a live (d) curriculum is to respond to those multiplicities. Additionally, seeing Reggio Emilia inspiration at Delitto preschool from the concept of curricular as multiplicity or the middle curriculum allows us to see the complexity in curriculum and that it is not easy to draw a line between what is Reggio Emilia inspiration and what is not Reggio Emilia inspiration at Delitto preschool. Many other factors are at play when it comes to understanding Reggio Emilia inspiration. Delitto focuses on some of the principles that define the philosophy of Reggio Emilia approaches. However, sometimes these principles work in harmony with the culture of the school and while at other times, it does not. In these circumstances, teachers work to balance between the national and local standards as well as the inspiration from Reggio Emilia. The quality rating system has its own set of criteria to evaluate preschools in Pennsylvania.

Delitto Preschool’s Curriculum

The Curriculum-as-plan

At Delitto Preschool, national and state educational requirements coupled with the Creative Curriculum package act as curriculum-as-plan and become influential in teachers’ pedagogical practices. According to Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards, the pre-kindergarten curriculum children should focus on areas such as economics, literacy, numeracy, government, and sciences. The standard clearly outlines what the learners should do and how the teachers can obtain such objectives. Moreover, Delitto Preschool uses the Creative Curriculum package to plan lessons since the package provides ideas for educators to implement it into their daily lesson plans. The package contains lesson plans and activities, which aim to reach a set of
objectives and skills (Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood Education, 2013). Furthermore, Delitto Preschool is also influenced by NAEYC’s (National Association for the Education of Young Children) code of ethics and statement of commitment for teachers. While they are not accredited by NAEYC yet, it is their hope to be accredited. NAEYC’s (2011) code of ethical conduct provides a set of statements on educators’ responsibilities towards families, their colleagues, and the community. The developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is another area that is emphasized in NAEYC (2009) and is an influential framework for early learning centers in the United States. Using normative assessments, DAP assesses children based on a set of standard checklists (Moss, 2019). From this perspective, teachers plan the curriculum to help children meet the learning goals and NAEYC clearly outlines ways in which teachers can adhere their practice to DAP (Bredekamp, 2014). Instead of observing children to understand their experiences, teachers use DAP to observe children in order to classify and assess them based on established categories. As such, DAP, as a curriculum-as-plan, governs the educator’s pedagogy and their curriculum. The presence of many standards, requirements and regulations from federal and state agencies requires that curriculum and pedagogical practices should adhere to them. Director Laurie and other teachers from Delitto Preschool plan curriculum to respond to the requirements of federal and state quality assessors and their standards.

Delitto Preschool’s curriculum is regulated and evaluated by many outside agencies including Pennsylvania quality rating and improvement system. These agencies bring forth a curriculum-as-plan for Delitto Preschool to follow. The Pennsylvania Keystone STARS, Early Childhood Environmental Rating (ECER) scale, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and other systems of accountability from the state ensure the curriculum-as-plan is implemented. As part of the observation tool for quality assessment, Delitto Preschool uses
CLASS for children under one-year-old and ECER for children above one year old. Both CLASS and ECER are approved as a quality observation tool by the Keystone STARS. The Keystone STARS influences the curriculum of Delitto preschool because of the funding and many other services it provides. As a governing body, even though it may not correspond to the lived experiences of the classroom, the curriculum-as-plan often governs educators’ practices due to the accountability it requires. Early childhood centers in Pennsylvania will be evaluated and rated based on these rating scales. Moreover, a particular view on early childhood philosophy is encouraged through these planned curricula. For example, the Pennsylvania Keystone STARS requires early childhood centers to comply with developmentally appropriate practices (Keystone STARS, 2018). This suggests that educators are under pressure by the standards and values set through the state. Teachers' pedagogical goals become focused on meeting established standards and regulations.

The inspiration from Reggio Emilia schools is not meant to be curriculum-as-plan as they do not outline “goals, aims, and objectives” for inspired schools outside of Italy to follow (Aoki, 1986/1991). Rather, they are intended to be lived in their own way, in contexts that give them a new life, that connect them to the lived experiences of the children and educators. However, Reggio Emilia inspiration at Delitto School cannot be constituted as curriculum-as-live (d) since it is an educational philosophy that originates from outside the classroom and thus can be seen as a curriculum-as-plan. More than being an inspiration, Reggio Emilia philosophy is also an approach (Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019). What does it mean to think of Reggio Emilia as an approach? An approach requires a particular method. The textbook from Reggio Emilia exemplifies a curricular and pedagogical approach. As Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) write, “the cultural objects, mainly texts, are signs that make the Reggio approach visible,
understandable, and comparable with other experiences” (p. 2). This does not mean that the textbook from Reggio Emilia approach prescribes “how tos” of practice. The philosophical and theoretical framework underpinning Reggio Emilia is not a prescription; rather, it is contextual and open to interpretation. Emergent curriculum, pedagogy of listening, pedagogical documentation and project-based learning all have to rely on the lived experiences of the school—the bodies, ideas, materials, etc. The stories documenting children and educators’ experiences from Reggio Emilia schools in Italy provide a framework for global educators. Therefore, a dwelling between the Reggio Emilia inspiration and the lived experiences of the school is necessary to situate the inspiration into the local context and culture.

*The curriculum-as-Live(d)*

At Delitto Preschool, teachers draw from various theories of childhood, including the inspiration from Reggio Emilia, when planning their curriculum. The classroom space and the pedagogical situation becomes an interplay between various theories and beliefs in addition to the local requirements. Based upon Aoki’s concept of live (d) curriculum and upon Bruner’s (1996) folk pedagogy, my interview with educators at Delitto Preschool indicate that teachers’ theories about children are tied to teachers’ identities, educational backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures. There is also an established folk pedagogy amongst the teachers about early childhood education and their role as an educator which comes from the cultural and local context of the place (Bruner, 1996; Ilić, & Bojović, 2016). According to Bruner (1996) folk pedagogy is culturally rooted pedagogies that guide educators teaching practice. In addition, teachers join Delitto Preschool with their own experiences, theories, cultural and professional identity. With higher teacher turnover rate, the new teachers joining Delitto Preschool enter a classroom space that already has a culture in place. For example, Keshvar, a teacher who used to work in
Montessori classroom, begins to navigate Reggio Emilia inspiration and encultured curricular practices when becoming part of Delitto Preschool. None of the educators have worked in a Reggio Emilia inspired center before and they begin working towards Reggio Emilia inspiration to meet the requirement of the preschool.

Delitto preschool is composed of multiplicities and diversities. The children at the preschool come from various ethnic, cultural, linguistic, class, religious and racial groups. They bring their diverse identities with them each day at Dellito Preschool. Moreover, according to Aoki, as a living curriculum, each child is unique as an individual with a particular personality, character, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values behavior, etc. They have different relationships with the local place, which informs their positionality and status in society. Van Manen (2002) writes that “no two children are alike or experience a situation in exactly the same manner” (p. 9). To understand the live (d) curriculum of Delitto Preschool from a phenomenological perspective, it is critical that teachers understand each child’s experience in a given situation and respond pedagogically.

The local educational values influence what constitutes the best education for young children. Delitto Preschool is situated in central Pennsylvania in the United States. The national and state educational values inform and influence its current educational discourses. My interview with the families demonstrates that the discourse of school readiness matters to them. Parents want their children to succeed in kindergarten academically and morally. Thus, teachers need to respond to parents’ concern by giving literacy and numeracy lessons and put great emphasis on children’s behavior.
Delitto Preschool’s middle curriculum is a zone where the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) encounter. As such, the local, state, and national standards and regulations, Reggio Emilia inspiration and folk pedagogical practices become entangled with the multiplicities of children and educators’ lived experiences in the zone in between the two curricula to compose the middle curriculum. Aoki (1986/1991) has named the middle curriculum a space of unknown, tensionality and possibilities. Being in-between the curriculum-as-live (d) and the curriculum-as-plan does not mean simply bringing the two together. Rather, as Aoki (1992) reminds us, “it will need to be open to possibilities of lived curricula, which vary depending on the situated lives of teachers and students” (p. 274). Dwelling midst the two curricula opens up for something to “grow in the middle” or emerge out of lingering in this zone (p. 274). According to Aoki (1986/1991), the middle curriculum is “a pedagogic situation, a live (d) site pregnantly alive” (p. 257). The middle curriculum constitutes the living pedagogy and the collective experiences of children and educators.

Aoki’s (1996) theory of the middle curriculum, the space in-between curriculum-as-live (d) and the curriculum-as-plan suggests that teachers are caught between spaces of figuring out the forces at play in both curricula at Delitto Preschool. Reggio Emilia inspiration is only one discourse or force with which educators are indwelling with. They reside in “third space” or the space in-between as they interpret Reggio Emilia inspiration in relation to their context. Dwelling in a third space “does not simply revise or invert the dualities but revalues the ideological bases of division and difference” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 58). In these instances, living in a third space welcomes contradictory ideas. As shown in my data, teachers are uncertain and ambiguous whether they meet Reggio Emilia's inspiration requirements or not. Being in this
contradictory space allows teachers and the director to engage in ongoing reflections and question the implementation of Reggio Emilia approach instead of importing it to the State College context. As Yoshimoto (2011) suggests, third space is where dwelling with dual identities is possible. Not reconciling and not really giving one for the other. Teachers enter this space when they question whether their pedagogical and curricular approach is considered a Reggio Emilia approach or not. As they continue to ask questions, they face conflicting responses. In my interview with Elizabeth, she shares: “The stuff we have is from the internet and we have to wonder is that Reggio. It is mostly from a blog and not a Reggio scholar. It is a challenge on what is real and what is practical”. Rahman, one of the teachers, is also trying to make sense of why certain ideas from Reggio Emilia are not appealing to him. He says: “I like a little bit structured. Sometimes it is a bit too laid back.” He thinks that having a structured curriculum will help children in the future. Nevertheless, he also says: “I don’t know much about Reggio Emilia.” He resides in a third space where his ideas seem to contradict one another. In these instances, he questions himself and is in flux.

Aoki (1986/1991) writes that curriculum implementation will happen in the tension between the language of the situation and the language of “third space”. Dwelling between the situation and the “third space” is very important for Dellito preschool. Reggio Emilia is not a prescribed curriculum, but rather a philosophy with principles and values. Based on my conversation with director Laurie, her primary goal is to make Delitto Preschool look like the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and those inspired schools that have since been created in other parts of the world. Making a preschool look like Reggio Emilia is problematic. Each Reggio-inspired preschool adheres to Reggio Emilia's philosophy from their own social, cultural, environmental and place-based approach. State College is unique in its own ways; therefore,
Delitto Preschool will be different from the other Reggio Emilia inspired preschools in other parts of the United States. To embody the pedagogical commitment required in the middle curriculum, teachers have to dwell between the inspiration from Reggio Emilia and their local place, its history, people, culture, language, background, and other differences.

Aoki warns us against binary thinking and dichotomized view of theory and practice. Aoki (1984) writes that rather than having theory lead into the practice, we see it enacted as a reflective moment in praxis. Teachers reflect on their practices and the philosophy of the educational setting to merge the theories and practice together in situational praxis. At Dellito Preschool, teachers bring their previous pedagogical practice into this new site. In this case, they embody the Reggio inspiration through a situational praxis, which is not independent from the other curriculum-as-plan and the teachers’ choices. Based on my interview, dwelling between Reggio Emilia inspiration, other curriculum-as-plan and the live (d) curriculum of Delitto Preschool has been a challenge for some teachers and the director. The philosophical approach and inspiration from Reggio Emilia challenges standardized and outcome-based practice whereas the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards (2014) requires it. For teachers with no theoretical background and knowledge of Reggio Emilia philosophy, a critical reflection on how Reggio Emilia inspiration can inform their practice has led to tensions. Therefore, critical and ongoing reflection is important in understanding the third space, the space in between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d), and its implication for practice. Moreover, as Aoki states, teacher can dwell and situate pedagogy in between the spaces of the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d) when they understand the live(d) curriculum, the living experience of children, families, and educators.
Educators identities are important in how the forces in the middle curriculum inform educators practice and pedagogy. Aoki questions the traditional view of teaching when “teaching is reduced to ‘doing’” (Pinar, 2005, p. 17). He thinks that such a notion may abandon the fact that teaching has a lot to do with who a teacher is. Pinar (2005) writes that teaching is a thoughtful way of being, an “embodied doing and being” (p. 19). As such, the teachers make the curriculum. Springgay, Irwin and Kind (2005) use the term a/r/tography to denote the role of teacher as artist/researcher/teacher, these roles are interrelated and shifting. The artographer engages in inquiry, “searching for deeper understandings while interrogating assumptions. Asking oneself questions that linger between, amid, and/or within visual/textual, theoretical/analytical, and pedagogical/curricular matters is to live a life committed to inquiry, active engagement, and dis/comfort” (p. 901). Embodying an artist/researcher/teacher identity embraces the tensions of being in space-in between this and that and works toward figuring things out as they connect, intersect and disconnect within the middle curriculum.

The role of the teacher is critical in understanding how Reggio Emilia's inspiration dwells in between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d). Reggio Emilia philosophy firmly believes in the strong image of a teacher. A rich teacher is needed to complement the image of a rich child (Moss, 2019). Malaguzzi writes about a strong, powerful, competent and relational image of the child (Moss, 2019; Rinaldi, 2006). Teachers who are inspired by Reggio Emilia embraces a pedagogy of listening and co-construct knowledge together with children. However, in the United States, the education approach which favors calculation, competition, and managerialism has become dominant in early childhood education (Moss, 2019). This kind of educational approach often pressures teachers to become merely a doer and a passive observer of children instead of interacting and engaging in critical dialogue with young children. When
educators take on a managerial position in the classroom, they create a boundary between their role and the children's lived curriculum. Children’s identity, culture, race, language, religion, abilities, and characters are compromised for the sake of managing children to prepare them well for the future and to meet the quality standards and accountabilities required by the state and federal bodies. Aoki (1984) suggests critical reflection not only on the reality that teachers and children live but also their own identities. The educators’ pedagogical orientation and disposition have to be responsive first and foremost toward children’s lived experiences and then the teacher’s lived experiences as they live their life together inside the Delitto Preschool and separately outside the school.

Instead of living in the dichotomy between what is Reggio Emilia and what is not, the teachers have to move away from binary thinking and enter a space of tension. Aoki (1986/1991) writes that “to be alive is to live in tension” (p. 162). The space of tension for Aoki is a site of generativity and newness. The encounter between the inspiration of the Reggio Emilia and the live (d) curriculum of Delitto Preschool can invite teachers to dwell and have dialogues between their pedagogical and curricular practices and the philosophical approaches of Reggio Emilia. A critical and continuous dialogue in which teachers examine what is produced from this encounter and what they strive for to happen is needed at Delitto Preschool. Dwelling between the space of curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) entails complexity (Aoki, 1996). As Aoki writes (1996) “it is a space that knows planned curriculum and live(d) curriculum, a space of generative interplay between planned curriculum and live(d) curriculum” (P. 420). Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) argue that the Reggio Emilia approach is “often presented as prescriptions, frequently in component parts” globally (p. 1). A beginning step for educators at Delitto Preschool is to know their live(d) curricula and the planned curricula. Knowing the
discourses at play in addition to Reggio Emilia's inspiration holistically will help educators to see more possibilities and create newness.

Teachers are always becoming professionals as they transform themselves and the curriculum reality. The self for Aoki is grounded in lived experiences and is not complete (Pinar, 2005). “Rather, who we are is produced by the effects of movements among layers of difference” (Pinar, 2005, p. 24). Similarly, the teachers’ identity for Aoki is not fixed, but rather is constructed as we encounter differences. Our identities as teachers are not in us. “Our identities… are ongoing effects of our becoming in difference” (Aoki, 1993, p. 205). The teachers’ pedagogical practices are becoming as they encounter many differences in their practices and approaches. Reggio Emilia inspiration has brought another layer of complexity and puzzlement for the teachers to dwell with and figure out. It somehow created ruptures and space of tensions pedagogically for teachers. Whether they know, practice, and embody Reggio Emilia inspiration or not is an ongoing question for educators as they are continuously becoming educators. The educators at Delitto Preschool continue to interpret Reggio Emilia inspiration from their own situation and their different positionalities and identities amidst many other discourses influencing the curriculum. They are always becoming, and the curriculum informed by Reggio Emilia is also in the process of becoming. What matters is to stay in this zone of tension and not assume that they have figured things out in order to pave the path for newness and generativity.
Chapter 4
Research Methodology

Rationale: Justification for the study

Most of the studies from Reggio Emilia inspired schools in North America examine one principle of Reggio Emilia instead of inquiring about its middle curriculum. I propose to understand how the inspiration of Reggio Emilia dwells with the lived experience of Delitto Preschool which is located in State College, Pennsylvania, United States. Moreover, there are not many early childhood centers which are inspired by Reggio Emilia philosophy in State College Susquehannock land. This suggests that there has not been much research which examines Reggio Emilia inspiration in State College. By examining the case of a preschool in State College, I am interested to learn how a local place which does not share the same sociocultural condition as Italy responds to Reggio Emilia inspiration from their local context.

Reggio Emilia schools were established to bring social change. In the United States, people of color and marginalized population have been advocating for their rights more so now than before. How do early childhood centers which draw inspiration from Reggio Emilia respond to people’s demand for social justice? While the socio-cultural, economic and historical conditions of countries may not be the same as Italy, how do certain forms of inspiration from Reggio Emilia get embraced in these places? I am interested to research how the premises of Reggio Emilia philosophy, which are broadly based on creating social change and democratic citizens, get taken up in the United States. Therefore, I employ Aoki’s theoretical framework to discuss the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool.

This thesis project is guided by two broad research questions:

1. In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia?
2. How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum Delitto Preschool?

**Researcher’s Local Positionality**

In attempting to understand the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool, I have been lingering between spaces to negotiate who am I as a living curriculum. As a researcher, I have been thinking from my positionality. I entered my research site with my research questions and wanted to perceive the live(d) experience of the place from my perception. I moved to State College from Canada in August 2017. As a guest on Susquehannock land and someone who is not local to State College, I have to define myself and my identity as a researcher. On the first day of my research journey, I had a conversation with Director Laurie. I explained my research and its rationale. Director Laurie and I had a casual conversation. As a woman of color with an accent, it creates a question about where I am from. After a few minutes into our conversation, she asked me where I am from. I had to define myself and explain my history of immigration from Afghanistan to Canada and finally, to the United States. There is an implicit knowledge that I am not from State College. Thus, as a researcher following an ethnographic methodology, this makes me an outsider member of the local place and community.

Aoki (1979) reflects on his experiences as a Japanese-Canadian who resides between his Canadian and Japanese identity while living in Canada. He lingers in-between spaces to negotiate belonging. He dwells in places as an outsider and an insider who carries a hyphenated identity. Similarly, I carry a hyphenated identity as being local and global at the same time in State College. Although I live in State College, I am not considered local because I do not fit the dominant racial group and language, but also my legal status in the United State is an alien. People without U.S citizenship or green card holders are considered alien. I am neither
considered a citizen nor an American. The fact that I am not given the same status as an American, it makes it hard for me to define myself as a local American person. When encountering Americans outside the State College area, I was asked where I am originally from. My first response was State College, Pennsylvania. I was asked again where I am really from. Perhaps my first answer was not acceptable or thorough enough. My accent and my physical appearance take me away from the mainstream European-American folks who constitute the majority of the people in State College (United States Census Data, n.d). As such, my identity resides in-between the spaces of being local and not being local.

**Research Design**

My research methodology is qualitative research which focuses on people, situations, and contexts (Maxwell, 2013). I chose qualitative research because it allows me to inquire about the ways in which people make meaning and interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Since I am examining the interpretation of Reggio Emilia inspiration by the teachers and the directors, the interpretive nature of the qualitative study will aid in capturing those meanings.

I chose a qualitative case study to be able to focus in depth on Delitto Preschool and to better understand the dynamic between the children, teachers and pedagogical situations that arise at Delitto Preschool. Yin (2018) suggests that a case study is appropriate for ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions. My research questions begin with ‘how’ and thus a case study is the most relevant approach. A case study is an empirical study of a single case with a focus on “holistic description and explanation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). The practice of teachers and the decisions which the director of Delitto Preschool make regarding the inspiration of Reggio Emilia are influenced by many other factors outside the school, such as state regulations and educational policies. Employing a case study allows me to see the lived experience of the school
holistically instead of focusing on one aspect of it. Using a case study, I present an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the context and its culture (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). I examine the context of school from the state and national level to understand the contextualization of Reggio Emilia in this local place.

As a case study, my unit of analysis was the Delitto Preschool, specifically the three classrooms that I observed while conducting fieldwork. I began my study from the summer camp classroom and then moved to the preschool and infant toddler program. Often during the drop of and pick up time, the infant toddler classroom got together with the preschool classroom.

Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the theory which we use for our research can help us in keeping our attention focused. I attempt to stay with Aoki’s conceptualization of curriculum to contextualize the inspiration of Reggio Emilia within the middle curriculum and pedagogical experiences of Delitto Preschool.

Sample

Participants

The participants in this study were 32 children, girls and boys, in all three programs at Delitto Preschool, a summer camp program (6 to 12 years old), a preschool program (3 to 5 years old), and an infant and toddler program (1 month to 3 years old). I spent more time in the preschool classroom and the summer camp classroom. During the month of July and August, one of the preschool rooms served as a summer camp for children, ages 6 to 12. I obtained consent from the teachers, parents, and directors. Ten teachers participated in the study. I interviewed 8 teachers because the other two teachers left Delitto Preschool for other opportunities. Moreover, there were two directors at Delitto Preschool, the main director Laurie who is also the owner of the school and the associate director Chloe. The associate director left the school for another
position in Altoona. I interviewed 20 parents from preschool and infant and toddler programs to get their perspective about the philosophy of the school and the service offered to their children. Consent and assent forms were distributed by me, the researcher, and the director of my research site during the initial days. The parent gave consent for their participation and as well as for their children’s participation in the study. I attempted to obtain assent from children before conducting my research. All parents except 3 children provided consent for their children to participate.

**Key Demographic**

Delitto Preschool is located in Center County which is situated in the heart of Central Pennsylvania. Center County is home to the historic villages of Boalsburg and Bellefonte. The city is geographically located in the midpoint between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the two largest cities in Pennsylvania. Situated in the valley of the ridges of the Appalachian Mountains, State College is a small college town. The town is also referred to by the term “Happy Valley,” dating back to a time when the town successfully avoided the financial hardships experienced by most in the U.S during the Great Depression (State College.com, n.d).

To map Delitto Preschool, at its west, on West College Avenue, there is huge farmland, the closest farm being the Harner farm. From the east, it borders residential apartments and businesses, from the south it faces a radio station, the Ferguson Township Police Department and at its North, there is a business school and other organizations such as Center County Assistance Office. Surrounded by a car dealership on one side and farmland on the other, the location of the school symbolically represents the tension between the rural and urban dichotomy of the town. Some people prefer this town to remain small, whereas others appreciate the blossoming urban culture that it is currently experiencing. People are worried that the city will lose its local charm if it continues to grow at its current rate (Xian, 2018). Some people think of this town as rural
whereas others view it as urban. According to the State College Bureau, State College is an urban place.

Delitto Preschool is a school and daycare located in State College, Pennsylvania. It is licensed as a school by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and is also approved by the PA Department of Education State School Board to offer Preschool/PreK and Kindergarten. “While we are open 7 am until 6 pm, our ‘formal’ school hours are from 8:30 am to 3 pm, and the hours outside of 8:30 am and 3 pm are considered wrap around care, or daycare if you will” (Delitto Preschool Website, 2019).

The children come from diverse backgrounds. The school does not have any written document on children’s ethnicity, religion, race, and other differences. Based on the information from director Laurie, including the summer camp program children, there are 7 American Biracial children (4 African-American and European-American, 3 Mexican-American), 2 Egyptian-Americans, 1 Uzbek, 22 European-American. Most of the children are from the State College area. The teachers belong to European-American racial group. 8 teachers and the directors identify themselves as female. Two teachers identified themselves as male. Most of the children are from the State College area. All of the teachers including the director belong to the European-American racial group. I used pseudonyms to refer to participants and the school’s name to keep their identities confidential.

Based on my interview with parents, the majority of the children come from Middle-class families. Social class, in this case, is defined by the level of education and the occupation of each parent. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) the definition of class cannot be reduced to income only. They argue that “class is also (and perhaps primarily) about political power: the ability to influence policy, control, capital, and shape institutional structures” (p. 160). Middle
class parents work jobs that requires advanced education beyond high school and working-class parent hold occupations that require high school education and possibly trade schooling (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). At Delitto Preschool, majority of the middle-class parents held a bachelor’s degree and are working as a professor, physicians, psychologist, high school teacher, etc. Out of the twenty parents I interviewed, the majority of the parents are middle-class with six families coming from a working-class background. Out of five of the working-class families, one of the mothers is unemployed, a father is a barber, another mother works in a hotel and two other mothers are home care assistance with one of them being a single mother. The two black biracial children and the child from Uzbekistan are both from a working-class family. Based on my conversation with the director, three children are on the government’s subsidy and one family is on an organization’s subsidy.

Type of Sampling

Since I am conducting a case study, I had to select my sample first. My sampling for my case study is purposeful (Merriam, 2009). There are not many Reggio Emilia inspired centers in State College. Delitto Preschool’s announcement as a Reggio Emilia inspired center on a local radio station created awareness about the availability of the new program. My thesis advisor suggested to reach out to Director Laurie and discuss my research interests. Having an early childhood center which identifies itself as Reggio Emilia inspired, I assumed the participants would be familiar with Reggio Emilia inspired philosophy. In addition to a purposeful sampling, my sampling was also convenient because the school was located in the same city as me. While the sample includes parents or any other family members who are responsible for the children, it centers foremost on the director, teachers, and children. All others involved with the preschool were excluded from the study.
Ethics

Before beginning my research, I proposed my research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pennsylvania State University. I outlined the procedure of my research study, my data collection, recruitment protocol and consent form samples for parents, children, teachers, and the directors. I also shared my interview questions with children and teachers. I began my research after IRB’s approval.

Data Collection: Instrumentation

Data collection in qualitative research is “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). In a qualitative case study, researchers collect data from interviews, observations, documents, and audio materials (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used ethnographic methods to collect my data to inquire about teachers’ practices, children’s experiences, parents’ perspectives, and the directors’ experiences. The study was conducted for a period of 17 weeks, 2 to 3 days per week for a period of 3 to 2.5 hours per visit. I visited Delitto Preschool at different times of the day to better understand the children's and teachers’ experiences.

As a case study, I draw upon Emerson, Fretz and Shaw’s (2011) work on collecting data. I collected data through field notes, videography, still image photographs, children’s artifacts, internet-based resources, materials analysis in the classroom, necessary documents shared by the director, and the website of the school. I used field notes to jot down my observation from the school and wrote in process memos to interpret those observations. I typed most of my field notes on the same week or the following day from my visit to reflect and interpret the data when it was fresh in my memory. Along with writing notes, I took pictures of children’s experiences, materials, curriculum exploration set up, children’s artwork, and any other events which
answered my questions. Moreover, video recording children’s experiences and teacher’s curriculum exploration aided in helping me capture the details of events.

When possible, I took videos of teachers reading stories or providing art exploration for young children. I studied the materials in the classroom and questioned teachers about their choice of a particular material. In addition, to better understand how director Laurie was training teachers on Reggio Emilia philosophy, I studied the resources she prepared for teachers on Reggio Emilia. Furthermore, I found the website of the school helpful in gaining an understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical framework of the school.

I collected and analyzed my data simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). After transcribing interviews, fieldnotes, and videos, I reviewed my data (Merriam, 2009) in addition to analyzing my in process-memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I decoded the data to reflect its meaning and after determining its relevance to my research, I encoded it (Saldaña, 2015). I coded data during collecting and later analyzed. Saldaña (2015) argues that when data is grouped together according to similarity or patterns it facilitates the development of categories. I grouped my data according to similarities and developed in tentative themes.

**Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with parents, teachers, children, and directors to obtain their perspectives and experiences. My interviews with the children about their experiences were casual conversations during unstructured playtime. I set up a time to interview the teachers, the parents, and the director. I developed a set of questions while leaving room for the questions to emerge as the interview proceeded. Most of the interviews with teachers and directors took around 30 minutes and parent interviews took between 1 and a half minutes to 8 and a half minutes. All of the interviews with parents (except one), teachers, and
directors were conducted as individual, one-on-one conversations between the informants and I.
All interviews were conducted at Delitto Preschool’s site.

Researcher’s Role: Observer and Participant-Observer

Corsaro (2003) writes that the first step of entering into children’s play or interactive space is to observe. Similarly, Knupfer (1996) believes that ethnographers who observe and listen first were able to understand more compared to ethnographers who gave themselves less time for observation. He emphasizes the importance of giving time to listen and observe as an adult researcher. I started my research as an observer with children and teachers initially. As a researcher, I sought to position myself as an interested adult in relation to the children. I did not introduce myself as a teacher. Instead, I attempted to adopt the least-adult role available, which means adopting a friendship role and being less authoritarian (Mandell, 1988). Using an access strategy, I tried to enter into children’s ongoing interaction or play (Corsaro, 2003) to become a participant-observer. Corsaro (2003) explains that an access strategy is standing near a group, listening and understanding what others are talking about and then joining the conversation. My way of joining the children’s conversations often started with observations first and later by asking questions to better understand what the children were doing. I used an access strategy to shift my role from an outsider observer to an insider participant-observer when the teachers and children allowed me. However, this does not mean that the children and I had equal status. With preschool and infant and toddler children, it was easy to become a participant-observer. With summer camp children, I was able to be participant-observer with some children and an observer with some other. Some children were shy and did no talk to me as much as some others. As a participant-observer in most of the classes, I engaged in children’s play to understand how teachers’ decisions and pedagogy affect children. The children saw me as an interested adult
instead of a teacher. When researching the teachers, my role shifted based on the teachers’ relationships with me. With some teachers, it was easy to be a participant-observer and with some other teachers, I became an observer.

**Researcher’s Positionality with Teachers**

My role as an insider and outsider was dependent on teachers. Maintaining an insider role and emic perspective with some teachers has been a challenge. Since the teacher changes quickly and during my research time, five teachers left the center, I have not been able to build a long relationship with teachers due to the higher teacher turnover rate. Whether I wanted to be an observer, or a participant was not dependent solely on me. Some teachers have allowed me to exercise more than an observer role in their classroom. As a researcher, I entered a space that was not mine. I tried to respect the rules of engagement and the culture of the place formed by the teachers. In attempting to understand how teachers wanted me to engage in their classrooms, I found myself in this space in-between insider and outsider or a participant or observer. Therefore, I was uncertain and always in search of finding ways to connect, relate and understand the children and teachers.

I was comfortable more in Lucy’s classroom than Anna’s classroom. I was in doubt about my way of engagement in Anna’s classroom. In Lucy’s classroom, I was always welcomed with a smile on her face. I felt comfortable to ask her any questions. I could easily participate in children’s play. I had a participant-observer role in her classroom. In contrast, I was not able to easily communicate with Anna. I got this sense of busyness all the time from her. I had a different way of being in Anna’s classroom. I was uncertain of being a participant-observer because I felt that she wanted me to be more of an observer. For example, when children wanted to interact with me by talking or by sitting close to me during circle time, Anna reminded them...
to focus on their work. She would say to children: “You can’t focus. You have to focus.” From my encounter with her, I experienced that listening and respecting the teacher was very important. One time the children were around me when I was trying to document Lucy during circle time. I had my little camera on my hand. The children wanted to use my camera. I let them explore my camera when Lucy was asking children to tell her how they are feeling today. I gave my camera to one of the children to record what was happening. They became playful. Anna was watching the children and me. She said: “Okay, we are being disrespectful to what Ms. Lucy has got. Can you take your camera back? Ms. Lucy is trying to do something. You guys need to pay attention.” I took the camera from the children after. In situations as such, I felt that being a participant observer was made difficult for me. Perhaps, I was disturbing the ways in which children and adults should be in the classroom. I was taking children’s attention away from what the teacher was doing. I began to question the role of a participant-observer. A participant-observer role or an emic role is not easily cultivated when the participants are not ready. I also noticed that my notion of respect was different from Anna's. In order to respect the teacher, Anna preferred that I quietly observe and listen. Moreover, when I engaged with children during unstructured play, Anna reminded them to focus. This suggests that Anna communicated to me that I am taking children’s attention away from their work. How could I become a participant-observer if I had not interacted with children and just passively observed? I was working with the constraint of the classroom teachers. Overall, my positionality and embodiment as a researcher were certainly influenced by the teachers' embodiment in the classroom.

I understand that my positionality as a researcher has power. As Fasoli (2001) reminds us, power is continuously negotiated in research with children. My presence in a classroom gives me the power to be seen as an adult who has authority as a researcher. Anna is the only teacher
who has been at Delitto Preschool for more than a year. The high teacher turnover rate put stress on her as a permanent teacher. Perhaps, she was not willing to have a researcher in the space and had to because of the decision made by the director.

**Participants Categorization**

In this study, when defining the racial or ethnic diversity of people, I resist categorizing people based on the color of their skin. Some categories are based on color (White and Black) and others are based on the place of origin (Asian). When defining myself, I do not fit the usual Asian categorization. The term Asian is mostly associated with people from Asia-Pacific. I define myself as an Afghan. With respect to the Indigenous people of the United States and different race and ethnicities in the United States, I do not use the word American when referring to my participant. Instead of using the term White and Black to refer to racial groups, I have used African-American and European-American. This is to show that the Indigenous people of the country are the ones who are from this land and should be referred to as Americans. People from other nations are settler colonials, immigrants, refugees, international and so on which makes them have a different relationship with the land. I use hyphenated identities such as European-Americans to disclose the racial group of the person. Moreover, when thinking of the term White and Black, there are different shades of Whiteness and Blackness which are not really included in such terms. As Davis and Mac Naughton (2009) discuss, “‘racial’ and ‘racialized’ identities have resulted from a history of actions and institutions in which ‘race’ has been used to classify, name, oppress, repress, and silence specific groups of people” (p. 4). I oppose categorizing people based on color because people are composed of more colors than Red, Yellow, Brown, Black, and White. Hybrid identities are often left from those categorizations. Color categorization of race does not do justice to power relations amongst different racial groups.
Historically, the color White or the Aryan race was deemed purer in comparison to other people’s skin color. Therefore, in this study, I have resisted color categorization.

**Data Analysis**

I collected and analyzed my data simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). After transcribing interviews, fieldnotes, and videos, I reviewed my data (Merriam, 2009) in addition to analyzing my in process-memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I employed a thematic analysis to analyze my data. My first step in analyzing my data was to read my field notes, transcripts of audio-recorded interviews, transcripts of video recorded events occurring at Delitto Preschool, and analyze the content of artifacts and still images from my research site. After transcribing interviews, and videos, I reviewed and questioned my data (Merriam, 2009) to determine whether it was relevant to my study or not. Then, I used open coding to arrange my data in different themes and categories based on my research questions (Miles et al., 2014).

Additionally, the theoretical framework of my study influenced my data analysis. Looking through Aoki’s lens, I choose the data which pertained to his notion of curriculum. I labeled my themes based on the labels derived from the participant themselves, such as “Get them ready for ABCs and 123s”. I grouped my data according to similarities and developed in tentative themes and codes (Saldaña, 2015). After coding my data to respond to my research questions for this thesis, the main themes suggested: Reggio Emilia inspiration, Delitto Preschool live(d) experiences, teaching from the environment and local requirements: “Get them ready for ABCs and 123s.”

My overarching research questions were on existing discourses and the negotiation between the local lived experiences with a globally recognized philosophy. In order to narrow my focus, I analyzed my data based on my three informing sub-questions. For example, to
answer the question of how specifically does the Delitto Preschool, a Reggio Emilia inspired early learning center in State College, Pennsylvania, draw inspiration from the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, I analyzed data that defined Reggio Emilia philosophy and the ways in which Reggio Emilia was understood. Saldaña (2015) argues that when data are grouped together according to similarity or patterns it facilitates the development of categories. I grouped my data according to similarities and developed in tentative themes. In addition, I attempt to see connections between themes and codes to contextualize them (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, I made Reggio Emilia's inspiration as the main theme and other relevant codes came under that categorization. For example, Reggio as nature, the environment, Reggio Table: Loose parts, project-based learning, and the emergent curriculum were associated with Reggio Emilia's inspiration. My second research question was on the middle curriculum of the Delitto Preschool and its entanglement with Reggio Emilia inspirations. I developed three different themes to respond to this question because the live(d) curriculum of the school was affected by many different factors including local requirements and discourses coupled with national and state standards and regulations. Therefore, my first theme was on the teachers' experiences. The curriculum of any school is based on the interaction between the teacher and the children. At Delitto Preschool, the teachers' lived reality is important in understanding the live(d) curriculum. Thus, I have teachers' experiences as one of my themes. The second theme which is titled under the local requirements: “Get them ready for ABCs and 123s provides a discussion on the encounter between Reggio Emilia philosophy and the national and state policies and regulations. My third theme which is titled teaching from our environment discusses the folk pedagogical practices and the way in which teachers inform their practices from the place in which they are situated in.
Chapter 5

Findings

In this chapter, I will present data in support of the following findings: Reggio Emilia inspiration, Delitto Preschool lived experiences, teaching from the environment, local requirements: “Get them ready for ABCs and 123s.” I will preview those findings and then I will describe data supporting each finding, also detailing how it relates to each research question.

As a reminder, the two research questions which informed my study were:

1. In what ways is Delitto Preschool inspired by Reggio Emilia?
2. How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the middle curriculum Delitto Preschool?

Reggio Emilia Inspirations

In response to the theme of Reggio Emilia Inspirations, I discuss six specific inspirations that emerged during the research process:

• “Reggio Emilia is nature”
• The environment
• Reggio Table: Loose parts
• Project-based learning
• The emergent curriculum
• The Desire to be Reggio Emilia Inspired

I will now describe the basic elements of each of these inspirations and support this discussion with data collected during my fieldwork experience.

Each teacher, including Director Laurie and Associate Director Chloe interpret the theoretical and practical concept of Reggio Emilia differently. For example, Abi, one of the
teachers, told me in an interview that Reggio Emilia is not a curriculum but a philosophy of thinking. She said: “I learn about Reggio Emelia during research. What I like about it that it is not a curriculum, it is a philosophy.” Director Laurie thinks that “Reggio is what you have.” In her eyes, embracing a philosophy of Reggio Emilia is possible in any context and with any kind of material. She does not view Reggio Emilia as a curriculum-as-plan, but rather as a philosophy that is lived in the curriculum-as-live (d). In the same way, the summer camp teacher, Elizabeth thinks Reggio Emilia is a “loose philosophy. It can translate in a lot of different ways as long as you are out there, and you are involved.” The teachers and the directors recognize the fluidity of interpretations of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. As understood by teachers, Reggio Emilia's philosophy is rather a loose philosophy of thinking which relies on the teacher’s interpretation.

There are some overarching concepts and principles that Delitto Preschool defines as Reggio Emilia inspired. Although in their interpretations, Reggio Emilia is a curriculum-as-live(d), in practice and in thought, Reggio Emilia is a curriculum-as-plan. This is because Reggio Emilia does not emerge from the context of the school. Scholarly academic books, blogs and internet resources all inform teachers understanding of Reggio Emilia. As such, teachers define Reggio Emilia philosophy as having particular characteristics. For example, in order to practice Reggio Emilia, teachers should incorporate certain materials such as loose parts and natural material in their classrooms and lesson plans. Based on my interview and the information obtained from the website of the preschool, Delitto Preschool’s educators’ practice center on six concepts of Reggio Emilia: Reggio Emilia is nature; Reggio Table; Loose Parts; the Environment; Emergent Curriculum; project-based learning and The Desire to be Reggio Emilia Inspired. I discuss each of these concepts in the following section.
Reggio Emilia is Nature

According to most of the teachers and director Laurie, having natural materials in the classroom and bringing nature inside the classroom is an important component of Reggio's philosophy. Nature has been a prevalent theme throughout my data. All of the teachers whom I interviewed, including director Laurie, emphasized the importance of natural materials in Reggio schools. For example, Anna, one of the teachers, told me in her interview that “Reggio is nature.” Her comment was echoed by another teacher, Stella who said the same thing about Reggio Emilia. Anna noted that she tries to incorporate Reggio in her classroom by bringing in natural materials. As I observed, some natural materials are placed in clear jars for decorations and others are placed in a basket for children to play with. Natural and non-natural plants are placed by the windows of the classrooms. Anna reports in her interview that some natural materials are collected by the children and some are bought from a nearby store. She said: “Some of them we got them. A lot of it also came from the summer camp. I gave them [children] baggies to get things from their nature hike.” Natural materials can either be displayed in the classroom or provided for children to play with. In both circumstances, it shows that having natural material is important to make it a Reggio Emilia inspired school.

Figure 1: Wormery
Teachers incorporate natural materials in children’s art-making practices to make it Reggio inspired. In the summer camp program, I observed Elizabeth incorporating the natural aspect of Reggio Emilia in her curriculum by bringing dirt, grass, and worm to create wormery with children (see figure 1). Wormery is a small farm or habitat for worms. The children engaged in the activity by touching and observing the worms. Elizabeth is making a conscious effort to include activities in which bonding with nature is an important component of it. Elizabeth said, “I have also incorporated [Reggio inspiration] using natural material during craft’ time, they like to use the lima beans. I tried to give them a wide ray of materials that they can use when they are doing their craft or other activities”. Likewise, another teacher, was also incorporating nature in her curriculum by providing leaves for toddlers to glue on the paper. In the preschool classroom, Anna had a sand table prepared for children during station time where sometimes one child and other times two children were provided the time to play at the sand table. Anna views the incorporation of nature in curriculum as a vital part of Reggio's inspiration. In her interview, Anna stated,

[Reggio Emilia is] nature, loose parts, scraps, recyclable, feathers. Yesterday, I made copies of a leaf and made them color them. We are going to do another set. We are gonna get them and glue them so that they are kind of look like 3d. We are gonna make a mobile out of them. Partly it is Reggio because we are going to use sticks and maybe some twine. Another part there is not Reggio because we use paper. I couldn’t use the actual leaf. For me to put a hole in there, by the time they get dry, they will rip. It’s mostly nature and you incorporate in arts. (Interview with Anna, October, 3, 2018)

According to Anna, to be inspired by Reggio means to use only natural materials for art projects. A higher value is placed on natural materials because of its aesthetic component over man made
materials such as paper. However, she finds it challenging to solely use natural materials without paper when creating crafts. In contrast, Elizabeth finds Reggio Emilia a natural transition in her summer camp program because children are already playing with natural material. Having natural materials inside and outside the classroom is important because it practically orients children to the Reggio inspiration.

While nature is not the core principles of Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, the way in which Reggio Emilia schools and those inspired schools bring nature into the classroom is shown in images in some books and exhibitions from Reggio Emilia (see, Cavallini et al., 2011; Gandini et al., 2005; Vecchi, 2010; Vecchi et al., 2011). However, children have been playing with natural materials long before the establishment of Reggio Emilia. Why is this understood as a Reggio Emilia inspired principle? Moreover, based on the stories from Reggio Emilia tours, the natural environment display inside the environment has been fascinating for some visitors (e.g, Cadwell, 1997; Eckhoff & Spearman, 2009). Thus, Delitto Preschool teachers have brought nature into their classroom as part of their Reggio philosophy inspiration.

**The Environment**

Delitto Preschool teachers took children outside the classroom to practice the emphasis Reggio Emilia places on the idea of the environment as a third teacher (Cadwell; 1997; Edwards, 2002; Gandini et al., 2005; Rinaldi, 2004; Vecchi, 2010). On Delitto Preschool website, it clearly states that: “We believe the learning environment has a significant impact on their cognitive, social and emotional development, as a result, our classroom environments are viewed as our children’s third teacher, the first being the parents and the second being the classroom teacher”². Reggio Emilia’s emphasis on the environment was echoed by three teachers and the director.

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² Screenshots of quotes from websites is included in my appendices
Rahman says that “Reggio Emilia has three different teachers. The teacher, the students, and the environment.” Such an understanding is supported by most of the literature on Reggio Emilia (Cadwell; 1997; Edwards, 2002; Gandini, 2012; Rinaldi, 2004; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007; Vecchi, 2010). The environment for Rahman is composed of outside and inside space. Furthermore, Elizabeth said in an interview “it [Reggio] actually works out a lot because we are outside a lot.” During my observation, at the summer camp, depending on the weather, Elizabeth took children outside for science lessons or physical activity four to five days per week for a few hours. I was able to attend some field trips with summer camp children. The children went to the local parks, art galleries, art festivals, and historical sites. When the weather was nice, the preschool classes went outside in the afternoon to play in the school’s playground. Sometimes, children took a walk in their neighborhood with their teachers. In order to respond to the concept of the environment as the third teacher, Delitto Preschool ensured that children got playtime outside the classroom and are engaged in the environment.

There is no planned curriculum guiding the children’s interaction with the outside environment, rather, the children engage in an unstructured play. The summer camp children went to parks and lakes regularly to play sports or swim. Elizabeth told me in her interview that “the biology is all outside in the natural relationship”. The summer camp lessons focused on science and sometimes biology. While children observed the natural environment briefly, Elizabeth’s lessons did not take place outside. Moreover, children played mostly with human-made objects on the playground (e.g., slides, swings and balls). The parks and the school playground have some toys such as climbers, outside playhouse and see-saw. Of the three programs included in this study, I did not observe any formal activities intended to give children the opportunity to engage with nature and natural materials of parks. The ways in which the
children played outside appeared to be similar to how children at non-Reggio Emilia inspired schools play. For example, children played catch with some children and educators.

Reggio Emilia's inspiration requires a particular aesthetic quality in the indoor environment, which is very appealing to Delitto Preschool teachers. Curating a learning space with furniture made from natural materials, displaying natural plants in the classroom and natural light reflecting into the classroom space are a few of the aesthetic quality of the inside environment that seems to define Reggio Emilia's inspiration for both Lucy and director Laurie. Lucy says that “If you google Reggio you might see nothing but these beautiful natural materials whatnot. That is wonderful.” The natural furniture and the artwork inside the space are important to make Delitto Preschool a Reggio Emilia inspired center. Director Laurie showed me the pictures of the furniture she wants to buy from a catalog to make it Reggio (See Figure 2). The catalog intended to reflect a Montessori school learning environment. She said: “Eventually I would like to transition our furnishing to things that are more natural but that is what we have right now. As we grow and make money we can transition into natural furniture. Like a Reggio look with a lot of woods.” However, Director Laurie said that the furniture is very expensive for her to buy at this point. As I observed, Delitto school has embraced the aesthetic quality of Reggio Emilia schools by installing light stands across the classroom and by placing natural and non-natural plants in some parts of the classroom. They have also displayed children’s artwork on the walls of the classroom. While they want to bring in more natural material to make it look like those other Reggio Emilia inspired schools, lack of material and financial support prevents them from doing so. Most of their current furniture and materials came from their previous non-Reggio Emilia inspired school.
An open space curated with furniture made out of natural materials, natural plants breathing in the space and the lights warming and brightening the space is some of the aesthetic elements of Reggio Emilia inspired schools. Delitto Preschool’s interior aesthetic inspiration of Reggio Emilia came from internet sources. As such, their attempt to be Reggio Emilia inspired can be seen as a replication of the aesthetic of Reggio Emilia schools from Italy and outside.

Delitto Preschool draws inspiration from Reggio Emilia in their set-up of the inside environment. In all three programs, the inside environment is organized in different stations which include a block station, an arts and craft table, a Reggio table, a kitchen area, an imaginative play area, and a quiet area. For example, in the preschool classroom, each morning before lunch, teachers assign each child to each station. Children rotate stations after 12 minutes. There is a two-minute mind break in between which allows children to dance or learn the alphabet of the day. Moreover, teacher Rahman said that in Reggio Emilia they have a quiet area for children with special needs. He said: “I used an article that was about Reggio Emilia because they talked about having a quiet area for special education. To have a place where they can go and have their downtime. It gives them their me time.” Thornton and Brunton (2010) write about
the importance of having a quiet space for children from a Reggio inspired perspective. The preschool room has a cozy little couch with some children's books in their quiet area. Children who are not listening to the teacher are sometimes asked to sit in a quiet area. The set-up of the room does not change much. The tables in the classrooms are used for any kind of curriculum exploration prepared by teachers.

**Reggio Table: Loose Parts**

The Reggio table provides ‘non-traditional’ materials to engage children in their imagination. In the pre-school classroom, there is always a table with loose parts in one of the stations which Lucy calls a Reggio table. In this table, children can play with a variety of non-traditional materials such as loose parts. Lucy states, to be inspired by Reggio Emilia, “I know it is not about not necessarily using traditional material for play.” Lucy and Stella define traditional materials as toys bought from the store whereas loose parts are seen as Reggio materials (see figure 3). Lucy said that using loose parts transcends Reggio Emilia's inspiration globally because “you will have leaves, rocks, pinecones, and acorns all over the world”. Loose parts are available naturally in all parts of the world. She goes on to say that “using loose parts and creating them in ways that it can become part of a sculpture or it may end up being a design, or a window on a block tower. Not precut toys from play stores or things like that. It is really experiencing the world without commercialism.” Loose parts are an open-ended material that invites children to play with it creatively and imaginatively (Smith-Gilman, 2018). At Delitto Preschool, they are using loose parts in addition to toys bought from stores. Abi has a shelf with loose parts in her classroom. She stated in her interview that “I have a shelf with loose parts. That’s something that I let them play with loose parts in certain settings. I let them explore things without giving guidelines.” She allows children to play with loose parts in any way that they
want. All three programs have loose parts materials. This demonstrates that teachers are inspired by the open-ended exploration encouraged by loose parts. They think that loose parts break the conventional way of thinking about one material in one way. It invites children to see different possibilities when using the same material and therefore enhances creativity and curiosity.

Figure 3: Loose parts at the Reggio table

Teachers use loose parts differently from that of children, which means that the teachers essentially depict how children “should” use loose parts. Teachers usually bring a variety of loose parts on the table with Elmer’s glue. I observed Anna setting-up feathers, pom poms, small pieces of stones, yarn and googly eyes for children on the table. She provided the children with a sheet of coloring paper. The paper had a picture of a lady wearing a long dress. The children were asked to glue the loose parts onto the dress of the lady. Most of the time, as I observed, the teacher’s curriculum entailed making a collage with the loose part materials. In contrast, during unstructured playtime, due to less teacher’s influence and guidance, the children improvised and played with loose parts materials the way they wanted to. I observed the summer camp children using loose parts to make guns. They could create a variety of different kinds of guns using the
same material and engage in a dramatic war play. Here is the data from my field note which shows how children create stories using loose parts.

Khenza places the two purple plastic circles under her nose and says: “I got a mustache.” She puts it onto her hand and asks me, “you know what these are?” I respond: “No.” Money, she answers. She places the money onto a piece of block. She puts another block on top of the money. The block becomes the dinosaur and the purple circle is something that dinosaurs find. She then takes back the purple circles and hides it into her hands and asks me to guess where the money is. (Personal Field Notes, January 2019)

To compare child-initiated play with teacher-initiated lesson plans using loose parts, children’s play with loose parts was more imaginative, creative, experiential and improvisational. Children demonstrate their meaning-making processes through working and making things with the loose part. This demonstrate that the way teachers present the loose parts allow the meanings and understanding children construct with it.

**Project-based Learning**

Project-based learning is another aspect of Reggio Emilia which director Laurie and the associate director would like to implement as part of their commitment to Reggio Emilia's inspiration. The associate director Chloe stated in her interview that project-based learning is one of the principles they borrow from Reggio Emilia schools. As stated in her interview, project-based learning happens when “they [children] do some stuff with activities that are generally facilitated around a larger theme that they are focusing on that week.” She says that the kind of activities will vary according to children’s age. “For the toddler, it is mostly art activities. The pre-school and centers have different focuses such as language, writing, reading and things like that.” Chloe mostly works in the office and she rarely plans projects. I observed Abi, Anna, and
Lucy conducting short term projects which last for a week. Most of their project focuses on holiday curriculum. Throughout my research, I saw Anna once conducting a project which lasted more than a week.

The children read a story titled *Apple Trouble* by Raganhild Scamell. The story was about a hedgehog and apple. When they finished the story, the children did an activity related to the apple. The center bought a ready-made pie crust. The children put the apple pie filling which Anna made into the ready-made crust. The children were making an apple pie to take home. When Cameron finished, he shouted with excitement: “I did it!” After they were done making apple pie, Anna informed them that they will be testing apples. She brought five different kinds of apple in a gray plastic bag. She said we have five different kinds of apple and they all taste different. She explained to the children that the first apple is called a granny smith apple. These apples are tart and they can make a great apple pie. She gives a sample test for each child. Cameron asked: “Can I eat them.” Anna nodded and said: “Yes, they have got a very good smell to them. Smell it.” The children enjoyed eating apples. Charles said: “So sour!” Eva said: “I don’t like this.” “This is good right Charles”, Cameron asked. Charles said: “Yeah, its apple peach.” The next one is a Macintosh. They are not as tart. They make good apple sauce. Cameron said: “Ummm, they are really good. They smell so good” Khenza: I like them, they are very juicy. Anna said: “The next one is red delicious. They are my favorite. They are harder than an apple. They have a crisp to them”. Ummm, Charles said, “this is delicious”. “The next apples get sweeter and sweeter. This is a gala apple. This is really sweet. This is a softer apple. Very soft,” Anna stated. Charles tried one, he went to threw up and said: “I don’t like the softer ones.” The last apple, as Anna described, “Is a Fuji apple. This one is really sweet.
This is what you usually eat here. It is nice and soft so that the toddlers can eat them, and it is really sweet. There are all different kinds of apple, the pink lady and there is also a golden delicious which is a soft apple”.

(Personal Field Notes, September 2019).

Figures 4 and 5 show the artworks made by children and teachers. The teacher pre-cut pictures of apple for children to paint and draw.

*Figure 4 & 5: Apple project*

The project-based learning in Delitto Preschool is not based on the concept of emergent curriculum. It is instead pre-planned by the teachers. My data demonstrate that children follow the projects planned by the teachers. Project-based learning is practiced as a thematic lesson or unit plan. This way, the project follows an already planned theme on an idea instead of following the direction that the project may take based on the children's and teachers’ engagement with it.

*Emergent Curriculum*

At Delitto Preschool, the concept of emergent curriculum is employed to respond to children’s development and the state standards whereas in Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum
emerges from the lived experiences of the children. As states on Delitto Preschool’s (2019) website, the emergent curriculum is defined as follows:

The Emergent Curriculum is a project-based curriculum that focuses on being responsive to each child's needs and developmental level. Lesson plans are developed to support the children's interests and integrate the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards. Our educational goals for children include becoming socially and emotionally intelligent, academically prepared for the primary school setting, and successfully joining the classroom community. (para. 1)

In Reggio Emilia schools, emergent curriculum is an “emergent or unplanned process…the course of this curriculum is not known at the outset. It is emergent – that is, its trajectory develops as a consequence of the logic of the problem” (Wien, 2008, p. 5). Wien (2008) notes that emergent curriculum emphasizes co-construction and collaboration between children and adults while allowing children and adults to take agency. In Reggio Emilia philosophy, teachers follow a long-term project inquiry as part of their emergent curriculum (Vecchi, 2010). However, at Delitto Preschool, as part of the Keystone STARS, teachers plan lessons a week in advance. The lessons might consider children’s interests or development. It is important to note that planning lessons to serve the purpose of standards goes against the concept of the emergent curriculum (Nxumalo et al., 2018). In addition, it will not allow teachers and children to co-construct knowledge for the emergent curriculum to continue. Teacher need to dwell between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) to create situation for the children and themselves for co-constructing knowledge and to follow an emergent curriculum.

Teachers define emergent curriculum as following children’s interests. In my interview with Lucy, one of the teachers explains what she means by emergent curriculum.
Emergent curriculum means if the children show continuous interests in the subject matter. Perhaps, they are interested in the pumpkins and they wanted to continue that learning experience we can supplement materials on that and find another way if it is in spring, we can plant seeds and they can grow their own pumpkin. Before, I have seen that they were really involved with dinosaurs. Their sand tables became an environment for dinosaurs, and they created a park for dinosaurs with various plants. That is as far the emergent can go if there is any interest that comes about. We will definitely expand on that.

(Interview with Lucy, October 19, 2018)

To follow an emergent curriculum, teachers realize the importance of responding to children’s interests. As I observed, children’s interests play in some aspect of the curriculum, but it is not the core guiding philosophy of teachers’ pedagogy and curriculum. For example, some children like to dance so Lucy gives them two minutes to dance between transitions. This shows an example of how Lucy is responding to children’s’ interests. In addition, the art curriculum or station time is planned based on children’s interests. Therefore, it can be said that the emergent curriculum as understood in Delitto Preschool informs some parts of the middle curriculum.

Emergent curriculum is different from the Creative Curriculum. Delitto Preschool “utilizes the Emergent Curriculum in conjunction with the Creative Curriculum” (Delitto Preschool, 2019). The prepackaged planned curriculum by the Creative Curriculum is ordered through the Creative Curriculum website. As advertised on their website, “the creative curriculum website is everything that teachers love: a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning” (Teaching Strategies, 2019). The curriculum outlines the kinds of activities teachers can do to support children’s learning. As I observed, teachers are planning art lessons based on the Creative Curriculum package. In
contrast, emergent curriculum comes from children and is planned in response to the events and experiences taking place at the preschool whereas the Creative Curriculum comes from outside the classroom environment regardless of children’s experiences. Hence, teachers do not need packaged lessons when they follow an emergent curriculum. To think with Aoki (1986/1991), the emergent curriculum occurs when indwelling midst curriculum-as-live (d) and curriculum-as-plan whereas the Creative Curriculum is a curriculum-as-plan with comes from outside the context of the school. The emergent becomes a relationally live(d) curriculum that exists in school. With Creative Curriculum packages, the curriculum becomes instrumentalized with predetermined learning strategies and goals. Thus, there are tensions in using these two curriculums since they each serve different purposes.

**The Desire to be Reggio Emilia Inspired**

The director was inspired by Reggio Emilia because it resonated with her experience at another early childhood center, Nurtury, which was not a Reggio Emilia inspired. During our interview, she shared: “There wasn’t a time that I can pinpoint. I know that when I taught at Nurtury, I liked the way we did things there. I like to read anything with the information. At one point I came across Reggio Emilia. I said oh that is what is called. I said this is exactly what I believe. I believe that children are human beings just like adults are. They have a mind of their own and they know what they want to do. They know what they like. I believe in those kinds of situations; you can still slip in ABC’S and 123s. You just do it in a different way”. At Nurtury, they did not follow a strict curriculum, but a child-centered approach. Moreover, she was inspired by the agency giving to the children and the community aspect of it. “The kids are in control of their ship. I really like the community aspect of it. I feel like it creates a tighter bond
with the family,” responded Laurie. This implies that Reggio Emilia's inspiration is desirable because of the respect and agency children are given.

Reggio Emilia's inspiration is also interpreted as a child-centered approach where the curriculum comes from the children and children have agency in guiding the educators' teaching pedagogy. In my interview with teachers, most of them interpreted Reggio Emilia philosophy as following children’s interests and needs. Elizabeth shared in her interview, “The main difference [between a Reggio Emilia Inspired center and other centers] is that your education is more specific to what the kids are interested not trying to reach the benchmark.” Similarly, Rahman said in his interview, “It [Reggio Emilia inspiration] is all about the children. what they are interested in and what they want to do. You can do what they need by observing them.” Abi provided an example of how to follow children’s interests. She said: “I see their ideas and what they want to do, sometimes I plan color for them, but I see they want to use paint instead. I try not to be fixed but yes, I want to do that but if you have a better idea then I would do. I have books and books and sometimes, they just want to read the books that I read, and they want to listen to another one that I read last week, and I am gonna read the book that they want to read.”

Soler and Miller (2003) also write that Reggio Emilia philosophy follows a child-centered approach to learning and teaching. Focusing on children’s interest is an important component of Reggio Emilia's philosophy which is appealing to the educators at Delitto Preschool.

The educators also value the emphasis Reggio Emilia has on fostering creativity and imagination. The natural materials and loose parts used in Reggio Emilia schools provide children with more opportunities to exercise their imagination and creativity when playing. Rahman said: “Reggio Emilia is: here is the craft and you guys figure out how you want.” As
defined by Rahman, Reggio Emilia teachers do not direct children’s curriculum. When I asked Rahman how is that different from other centers, he said:

The YMCA was more structured. There was a bit of free time. When teaching a picture of fish. We would teach them exactly how to make the fish. Reggio Emilia says here is the picture of a fish and you make the fish yourself. We have more free time here.

(Interview with Rahman, July 26, 2018)

Similarly, Elizabeth noted:

Once they [children] hit school, they use things for their purpose. They don’t use a lot of imagination or creativity. I think it is an awesome philosophy if you incorporate it when you are younger. When they are older, they will still be using their imagination and they have the ability to continue and use it. They can’t think anything outside of what literally say. They use traditional root to find. They don’t interpret them. Especially with science, you want to go outside the box and the tradition, that is when you find a solution, that is when you find something incredible. People who are traditional won’t be able to find out but odd people like Albert Einstein will be able to figure it out. (Interview with Elizabeth, July 26, 2018)

Lucy observed that natural materials emphasized in Reggio Emilia schools encourage children to be more creative and to problem-solve. She shared in her interview:

From the center I came from, we didn’t use a lot of natural material. We learned to use a lot of kind of cookie-cutter, opening up a catalog, picking up a doll that comes with this. A lot of things were already made. There weren’t a lot of emergent. There was a lot of cookie cutter. I understand that parents may like to see that. But, what is the kid actually
learning when you say place this piece right here. They are not actually exploring the materials and using them. Whereas with Reggio having more process things rather than the product, I find a lot of value in that. In the process. It is they can create what they want to. Part of going back to how I feel about children, how are they gonna use those materials to solve problems. We talk about who they want to be, but we don’t talk about what problems they do wanna solve. If they want to solve the problem of not having enough food, then we can get them about these are ways that you can do that. Or figuring out. It is more about what problem they want to solve. (Interview with Lucy, October 19, 2018)

The importance given to creativity and imagination in Reggio Emilia philosophy is supported by Malaguzzi’s ideas. “Malaguzzi believed that all children are naturally creative and that they should have opportunities to develop their creative skills and expression” (p. 30). The Reggio Emilia approach has recognized children’s creative expression through the use of the term ‘the hundred languages of children’ (Edwards et al., 2012; Gandini et al., 2005; Vecchi, 2010). As such, the different ways children express themselves are nurtured. The role of the teacher is to listen to ways in which children express themselves. Gandini (2012) write that “creativity seems to find its power when adults are less tied to prescriptive methods, but instead become observers and interpreters of problematic situations” (p. 189). Educators have a role in children’s creative thinking. They create the conditions for creative thinking by not following a prescriptive method.

In the same way, Reggio Emilia schools see the hundred languages of materials (Schwall, 2005). Thornton and Brunton (2010) note that children are provided with open-ended materials which can be recycled material or natural material to develop their creativity. Providing open-ended materials encourage children to use their hundred languages and be creative.
Beauty and aesthetics are other components central to Reggio Emilia inspired schools. Director Laurie is very inspired by the look of Reggio Emilia inspired schools. She has not been to a Reggio tour but has seen pictures of Reggio Emilia schools on the internet. Laurie shares: “I was really excited one day. It was in SoHo. I walked past a childcare center and looked through the window. I walked to the owner and I said that there is nothing out there, but this tells me that this is a Reggio center. That is what I want. That is what I want to do. I looked through the window and tried to take everything that I could”. After visiting a Reggio Emilia inspired school in New York, it has become her goal to turn her school into a similar kind. Vecchi (2010) discusses the importance placed on aesthetics in Reggio Emilia. She states that “there is the sense of well-being when entering a place that is so well cared for and aesthetically pleasing, and that functions simply and so well” (p. 4). She writes that the aesthetic qualities that are valued help to enhance learning through empathy and relationship with place and its’ material.

**Delitto Preschool Lived Experiences**

In this theme, I discuss the finding regarding my second research question: How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the Delitto Preschool? In other words, what is the middle curriculum of the Delitto Preschool? When does these Reggio Emilia inspirations meet and become entangled with the expressions and realities of the centre’s local requirements and emplaced knowledge, practices and culture? I describe the live(d) reality of children and teachers’ lives. There are many factors which affect the lives of teachers in Delitto Preschool. These include the challenges they face as an early childhood educator in State College. In this section of my finding, I will discuss how these challenges affect the inspiration of Reggio Emilia in Delitto Preschool.

1. *Early Childhood Teachers lived experiences at Delitto Preschool*
2. **Teachers Challenges at Delitto Preschool**

3. **Children’s Lived Experiences**

*Early Childhood Teachers lived experiences at Delitto Preschool*

During my time at the preschool, six teachers left their position. The rate of teachers leaving their job at the Delitto Preschool is high, which makes it harder for the director to work toward her vision. Not having a permanent team makes it very difficult for director Laurie to work collectively towards her vision of becoming a Reggio Emilia inspired school. In Director Laurie’s view, early childhood teaching work is a stepping-stone for many teachers. She also stated during a conversation with me that some educators were not doing their work properly and that she was happy they decided to leave. Based on my observations, there are likely many reasons as to why teachers elect to leave their jobs at Delitto Preschool. For example, Keshvar left Delitto Preschool to work for an organization outside of the early childhood education, for better pay and benefits. Keshvar decided to leave her position at Delitto Preschool because she did not have a good relationship with one of the senior educators in her classroom Abi, a teacher in the infant toddler classroom, left because her two twin sons were presenting challenges for some of the other children in the school. Specifically, parents had complained that her sons were hitting their children. Thus, while the reasons for leaving Delitto Preschool varied, there was in fact a high rate of teacher turnover, which made it challenging for director Laurie to consistently educate the teachers about the Reggio Emilia philosophy and, importantly, to implement her broader vision for Delitto Preschool.

Children, and most of the teachers, adhere to different localities, which is to say they have different relationships with their local environment. Including the preschool and the infant and toddler program, there are four teachers: Rachel, Lucy, Anna, and Abi. Anna is from Lock
Haven and she completes a nearly one hour commute to State College each day. Rachel is from Bellefonte, a small town about 10 minutes from State College. Lucy is from Philipsburg, a small town that is about 30 minutes away from State College. Abi is the only teacher from State College. The director and the owner of the center, Laurie, also lives in State College. Chloe, who is the assistant director, commutes from Altoona, which is about one hour from State College by car. The summer camp had three teachers, Elizabeth and Ella, the director’s daughters, and Rahman. Rahman was from Lock Haven, Stella lived in State College with her mother Director Laurie, Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Director Laurie, had recently moved back to State College for the summer from North Carolina. Based on my interview with the educators, they view State College as a big town with a very diverse group of people. The experiences of children who attend Delitto Preschool is therefore quite different from experiences of the teachers. This is because their experiences are, in part, rooted in different localities. While it is not always possible, or even necessary, for the teachers and students to be from the same local environment, it can certainly make it easier for the teachers to connect with the children, their lives, and experiences. For example, there could be different cultural beliefs regarding early childhood education, or perhaps different understandings of children and childhood. The larger point being, when teachers and children share experiences within the same local area, they may be more inclined to provide additional resources to the children and also be able to relate to how the children interact with their community.

**Teachers Challenges at Delitto Preschool**

Teachers are in the process of figuring out what Reggio Emilia's inspiration is and having no specialized training in Reggio Emilia's philosophy makes it hard for them to implement the teachings. My interview indicates that none of the teachers, the director, and the associate
director received any specialized training on Reggio Emilia philosophy. The teacher’s understanding of Reggio Emilia's philosophy came from the knowledge director Laurie shared with them. One of the teachers attended a workshop on Reggio Emilia and others have self-taught themselves through academic books and other resources found on the internet. In addition, most of the teachers did not hear about Reggio Emilia before working at the Delitto Preschool. I interviewed one of the teachers, Elizabeth, who, as I mentioned, is the daughter of the director of the school. Here is an excerpt from our interview:

Tahmina: Before working at Delitto, did you have any prior knowledge about Reggio Emilia?

Elizabeth: No, until my mother decided to open a daycare. I didn’t even know it existed.

Tahmina: How do you get trained in Reggio Emilia?

Elizabeth: They did not have a formal training, like you can’t go and get training. You have to learn as you go if you don’t get classes at it.

Tahmina: Did you attend any workshop?

Elizabeth: No, I don’t. There is not anything unless you go to Italy.

Tahmina: There is not much in State College?

Elizabeth: No, for Montessori you can go to California and get training but there is nothing like that for Reggio.

Tahmina: Is that a challenge?

Elizabeth: Yes, that is. The stuff we have is from the internet and we have to wonder if that is Reggio. It is mostly from blogs and not a Reggio scholar. It is a challenge on what is real and what is practical.

Elizabeth: Is there any other challenge?
Tahmina: The challenge is really Reggio

Since many of the teachers do not have a substantive background on Reggio Emilia’s philosophy, they find it hard to reconcile the inspiration of Reggio Emilia with other local influences, such as Keystone STARS. As discussed earlier, Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) run by Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). It assesses the level of quality in early childhood care and education programs in Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, due to high teacher turn over, teachers are often not provided with professional development opportunities or regular staff meetings to discuss the Reggio Emilia philosophy. As I observed, director Laurie does not give workshops on Reggio inspired practices, nor does there appear to be any formal orientation to the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Rather, what does occur is often casual, for example, an informal conversation about Laurie’s interpretations of Reggio Emilia. When hiring teachers, Laurie does discuss some aspects of Reggio Emilia philosophy with recent hires. For example, I asked one of the teachers, Abi, whether or not they talk about Reggio Emilia during their initial or ongoing staff meetings. Her response was that it had been more than three months since their last staff meeting. She also said that their previous staff meetings did not serve as a training session on the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Moreover, teachers also work at different hours during the day, a matter which likely complicates Director Laurie’s attempts to provide professional development. In fact, all of the teachers have breaks at different times. Thus, they never have a moment in which it possible to gather in order to reflect on their teaching and the children’s experiences. In addition, it is challenging for Director Laurie to find experts in Reggio Emilia in State College, particularly those who can prepare teachers. She discusses this challenge in her interview:
On the east coast, there is not any place to send teachers to get training. We have a lot of books from Reggio that they can read. I have to find ways to train them. I am a certified Pennsylvania trainer. I can train them. But to train outside of here, I haven’t been able to find it. There is nobody I can call and say can you come and train us. Someone would do great if they come and train. There is a market for that (Interview with Laurie, July 30, 2019).

After all, director Laurie tries to train teachers, but she does not have formal education in Reggio Emilia philosophy herself. Her source of inspiration, as she stated in her interview, is the internet and academic books. She has not been on a tour of Reggio Emilia schools in Italy to personally experience and observes a Reggio Emilia school. However, she has observed Reggio Emilia schools outside State College. She prepares teachers based on her interpretation and knowledge of Reggio Emilia. While her interpretation orient teachers to some aspect of Reggio Emilia, having teachers reflect on Reggio Emilia’s pedagogical framework and philosophy will help Delitto Preschool serve its mission. In addition, perhaps giving teachers more time to reflect and discuss the philosophy of Reggio in relation to their cultural local context can help them find answers to the questions they have about Reggio Emilia.

*Children’s Lived Experiences*

The children at Delitto Preschool come with diverse lived experiences. Teachers echo the children’s diverse backgrounds in their interviews.

In the center, you have a lot of mixes. We have three kids that go home and unload hey. We have other kids who stayed in State College all their life and have never been on the farm. We have some kids who work on the farm. They go home and work. Their parents
ask them to be more responsible than other parents. It is a different work ethic. Most parents help them do everything. (Interview with Rahman, July 26, 2018)

I have all kinds of kids, I have a non-speaking child, I have a child who has developmental delays, I have a child that they are talking about starting medication this week being diagnosed with some kind of spectrum. I have kids just wanting all of my attention and testing because I am new. I have just huge dynamics of children. I have eight but I have every kind. (Interview with Lucy, October 19, 2018)

We have a diverse group of kids all the time. We have kids from a different faith background. We have some kids who are Islamic, some with special needs and some with some serious special needs. That kinds of bring a different culture into the camps. (Interview with Elizabeth, July 26, 2018)

To think with Aoki (1978/1980), the curriculum-as-live (d) draws from the children’s diverse lived experiences. The children bring their identities and characteristics into the center. Delitto Preschool educators recognize those differences that are at play amongst the children. The lived curriculum of Delitto Preschool has to center on the lived experiences of all the children including those not perceived as the locals. In the racial demographics of the school, we can see many hyphenated identities that form multi-racial and multinational identities. Some of these hyphenated identities are in tension with the local place. When Nasrat, an Egyptian-American child with North African features and curly hair, sat at the lunch table with his European-American peers at the summer camp program, Yuri asked him: “Where are you
from?” I wondered why Yuri was asking him that question. Does he not look local enough? Nasrat answered: “I was born in Regina, Canada and my family moved from Egypt to Canada a long time ago and now I live in the United States. I am from here.” I asked the director later whether his parents were international students and the director responded that they are from Harrisburg, which is the capital of Pennsylvania. The majority of the children in Delitto Preschool and centre country are from European decedents. A few other children are biracial. As per State College borough census, the racial demographic of State College is 78.4 % White, 11.2% Asian, 4.5% Black or African American, 4.3% Hispanic and Latino, 1.7% two or other races, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.1 % Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (United States Census Data, n.d). Since State College is a small town, it is predominantly European-American and children from any other racial group can be seen as outsiders. Thus, the lived curriculum of the school is based upon the dominant culture and hence it influences the children’s education and environment. How can hyphenated identities of children inform the curriculum of the classroom?

Thinking with Aoki’s concept of the curriculum-as-live (d), it is important to recognize the lived experiences of children. When teachers dwell between the curriculum-as-live(d) and the curriculum-as-plan, it is imperative for teachers to understand children’s lived experiences. On a Friday, I saw that there was a new child. I wondered and asked Lucy who he is. Lucy told me that “his name is Moh, but that’s not his real name.” He goes by Moh. Lucy also told me that “he does not speak English, I don’t know what language he speaks, I think some kind of Islamic dialect”. It has been a week since Moh was back and he does not speak any English and yet the teachers and director Laurie do not know his first language. Moh has been at Delitto for almost a year before going back to his home country during the summer and it has been a week that he is
back. The director told me that she does not know about him because the previous associate
director enrolled him. When interviewing Moh’s mother as part of my research, I asked what
language he speaks. His mother could not speak fluent English and told me that he speaks Tajik
and they are international students from Uzbekistan. To understand the lived experiences of
Moh, from Aoki’s perspective, is to hold the position that teachers should know more about him
than just his name. I think that Moh’s background, language, culture, and hybrid identity plays
an important role in his lived experiences at the center. I also wonder how he perceives his
experiences at Delitto Preschool. In order to blend in and assimilate into the dominant culture
and language, perhaps he has to leave behind his identity as Uzbek when entering the school.
This demonstrates that Delitto Preschool does not represent Moh’s lived experiences, nor does it
seem to allow for an open space where Moh is comfortable valuing and practicing his culture. I
had a conversation with Director Laurie about this very topic. I asked her about how she and the
staff value children’s differences. She stated that they try to accommodate anything that parents
would like us to consider. For example, a child’s parent would not like us to feed him pork and
we have considered that request. Moreover, she shares, “legally we are not allowed to ask
parents and children about their religion, sexuality, abilities and similar kind of differences.”
While some families might define their identity based on their religion and sexuality, they often
feel as if they have to strip off that identity before entering public spaces in the United States.
Thus, considering the legal requirements, Delitto Preschool middle curriculum practices does not
dwell much with diverse and marginalized children’s lived experiences.

Considering the current sociopolitical climate in the United States, especially with respect
to race, it is important that teachers take the time to talk about these topics with the children. In
my interview with Elizabeth, she spoke about a time when she was asked to stop talking about
race, at the request of the families. She said: “I have from the past discussed race. I had kids who harassed each other based on race. To get someone in trouble they would say that they are being racist to me. They had to sit down and talk about that. And there is the scientific background to that, and it works. But parents do not want us to push that”. This blurs the line between what teachers should be teaching children at school and how far they should go in accommodating the expectations of parents. Moreover, there are only three books which depict children of different racial groups at Delitto Preschool. While Reggio Emilia schools are about democracy and including the uniqueness of each child, at Delitto Preschool, it often depends on the comfortable level of the families. Based on the interviews conducted with families and my interaction with them, parents who are not confident about their English language abilities shy away from making suggestions to teachers, and may even feel intimidated, thus giving in to the norms set by the dominant group. Teachers may read storybooks that discuss diversity and race to implement the emphasis Reggio Emilia approach put on democracy and inclusion and to demonstrate race as a sociocultural phenomenon. Teachers need to examine power relations and they can do so by looking into antiracism education. Antiracist education focuses on the inequitable distribution of power, especially racial power (Mac Naughton, 2005; Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Local requirements: “Get them ready for ABC’s and 123’s”

In this theme, I discuss the finding regarding my second research question: How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the Delitto Preschool? In other words, what is the middle curriculum of the Delitto Preschool? When do these Reggio Emilia inspirations meet and become entangled with the expressions and realities of the centers’ local requirements and emplaced knowledge, practices and culture? I explain how the Reggio Emilia
inspiration becomes entangled with the expressions and realities of the centers’ local requirements particularly federal and state requirements, and folk pedagogy. I discuss state policies and other local discourses which effect Delitto Preschool’s middle curriculum. These discourses are influential in constituting the pedagogical and curricular practices of the teachers. State requirements have an impact on the ways in which Reggio Emilia inspiration is negotiated. I discuss four aspect of this theme:

• “We are able to ‘marry’ all of these things”
• School Readiness: Literacy
• Assessment tools
• Pedagogical Documentation: Kinderlime
• Branding Reggio Emilia

I will now describe the basics for these claims in data.

“We are able to ‘marry’ all of these things”

In Pennsylvania, preschools have to meet certain standards and regulations to be licensed by the Department of Human Services and Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). Preschools are evaluated by Pennsylvania’s Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development/Assistance, Resources, and Support) quality rating system. The Keystone STARS is a program by OCDEL to evaluate the quality of early learning centers. The purpose of the Keystone STARS is to support early care and education programs to achieve higher quality in addition to getting children ready for kindergarten (Barnard et al., 2006). The rating begins from STARS 1 and reaches STARS 4, which is the highest STARS level. The higher STARS mean a higher quality program. Delitto Preschool has reached the level of STARS 3 and wants to get to STARS 4. The rating system consists of 12
quality components such as staff qualification, staff development, child observation, curriculum, and assessment. The program also gets evaluated by the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale). These ratings are established based on 7 subscales such as space and furnishings, language reasoning, activities, program structure, and parents and staff. The descriptors cover the needs of children ages 2½ to 5 years of age (Barnard et al., 2006). A quality investigator completes the assessment annually by observing the center.

Sometimes the principles of Reggio Emilia work in harmony with the State of Pennsylvania standards and the STARS while at other times it does not. Delitto Preschool website (2019) states "we participate in the PA Keystone STARS program, there are some regulations and standards set by those agencies that you would not necessarily see or experience in a traditional Reggio Emilia Inspired center.” Director Laurie in my interview shares: “Being a licensed daycare in Pennsylvania, there are certain things that you have to do to satisfy the STARS and doesn’t necessarily fit in with Reggio. Finding a way to marry the two to make everybody happy. Keystone STARS wants some structures. It is not the kids leading the way. They can do it but they can’t be in a hundred control in order to meet the early standard. All of it we can do with Reggio, but you can’t do some of it” (Interview with Laurie, July 30, 2018). Moreover, she says that Keystone STARS requires us to do the calendars every day whereas Reggio Emilia inspiration does not emphasize doing calendars. Based on my observation, they do calendars and meet other requirements set by the Keystone STARS. One of the ways in which they marry the Reggio inspiration with state-set-standards is by providing the children with loose parts so that they can collage the first letter of their names. At other times, they respond to Reggio's inspiration depending on what is fitting. For example, Abi mentioned in her interview, “Reggio Emelia is not a curriculum. We use how it fits.” Reggio Emilia's inspiration can become
part of the curriculum when teachers can incorporate it. This suggests that Reggio Emilia is not
the standard or solely the planned or live(d) curriculum, it is in between the two curricula amidst
many other discourses. Furthermore, when having to choose between two conflicting discourses
often results in responding to the powerful view. One of the teachers, Keshvar, who joined
Delitto Preschool for a short time, shared with me that Delitto Preschool has to choose between
being a Reggio Emilia inspired school or getting a higher STARS ranking. The director is hoping
for a higher STARS rating, and the teachers have to work with standards to reach it. Therefore,
there’s an existing struggle between having the freedom and ability to fully establish a Reggio
Emilia inspired school versus having to follow state-regulated practices. This means that some
philosophical aspect of Reggio Emilia has to be compromised for the school to meet STARS
requirements. Furthermore, adhering to two conflicting views has created tension for teachers.
For example, Lucy in her interview mentioned that Reggio Emilia is about responding to
children’s interests and following an emergent curriculum. She said: “There is also emergent
curriculum coming in. I think they are working very closely.” However, in contrast, Keystone
STARS require planning lessons in advance. The teachers should plan lessons and follow a
teacher-directed approach to reach a higher STARS level. Moreover, she shared that “there is
also an environmental rating skill that we get rated and evaluated on where certain elements are
considered. Manipulative that goes with the blocks like a truck, people, those are all part of the
evaluation. The more we meet that criteria the higher our score and the benefits we can get from
meeting those materials”. This demonstrates that meeting the STARS and ECER ranking is more
of a priority because it provides benefits and ranking. Thus, STARS seem to have the upper hand
in this case and teachers are made to concentrate more on meeting the requirements set by
STARS than those taught by Reggio Emilia.
While the director sees the tension between Reggio Emilia's inspiration and the state licensing requirements, she interprets Reggio Emilia philosophy as one that is fluid and flexible. In her view, it is possible to be a Reggio Emilia inspired center while taking into consideration the local culture in addition to remaining true to the fundamental values of Reggio Emilia.

Director Laurie states in an interview that you can follow Reggio Emilia philosophy with what you have. As I observed, adding Reggio Emilia to existing discourses such as school readiness and developmentally appropriate practices do not serve the purpose of Reggio Emilia philosophy. When Reggio Emilia's inspiration becomes an add-on to standards and regulations instead of an established core philosophy, it implies that Reggio Emilia is not necessarily the focus of the program. The director draws on Reggio Emilia philosophy in addition to responding to Keystone STARS requirements.

**School Readiness: Literacy**

Delitto Preschool has taken the Early Learning Standard’s emphasis on literacy and numeracy to heart. The Pennsylvania Early Learning Standard (2014) for pre-kindergarten emphasizes different domains of knowledge ranging from STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) to skills such as creativity, problem-solving, scientific thinking and inquiry. The standard requires children to “differentiate between numbers and letters and letters and words” as well as “recognize and name some upper- and lower-case letters of the alphabet” (Early Learning Standard, 2014, p. 20). To meet the standard requirement, teachers have put more effort into ensuring children learn their alphabet. I observed that even arts and crafts are used to serve alphabet learning. This shows that although learning letters and numbers are not the core principle of Reggio Emilia philosophy, it is a core principle of Delitto Preschool.
Based on my interview, some families chose Delitto Preschool because it prepares their children for kindergarten. School readiness is a concern for many parents. Parental demand for numeracy and literacy skills before attending school has increased. As such, parents are powerful agents and they bring new discourses for teachers to work with. Zakir’s mother stated in her interview that she wants Delitto Preschool to prepare her son for kindergarten. He is learning to write. His motor skills are growing. “When they go into kindergarten they are right there, you know, where they need to be. No child left behind.” Some teachers find it challenging to accommodate parents’ demands as their job entails far more than simply teaching and caring for the children. One of the teachers Anna shared this very sentiment in her interview:

There is a higher expectation of what the people expect at state college. I think people have a higher expectation and their children are not there. I don’t mean that rudely. I think at this age they expect their children to be at a higher academic level but they are not there. So, they expect more from teachers. To get their child there but they don’t quite grasp that their child is not there yet. And for us to get their child where they want to be
is a lot of work. I think that they expect their children to know their ABC's, 123’s. we will get them there but right now, it won’t happen. Right now, I just can’t do it. I cook before I come. I am also in the office. I do a lot of things. (Interview with Anna, October 3, 2018)

While it may seem that parents are interested in the philosophy of Reggio Emilia at Delitto Preschool, for some of them, Delitto Preschool is important because it prepares their children for kindergarten. They are investing in their children to prepare them academically for their future education.

Teachers like Anna and Lucy, use different strategies to teach letters. Their first strategy is to teach the letter of the day during circle time. The second strategy is to incorporate letters in children’s art-making practices. For example, children will be given various kinds of generative materials to glue onto the letter of the day or the first letter of their name. Thirdly, sometimes teachers read a story that teaches the alphabet. For example, reading the “A for Apple” book, which contains a story about apples. Fourthly, sometimes the teacher plays a YouTube video in which the letter of the day is sung to the children. The last strategy is to give children worksheets to trace the letters of their names. All these strategies are used to make children learn their letters. Here is a short vignette, which demonstrates the emphasis Anna places on children learning the alphabet.

One day, Zakir and Cameron were sitting next to each other. They were both tracing the first letter of their names. Cameron was tracing the words “K and Kam” written in blue marker. Cameron has his head down to trace the first line of a whole page almost filled with K. Wanting to communicate something with Zakir, he turns his head toward him and says: “This this…” Anna walking towards him interrupts him and says: Cameron, you are
not leaving until you get it done. Do you need to go over to that table?” She points to the table across the room. Cameron looks at the table across the room and puts his two arms on his table. “Pick your book up and go over to that table,” Anna says. Cameron communicates, with hesitation, “No.” Anna’s voice gets louder and she says: “Pick it up and go.” Cameron with a sad face gently and quietly says, “I don’t want to go over that table.” Anna grabs her notebook and says: “You can’t focus. Come on!” Cameron goes to the other table to sit by himself. Anna says: “You have to focus. Come on! You are not focusing.” Cameron is very upset. He bends his head down and communicates that he does not want to do it. “You have to focus baby! You have to get it done.” Cameron with an upset face now moves the worksheet paper away from him and pushes toward the other end of the table as he makes a sound, “Em em.” Anna comes again and says, “You have to get it done. You will sit there longer, then. You have to focus, dear.” Cameron shows further rejection. He pushes his chair away from the table. Anna sees him, she comes and pushes him back. She stands right behind him and says again, “You have to focus.” She bends her head down and says: “If you could sit with him and still do your work. Are you gonna sit there and do your work?” Cameron does not respond at all. Anna repeats herself and slams her two hands on the table, “You either sit here and do your work or sit there. What do you want? Choose!” Cameron has his hand over his mouth and does not respond. Anna goes away. Cameron does not write. He puts his head on the chair. He sits there until lunchtime.

(Personal Field Notes, October 2018).
The above vignette demonstrates a teacher-directed approach to learning literacy. My intention in sharing this story is not to cast the teacher in an unpleasant light. Rather, my intention is to show the power of the discourse of readiness and the pressure it places on the teacher. As my data suggests, Anna wants the children to listen to the teacher and learn to focus before entering into the kindergarten class. While instruction based on worksheets does not serve the teachers’ overarching goal of developing a curricular approach that is inspired by Reggio Emilia, it does emphasize the Early Learning Standards (2014) valued by the parents whose children attend the center. While this approach is contrary to the Reggio Emilia philosophy and principles, it exemplifies how powerful the discourse of school readiness, parental demands, and Early Learning Standards (2014) are at Delitto Preschool. Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008), writing about the discourse of readiness, which is constructed by child-centeredness, argue that “readiness is assumed to be located within the child, resulting in a perspective in which the child (or his/her family) is blamed when progress does not occur” (p. 120). The discourse of school readiness is so prevalent that it overpowers children’s choices. Cameron shows a reaction against
writing the letters of his name (see Figure 8). Yet, Anna insisted to do so (see Figure 7). It makes me question why Anna was insisting. Perhaps Anna found Cameron’s action disrespectful because he was not listening to her or Anna was worried that he will not learn. According to Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2007), “in North America, early childhood programs are often viewed as preparation for school, while from a Reggio Emilia perspective children's educational experiences are valued in the here and now (p. 6). When I asked Anna about Reggio Emilia philosophy, she said that “I do kind of like 50/50 because most of our kindergarten and our schools here are not Reggio. But we still need to get them ready for ABCs, 123s”. Anna is more concerned about meeting family’s requests to prepare their children academically than about following Reggio Emilia principles. From her understanding, Reggio Emilia approach put emphasis on children’s art and play more than school readiness. The official educational discourses have influenced her practices. She believes that children need to know ABCs and 123s to succeed beyond Delitto Preschool and Reggio Emilia approach is unable to emphasis such skills.

Children like to draw when they are provided with writing time. In the preschool classroom, children have been practicing writing alphabets by writing their names on the whiteboard. Writing names have become a morning ritual for teachers Anna and Rahim. Anna uses a blue marker to write down all the children’s names on the whiteboard. She asks the children, ‘who is here today?’ She hands the white marker to Zakir who is sitting across from her. Together with all the children they sing, “Zakir is here today. Zakir is here today. It is a great day because Zakir is here today.” At the same time, Zakir uses the marker to write his name on the board. “How are you today Zakir?” Anna asks. Zakir responds: “Good.” Anna repeats and invites all the children to sing: “Zakir is good
today.” Anna asks teacher Rahim to switch with her. She gave the marker to Cameron. Cameron goes on the board to write his name. The children sing as he writes: “Cameron is here today. Cameron is here today. It is a great day because Cameron is here today.” The children attempt to copy the way their names are written on the board. Next, it is Charles’s turn. Charles takes the blue marker and writes an uppercase 'C' and a lower case 's'. After that, he starts drawing. He makes different shapes. Rahim takes the marker from him and says: “Alright, now we are drawing. We are not writing our names.” Khenza comes and writes his name. At this time, Cameron and Charles shout out their numbers loudly. Cameron says: “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,14.” Arif draws the first letter of his name which looks like a combination of A and F. He begins by scribbling and then drawing a little face. He soon realizes that he should not do that. He erases her drawing. Rahim sees that and he wipes Arif’s hand with a towel. Abigail continues to write A. Yasmin begins by scribbling and she continues to scribble. Rahim takes the marker from her and says: “Now we are just scribbling.” (Personal Field Notes, September 2018).

Figure 9: Anna writing children’s names   Figure 10: Mahal practicing the letters of her name.
Children scribble when it comes to writing their names. They are more interested in drawing instead of learning their names.

Literacy is also emphasized for students who attend the summer camp. As I observed, at some point during the day, children are provided with worksheets. Children are divided into groups based on their grades or understanding of the subjects. Math, language, art and science worksheets are provided to the children. The children most of the time complete them without the teachers’ help. When they are not sure about their answers, they exchange responses or copy each other’s answers. Some worksheets content relates to the lesson plan. For instance, while talking about metamorphosis, the science lesson worksheets were about the life cycle of a bee. The children were asked to glue the picture of a bee’s lifecycle to another page in a sequence. Once children complete the worksheets, teachers check the students’ worksheet before displaying it on the classroom walls.

![Image](image1.jpg)

*Figure 11: Tanin working on the worksheets Figure 12 and 13: Worksheet samples*

Delitto Preschool’s emphasis on school readiness is different from some of the qualities emphasized in Reggio Emilia schools. “A traditional, instrumentalized idea of education, where the teacher is seen as a neutral transmitter of a body of predetermined and societally sanctioned
knowledge and the child is constructed as a passive recipient” is problematized by the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Dahlberg et al., 2013). In Reggio’s view, knowledge becomes an act of co-construction when individuals socially construct it in relation to others (Rinaldi, 2006). Giving children worksheets to fill and marker to write does not allow room for a collaborative and co-constructive curriculum among the children and the educators. The worksheet in some ways transmits predetermined knowledge instead of allowing children to theorize their experiences from their live(d) experiences.

Assessment Tools

Delitto Preschool adhere to NAEYC’s ethics and the Early Learning Standards in planning their curriculum. They have not been accredited by NAEYC due to the funding it requires to get NAEYC’s accreditation, but they are hoping to get it. Both NAEYC and the Early Learning Standard require teachers to follow a developmental approach to teaching. According to the Early Learning Standards “instructional practices must embed the domains of development—cognitive, social-emotional, language, and physical” (Early Learning Standard, p. 4). Similarly, Keystone STARS requires that “results from observation-based assessments of children’s development are used for curriculum planning and instruction, individual child planning and referral to community resources. Teachers modify practices based on child assessment data” (Mercatoris, 2018). Thus, teachers' lessons and curriculum should reflect developmentally appropriate practices and match the age and developmental abilities of each child.

 Teachers plan their lessons based on the result of the children’s assessment. Delitto Preschool uses two different assessment tools: Work Sampling and Ounce Scale. Both of these tools adhere to DAP (Meisels et al., 1995; Meisels et al., 2010; Moreno, & Klute, 2011).
Teachers will complete an age-appropriate Ages and Stages Screening tool. As it states on Delitto’s (2018) website:

The teaching staff will also utilize the Ounce Scale (Birth – 3 Years) and the Work Sampling (3-5 Years) screening tools every October, February, and May. These assessment tools look at growth and development and help to drive the curriculum in collaboration with the teacher’s observations. Results will be recorded and shared with families prior to being filed within each child’s file. (para 4)

Similarly, Lucy notes in an interview that the assessment is founded on a “developmental checklist”, which considers “children’s abilities, based on their age and developmental stage”. When she started first, she said, “I am in the process of evaluating them [children]. I try to have a variety of levels of activities.” As my data suggests, teachers are encouraged to plan lessons according to each child’s development level. Anna shares that her lesson plans are based on a child’s developmental skills or delays. She states: “We look into their development.” She brought an example of one of the children who had developmental delays. She needed to plan lessons to aid in his development. Similarly, Abi shares that “I want them to work on a skill and find an idea that matches those skills. I wanted to work on fine motor skills.” This suggests that her lesson plan is based on specific activities to develop children’s fine motor skills. Taken together, when children’s developmental level becomes the measure for children’s abilities, the curriculum adheres to developmentally appropriate practices. In the same way, the ages and stages screening tool become a planned curriculum, which affects the live(d) curriculum of the
school. Instead of looking at children holistically, the ages and stages screening tool reduces the children to a checklist.

**Pedagogical Documentation: Kinderlime App**

Pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia is different from a traditional assessment tool used to evaluate children’s development. Pedagogical documentation is a form of visible listening, evaluation, professional development and a tool for research for educators (Rinaldi, 2006). Unlike the traditional assessments where children are evaluated in developmental stages such as cognitive and emotional, in pedagogical documentation, children’s development is viewed holistically (Dahlberg, 2012). Thus, pedagogical documentation is not the same as “developmental assessment” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2007, p. 8). For Davies (2014), documentation is not innocent but produces effects. She suggests that “it is important to re-emphasize, therefore, the vital role that documentation plays in opening up creative movement toward the not-yet-know, and in interrupting the quotidian practices through which life-as-usual is maintained” (2014, p. 28). Unlike documentation, with traditional developmental assessment children are reduced to a checklist and classified based on predetermined developmental categories. Teachers observe children based on their developmental needs. As opposed to developmental assessment, documentation aims to disrupt our preconceived notion about children’s theories while urging us instead to listen to the surprises that emerge in our work and experiences with children.

Using and experimenting with a variety of technological tools, teachers in Reggio Emilia schools pedagogically document children’s educational journeys to listen, understand and interpret each child’s thought process. Through pedagogical documentation, teachers attend to the emergent curriculum. Giamminuti (2013) describes the process of pedagogically
documenting children’s work: “to document is to observe children differently, to be aware of their learning processes, to marvel and wonder with them, to be curious and respectful, to listen, in daily life, every day” (p. 38). Documentation is about capturing children’s theories and dialogue about their lived experiences and making it visible to the public. For example, teachers display the documentation on classroom walls and also email documentation to children’s families (Mitchell et al., 2009). With the help of technological tools that help teachers record and distribute information about their child’s learning, documentation can help parents, teachers, and children create a strong community in which they can collaborate to help the children construct their knowledge (Vecchi, 2010). Thus, documentation becomes a site of dialogue, observation, and reflection where both children and teachers reflect on their experiences at the school.

As part of their documentation of children’s work, Delitto Preschool exhibit children’s artwork on the walls of the classroom to create an aesthetically pleasing environment. Children’s artwork is displayed without their pictures, statements or dialogues about the process of their work. Teachers provide materials for children to create their artwork and once completed, teachers exhibit their artwork in the hallway or inside the classroom. The purpose of the documentation in Reggio Emilia schools in Italy is not only about displaying the final artwork product but a way of sharing the children’s processes, theories and ideas (Vecchi, 2010). At Delitto Preschool, the final product is more valued because of its appealing look.

Teachers’ approach to documentation is different at Delitto Preschool and they interpret documentation as sharing information with the parents. They use an app called Kinderlime to share children’s engagement and experience with their parents. Kinderlime allows for signing in/out, online billing and payments, learning activities, parent connections and center management (Kinderlime, n.d). When I asked one of the educators, Rahim, how they are
documenting children’s work, he responded: “everything is in the app now”. When I spoke with director Laurie, she said that the app now allows them to go paperless whereas previously parents were provided with a paper that included information about children’s naptime, bowel movement, medication, and other required information. With the new app, all the necessary information is communicated with the parents.

Teachers use documentation spontaneously instead of using documentation as a catalyst for extending the project of inquiry or following an emergent curriculum. At any time of the day or during any kind of play, teachers take pictures of the children and share it with their parents. They mostly take pictures of the individual child and share it with his/her parents. Anna in her interview shares that parents have found the app very useful to communicate with staff. She says: “They [families] will let you know why my son’s diaper was dry. One time we had cheese in a row. The parent told us that you kind of had cheese three times in a row. Wow! You read it. You knew. They are right on there”. Families can read or see what happens in the center daily and sometimes they make suggestions based on their observations. The Kinderlime app serves as a platform used more for communicating with parents than documenting to understand children’s process of thinking, their theories, inquiries, concerns, and ideas.

Delitto Preschool uses pedagogical documentation as a tool to observe children’s developmental growth. Kinderlime app has a list of different activities, such as arts and crafts and math. Rahim says that when taking a picture of a child participating in an activity, you can mark how that particular activity aid in children’s development. For example, when children are playing with a ball you can click on gross motor skills. This suggests that children’s experiences are broken down into developmental paradigms and then shared with parents. The aim of
documentation in this case, as shown in Figures 14 and 15, is to make visible children’s development.

Figure 14 and 15: Documenting children’s activities and development on Kinderlime app

Documentation has taken a new form with Kinderlime and mainly centers on each child’s experience instead of making visible children’s collective lived experiences. With this app, documentation has taken an individualistic form since a child’s picture is taken during any kind of experience s/he is having and is instantly shared with the parents. From my interview with parents, Mahwash’s mother shared that she finds the new app very helpful because she can show pictures of what Mahwash is doing at school to her grandparents. However, these pictures are not displayed on the walls of the classroom for other families and children to reflect, discuss and learn how individual pictures of their children situate in a broader classroom experience. Moreover, I have not seen any of the teachers documenting children’s words or engaging in a dialogue during their artwork to understand children’s perspectives about their experiences. Teachers provide a brief sentence about what a child is doing. For example, it can be Mahwash and the ball. A discussion on how Mahwash theorizes the ball and experience the ball is not
shared on the app. Therefore, as shown in figure 16, the app is not a public platform for sharing children’s experiences and ideas, rather a means of sharing pictures and information.

![Kinderlime app](image)

Figure 16: Kinderlime app a private documentation tool

**Branding Reggio Emilia Approach**

Reggio Emilia's philosophy is getting popularity in the United States and other parts of the world. The director, Laurie, who is also the owner of Delitto Day-school opened the school in 2017 as a Reggio Emilia inspired center in State College. Unlike the municipality schools of Reggio Emilia, Delitto Preschool is not a collective endeavor initiated by the local community, but rather Laurie’s efforts, who decided to bring Reggio Emilia to State College. Honoring her European heritage, (Italian and Czech), Laurie sees the Reggio Emilia approach as a connection to her mother who was Italian.

Instead of being inspired by the pedagogical and curricular projects of Reggio Emilia, the business aspect of Reggio Emilia is getting more attention in the United States. Reggio Emilia philosophy is used as a business strategy to promote Delitto Preschool in the childcare market. In my interview with teacher Elizabeth who is also the daughter of the director, I was told: “it's
good branding wise to do something different.” Perhaps, Reggio Emilia is a new concept that generates capital as it attracts families and staff members. The director also told me that: “The people who know about Reggio tell us oh my god, once the people find this out, you are going to explode.” To get the attention, the director has chosen an Italian word to name the center instead of corresponding it to the local language, which is English. As she shared: “Delitto is an Italian word and it means from the beginning. It took me forever to find a name. I wanted it to be something unique and cool. One day, I was thinking and wondered about what the Italian word is for from the beginning. So, I googled it whatever and I really like the word. I also like Preschool, so it flows together Delitto Preschool.” She aims to make Delitto Preschool an exemplary Reggio Emilia inspired school. Thus, it can be argued that the Reggio Emilia philosophy is appealing because it is profitable as a business model.

4. “Teaching from Our Environment”

In this theme, I discuss the finding regarding my second research question again: How does this Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum and pedagogy live within the Delitto Preschool? In other words, what is the middle curriculum of the Delitto Preschool, when these Reggio Emilia inspirations meet and become entangled with the expressions and realities of the center’s local requirements and emplaced knowledge, practices and culture? I discuss how the teachers’ folk pedagogy about children and early childhood education inform their pedagogical and curricular approaches which then influence the middle curriculum of the school. I discuss four aspects of this theme:

• Teachers beliefs

• Assigning children in stations

• Behaving well with each other: Daily ritual
Holiday Curriculum

I will now describe the basics of these claims in data.

Teachers’ Beliefs

Teachers’ belief about children comes from their experiences, cultures, and education, which influence their theories about children. In my interview, I asked four teachers about their beliefs and all hold diverse beliefs about children. Two of them view children as sponges that soak and retain knowledge and information. The idea of children as sponges resonates with John Locke’s concept of children’s mind as a blank slate or ‘tabula rasa’ which suggests that children’s knowledge comes from experience and perceptions (Rekret, 2018). It is hard to understand where the teacher’s concept of children is coming from. One can attribute these beliefs to folk pedagogy (Bruner, 1996; Ilić & Bojović, 2016). However, viewing children as sponges does not adhere to Reggio Emilia’s philosophy since Reggio Emilia schools argue against the image of the children as sponges. For them, children are born rich with hundreds of languages and abilities (Edwards et al., 2011, Moss, 2019; Vecchi, 2010). In contrast to the first two teachers, the second two teachers think children have their own opinions and they make their own decisions. For example, Anna stated in her interview that “they are very stubborn. It’s their way or no way”. Thinking of children as stubborn means that children speak up. Both concepts of children can be viewed as problematic. The concept of children as sponges suggests that children do not have any potential whereas seeing children as stubborn suggests challenging behaviors. This understanding comes from teachers’ experiences or cultural beliefs, which then influences the ways in which teachers view children and design curriculum spaces for them.

Here is data depicting teachers’ beliefs about children, based on their interviews:
Director Laurie’s beliefs about children

I feel that children are sponges. They will learn everything and anything that they can. I want to foster that. I want to be that person who gives them the ability to learn as much as they can. Whatever it is that they want to learn about. I believe in doing that in a way where we are following their lead. I want this center to be the Reggio center of state college. I want other people to be like us. We go along with the Reggio philosophy as well. I also feel like it is a collaboration and a respect. Children are supposed to be respected as much as adults versus being told what to do all the time. (Interview with Laurie, July 30, 2018)

Lucy, a preschool teacher, beliefs about children

They are such wonderful little humans that have so much potentials. I see them just these little sponges that will soak out everything that you will put out in front of them. They are so receptive, and you can learn so much from them about yourself with how they are. I learn something new every day when I come to work. I feel they are very awesome. I am very fortunate to be somewhere that I can work with these families and I can help these kids to be kind, productive members of the society. I really want to enforce the kindness piece. I feel like if we can be kind and respective to each other. We can accomplish anything. I totally believe that these kids through play, work, problem-solving they are gonna be able to just change this world in such a neat way. (Interview with Lucy, October 19, 2018)
Anna, a preschool and Infants teacher’s belief about children

They are very impressionable. They have their own opinion. They are very stubborn. It’s their way or no way. I do believe that no matter what values and no matter what the parents try to instill with them. They gather their own conclusion. They don’t grasp that concept. They are kind of little coolest. They are not sure yet. They like to test the little boundaries. I think they know that it is not right, but they are still gonna test your and their boundaries. (Interview with Anna, October 3, 2018)

Rachel, an infant toddler teacher’s belief about children

I have realized that you have to follow them and do what they want to do. Learning through nature and the environment there. (Interview with Rachel, October, 10, 2018).

The local culture of the school emphasizes children’s manners. As I observed, one of the things that matter for teachers is children behaving with respect. The children refer to their teacher as Ms. Anna and Mr. Rahim. Children raise their hands before speaking. One day during circle time, one of the children, Mahwash, started talking without raising her hand. Anna reminded her by saying, “we are working on the new rules. We will follow the rules whether a new person is there or not. Raise your hands, listen and talk.” Similarly, Rahim reminds children to make good choices when they are not behaving well. When Cameron was talking during circle time, Rahim said: “Your friend is not making good choices. You don’t need to follow him. You are in charge of your own behavior.” Moreover, teachers also communicate with parents whether children were behaving well or not. Here is an example from my data:

Cameron’s grandmother came to pick him up. Cameron’s grandmother asked him about
his day. She promised to reward him with ice cream if he had a good day. Cameron shouted around the classroom that he had a good day. Anna was his teacher and she can tell whether he had a good day or not. Goodness in this case refers to children behaving nicely and listening to the teachers. Cameron came to ask Anna to tell his grandmother that he had a good day. He said:

“I had a good day, Anna, right? Right Anna?” He keeps repeating his sentence. At the same time begging her to say that he had a good day. Anna who had a serious facial expression did not say anything for a while. Later, she nodded and said yes you had a good day. Cameron run happily toward his grandma and called out loud, “I had a good day.” (Personal Field Notes, September 2019)

Being polite, raising your hands when talking and listening to teachers is a few examples of the required manners. The emphasis on manner comes from cultural and individual beliefs, not from Reggio Emilia's inspiration and state standards. Consequently, these local discourses have an impact on the relationship teachers and children have with each other.

**Behaving well with each other: Daily Ritual**

Lucy has been initiating a dialogue among the children to ensure that they behave well with each other. Every morning the children gather for story time. Lucy reads a book titled *I Can Be a Super Friend by Grant and Lentini* to encourage children to be friends with each other. After reading the story, they have a meeting to discuss issues with each other. Here is an example of her meeting and discussions about the storybook.
Lucy reads: “I like going to school and playing with my friends and teachers. I also like playing at home. But sometimes I have a hard time. I feel frustrated or angry. If I feel this way, I need to stop, think and do. I can also remember to stop. Take two breaths and be a super friend and go with the flow. If I still have a hard time. I can ask an adult for help. I can go to an adult and say: can you help me, please? Ms. Lucy will always be here to help.”

After reading a few pages from the book, she has a dialogue with the children about their experiences.

Lucy: Let's share if we had any problems with our friends this morning. Charles, you came to me this morning very concerned. You and Zakir were very frustrated because I think you said some not very nice words to each other.

Lucy wanted to initiate a dialogue between Zakir and Charles about their conflict this morning. However, none of them shared their feelings.

Lucy: Maybe later you will share your feelings. When you feel more comfortable. You can talk to me about it, okay. It is nice to talk about this to let our friends know. Khenza has her hands up. Khenza is there something wrong.

Khenza says: Jade was pulling my hand.

Lucy: And you didn't like that.

Khenza: No

Lucy: “Did you use your words? Did you say, Remington, please stop? Did you do that?

Khenza: Yes

Lucy: High Five
Lucy: Let's see what super friends do again. They use nice words. Gentle hands and feet. They look with their eyes, they look with their ears, they take turns with toys. They go with the flow. Everyone is happy when I am a super friend. We will try to be super friends today."

(Personal Field Notes, November 2019)

During my interview with Lucy, I asked why she is trying to initiate dialogue among children, and she responded, "dialogue has been important for me. It's about having a dialogue instead of assuming where the person is coming from or assuming that they know. That is why I think it is so important that they have this dialogue and they are encouraged to give the safe space that they can talk about anything." As I observed, discussing friendship encouraged children to communicate with each other. In another way, as Lucy calls it, children “use their words” more. In other words, children use the vocabulary they learned from the storybook when they are faced with a conflict. Throughout the day, children face conflict over toys and not getting along with one another. Lucy uses those opportunities to encourage them to discuss their issues and create a socially just classroom where they are not bullying each other. She questions children and attempts to resolve a problem with them. Bringing all the children together to discuss their issues create a communal space that fosters good relationship amongst children.

Sticker feelings is another strategy that Lucy uses to understand children and their feelings. She has stickers of different feelings on the whiteboard. Children can choose from a range of emotions with faces and words. Each child picks up a sticker and tells Lucy how they feel and how they want to be greeted. The classroom greeter or Lucy will give him or her a hug, a fist bump, or a handshake depending on the child's comfortability. Each week one child acts as a classroom greeter. The responsibility of the classroom greeter is to make the children feel
better and interact in a positive way. Furthermore, Lucy asks children why they feel a certain way. They have a dialogue to discuss the what, why and how questions in regard to their feelings. Lucy says: "You will encounter so many people in life and you might not totally agree with what they do but you can still work together and collaborate. You are going to be in school and at work and places that you don't agree with. But you still need to be kind to them and treat them the way you want to be treated." The purpose of discussing feelings is to provide time and space for children to listen to each other's reasons and to live well with each other. It is also a way to understand children’s emotions better and teach them words to express their feelings.

*Assigning children in stations*

Assigning each child to play in each station individually is a daily ritual despite the fact that children like to play collaboratively in each station. During unstructured playtime, Anna assigns each child in each station. The children who listen and behave nicely get to choose their station first. Sometimes some children are not happy with their assigned station because the majority of them like to play on the sand table. There are also times that children like to play with each other, however, they are reminded to play individually with materials only. The children can switch stations after asking Anna. I asked Anna whether she will allow more than one child to play in a station. She nods her head and said: "Not this group." The preschool group is seen as an active, loud and energetic group. Sometimes Anna reminds children that "Listen! You guys are way too hyper today." In order to avoid the children's conflict over toys, one child per station is Anna’s solution to keep them engaged and quiet. Children stay in one station and play quietly with materials at that station.

Lucy’s practice differed from Anna initially regarding station assignment, but later, she began to assign children in the way as Anna. Lucy joined Delitto Preschool after Anna. When
observing Lucy at first, I saw more than one child per station. However, after a few weeks, she adapted to the previous culture of classroom pedagogy. Instead of having many children in one station, she has one child per station except for the block station. In the block station, she has two children. I became curious about what happened and why she decided on station assistantship instead of having children play where they would like. I wonder whether Anna’s approach had an impact on her. I interviewed Lucy and asked her about some of her pedagogical approaches.

Tahmina: How do you assign them in stations?

Lucy: Having the center time, I want them to understand my expectations in how I want them to play in the center. Not necessarily dictating their play but being respectful of the equipment and the materials that are there. The loose parts can’t just be dumped. I expect them to clean up the sand table. That is why we are very structured with our center time right now. Eventually, I want them to plan their day. Moving from blocks to train and to that. But, until we get the planning, I need to help them plan.

Tahmina: How did you go about planning to have one child per station?

Lucy: It is kind of my idea to have one or two kids to learn those expectations. It is also allowing me to learn who interact well with each other. It is also a matter of controlling. I feel like it is easy for them to learn those expectations one of them, they are not being influenced by a peer to misuse or stray their time.

(Interview with Lucy, October 19, 2018)

She also shared that when children learn about her expectations then she can have more than one child in each station. Her teaching pedagogy changed over time. Even though the assignment of station lived in Delitto Preschool before Lucy, Lucy embraced that cultural practice from Anna in her pedagogy. Anna has been influential as she often communicates to other teachers what
works best with the preschool children. This shows that some aspect of the curriculum-as-live(d) is encultured. Teachers' practices are informed by their local culture and belief systems. This vignette below provides an example of playing stations.

One day, I observed Zakir and Charles playing with tapes and paper. Charles had a green piece of paper. He put layers of packing tape on it. They were both trying to make a book. They create stories with tapes as they are ripping it and feeling its sticky texture. Zakir said to Charles: “I got some tape! You know what I will do with tape. Tape you!” Laughingly and playfully they were both exchanging the packing tape. Zakir takes a piece of tape and tapes Charles’s mouth. Charles removes the tape from his mouth and put it on his eyes. Now that he is blindfolded, he tries to find Zakir. He finds Zakir and gives him a hug. Zakir takes the tape from Charles’s eyes. Charles then takes the tape and cuts that piece of tape. Charles gets back to his green sheet of paper. He layers the tape in a pyramid shape to make a Christmas tree. He finds a small bottle of black paint. When he drips paint on his paper a big portion of paint drips on the paper and the table. Zakir shouts: “You are making a mess on the table now.” Lucy asks: “Okay, what are you doing?” Zakir explains as he points to the bottle of paint: “He found that!” Lucy asks again: “what did I say to do with it?” Charles and Zakir are not responding. Lucy says: “Ms. Lucy asked you if you found paint put it by the sink.” Charles says: I was trying to put a little bit on there then.” Lucy says: “You were trying to put a little bit there, but what did Ms. Lucy told you to do?” Charles says: “Put it by the sink”. Lucy responds: “I told you to put by the sink. No paint.” Lucy gives a rug to Charles to clean up.
When the timer rings, Lucy announces: “Okay, guys, we need to pause.” She assigns children to the station again. Charles and Zakir both want to play in the block area. She tells them that she cannot have them both in the same station. One of them has to pick another station. Zakir decides to go to the imagination station. Charles joins Cameron in the block station. Zakir is the only one in the Imagination station. There is a big bin with many fluffy animals inside the bin. Zakir picks up a fluffy and engages in solitary play with the toys. Sometimes, he communicates with Charles from a distance. Charles asks him: “what are you doing?” He answers: “Finding puppets.” He finds puppets and lines them up on a little counter. He communicates to him what he is doing. He continues his play until it is time to shift to another station.

(Personal Field Notes, January 18, 2019)

The Holiday Curriculum

At the preschool classroom and the infant-toddler classroom, the art exploration centers on the national holidays and seasonal changes. The craft activities done with children are mostly centered on national holidays or events such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanza, valentine’s day, Halloween, Dr. Seuss’s birthday and St. Patrick’s Day. In addition, sometimes children play with holiday related materials. For example, during Hanukah children in Abi’s class played a dreidel game. Teachers also read stories that relate to each holiday. Here are parts of Abi’s interview which discuss the holiday art curriculum:

We did Hanukah, we did Kwanza, we did Christmas last week. We are winter solicits this week. Winter things like snowflakes, snowman and things like that. Because it was the holiday season, so I did holiday. Before that, it was Thanksgiving, I did one thing on thanksgiving. On holiday, I plan for one week on holidays. I don’t only give more space
to Santa and Christmas than I give to Kwanza and Hanukah because I want kids to be are and respectful of other cultures. Before that, we had on Halloween. When there is no holiday, we don’t have much crafts. (Interview with Abi, December 18, 2018)

I provide examples of holiday crafts in Figures 17, 18 and 19. Most of the shapes are pre-cut by the teachers. The children glue, color or paint on the pre-cut papers. Indeed, as Abi stated in her interview, she gives equal attention to all holidays. However, from my observation, not all the holidays are celebrated. I did not see any crafts celebrating Black Heritage and Hispanic Heritage months. I question whether teachers prefer celebrating some common holidays to others.

Figure 17: Christmas holiday craft    Figure 18: shamrock for St. Patrick’s Day

Figure 19: Easter Eggs
Discussions

Discussion 1: Indwelling Midst Tensions: Discourses of Instrumentalization

The middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool is subjected to many competing discourses – discourse of the curriculum-as-plan and the discourse of curriculum-as-live(d). Foucault (as cited in Hall, 2001) defines discourse as a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment…since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do - our conduct - all practices have a discursive aspect” (p. 75). In the field of early childhood education, an example of discourse is, as Ortlipp, Arthur and Woodrow (2011) describe, “theoretical and conceptual resources on which the field of early education draws upon, such as standards and professional codes of ethics; the national policy context; the structural and institutional relationships; and the language that is used to communicate with others” (p. 57). The
teachers and the director are navigating their practices through various kinds of conflicting and collaborative discourses. These discourses are evident in both the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d). Aoki (1993) writes that “to live in the middle between the language of the curriculum-as-plan and the language of lived curricula is to live amidst discourses that are different in kind” (p. 206). The discourse from the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) are different and as such “they resist integration” (p. 207). According to Aoki (1993) the discourse from curriculum-as-plan is abstract. It is “written for faceless people in a homogenous realm” whereas the discourse from curriculum-as-live (d) is “the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and language people speak and live” (p. 207). As curriculum-as-plan, the state and the national standards are powerful discourses which place pressure in the middle curriculum. NAEYC, DAP, ECER, Pennsylvania Early Learning Standard, Work Sampling, Ounce Scale, CLASS, Keystone STARS, the Creative Curriculum Package, Reggio Emilia inspiration and family’s requests are all influential bodies which bring forth particular discourses in both curriculum and pedagogy. Since each of these discourses communicate different knowledges and thus demand for different pedagogical practices and curriculum frameworks, educators have to respond to one over the other in their practice. Delitto Preschool’s (2019) website states that ”we participate in the PA Keystone STARS program, there are some regulations and standards set by those agencies that you would not necessarily see or experience in a traditional Reggio Emilia-inspired center” (para. 3). Hence, preschools in Pennsylvania have to meet the standards and regulations set by the Pennsylvania state. Amidst many of these conflicting or collaborative discourses, the most powerful body, which in this case is Pennsylvania state requirements, become the hegemonic discourse. As such, it holds teachers accountable and governs educators’ practices.
In curriculum-as-live(d), various discourses create tension for teachers, particularly when these discourses do not communicate the same knowledge and information. Teachers’ folk pedagogy and individual cultural beliefs, combined with federal and state regulations and Reggio Emilia inspiration, create diverse and often conflicting theories of childhood, image of the child, image of the educator and the image of the school. All of these theories of childhood matter because they produce different discourses which in turn produces effects and consequences. To consider, teachers’ folk pedagogy, folk pedagogical beliefs matter because they have a profound impact on teachers’ practices. As my data suggests, teachers’ notion of children as sponges do not come from state and national standards or Reggio Emilia philosophy, but rather from cultural practices and folk pedagogy. Teachers’ image of children as sponges suggests that children will absorb all the knowledge and information passed on to them by their teachers. Therefore, the image of the teacher is someone who provides knowledge for children. As my data shows, the notion of knowledge as co-constructed between the children, teacher, materials, space, place, environment and families is neither fully acknowledged nor observed in practice.

Bearing in mind Foucault’s (1984) warning that “everything is dangerous” (p. 343), upholding conflicting discourses is problematic as it does not serve the pedagogical and curricular purposes of all or any of them. However, as teacher dwell midst the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d), some discourses are served at one time of the day and others are adhered to when they hold power. For example, the indoor space in school is given considerable attention when the program quality assessors assess the environment using the ECER instruments for Keystone STARS monitoring. At other times, such as when a child is ready to move onto the kindergarten, academic readiness matters. Hence, instead of holding onto one or another, teachers move in between these discourses and are always in the process of
negotiating them. These discourses “currently determin[e] which forms of knowledge are to be valued and upheld and which are to be devalued and discarded” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 105). However, teachers are often pressured by families and authority figures, such as the director, on what decision to make and when to make it. Despite the existence of various discourses, children’s families create new discourses for teachers to work with. Therefore, these dominant discourses constrain teachers’ knowledge and practices. Teachers’ decisions to choose long term project inquiry over school readiness to prepare curriculum can have a consequence for them. Because teachers are in a power relationship and accountable to families as well as to the director and quality assessor from Keystone STARS, their practices respond to those powerful agents.

Delitto Preschool is working hard to reach the highest quality rating established by the Keystone STARS and, as Liz stated in her interview, the Keystone STARS determines subsidies for the school based on the STAR level. According to the Keystone STARS’s grant requirements, child-care programs should be at the STAR 2 or above to receive a subsidy for every child they serve (The Pennsylvania Key, 2018). Delitto Preschool qualifies for funding as it has reached STAR 3. Therefore, teachers respond to the requirements and work to meet and maintain the standards as stated in Early Learning Standard and Keystone STARS to receive continuous funds.

The ways in which teachers understand curriculum influence their pedagogical orientation. Currently, Delitto Preschool educators are entangled with complexities in their curriculum. Director Laurie in my interview shared: “Being a licensed daycare in Pennsylvania, there are certain things that you have to do to satisfy the STARS and doesn’t necessarily fit in with Reggio. Finding a way to marry the two to make everybody happy. Keystone STARS wants
some structures. It is not the kids leading the way. They can do it, but they can’t be in hundred percent in control in order to meet the early standard. All of it we can do with Reggio, but you can’t do some of it.” For example, the Keystone STARS quality assessor will assess teachers weekly lesson plan when evaluating the center. To be qualified for funding, meeting the requirement of Keystone STARS is important and necessary for Delitto even though it does not go well with their interpretation of Reggio inspiration.

The state and national standards for preschools dominate the curriculum, pedagogy, teachers’ disposition and orientation to children. Due to the state and federal pressures, teachers continue to negotiate the middle curriculum. Early childhood schools in the United States undergo many regulations which prevents teachers from indwelling midst curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d). Often, teachers simply implement the curriculum-as-plan without attending or responding to the living experiences of children, ideas, materials, curriculum, events, families, their own experiences with children, and so on. As such, the role of an educator becomes a technician who works toward achieving the standards set by the state. Their approach to project-based learning is to use the ideas from the Creative Curriculum package to prepare children for academic life and manners in kindergarten. Children, as subjects, need to meet the standards, goals, outcomes, objectives, developmental milestones, and behaviour expectations as articulated in the curriculum-as-plan. However, children do exercise agency as they resist and negotiate the middle curriculum. How might children’s ideas, inquiries, interests, curiosities, wonder, and experiences lead to a project-based learning? What kind of environment can educators create to foster a project-based approach amongst children? This calls for a need to indwell, linger, and attend to the experiences that are lived amongst children using the theoretical and pedagogical approach from Reggio Emilia. For example, embodying a pedagogy of listening
and using pedagogical documentation to attend to the live(d) and make it part of the plan, and continuously engaging in this cyclical practice, opens up spaces where teachers can dialogue between the curriculum-as-plan and the live(d) in ways that embraces the complexities, multiplicities, and diversities of what is living and lived. Regardless of whether Reggio is there, the dwelling is important to go beyond the anything goes approach or simply applying or implementing pre-planned lesson plans to meet the standards.

Delitto Preschool’s curriculum mirrors the curriculum of many early childhood centers in the United States. While preschools or early childhood centers outside Pennsylvania State follow different standards, regulations, policies and legislations, the discourse of quality and standardization seems to be a dominant one in the United States. Scholars in the field of early childhood education particularly those adhering to reconceptualization movement (see Bloch, Swadener & Cannella, 2014; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Delaney, 2018; Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Mac Naughton, 2005; Manning, Thirumurthy & Field, 2012; Mevawalla, 2013; Moss, 2019; Moss, 2014; Penn, 2005; Pence, 2011; Robinson & Diaz, 2005; Ryan, & Grieshaber, 2005; Tobin et al., 2009) have been concerned about the dominances of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) as the ‘best’ and quality approach to early childhood education. Moss (2014) discusses that developmental knowledge from psychology and its developmentally appropriate practices, coined in terms of ‘high quality’ approach, become technologies that work toward producing subjects to meet predetermined goals. Evidence-based, programmes, quality, investment, outcomes, returns, assessment scales, human capital are some of the vocabularies used to place the discourse of quality in curriculum (Moss, 2014). Manning, Thirumurthy and Field (2012) warn us about the hegemonic power of DAP. According to them, DAP with its Western research presents itself as ‘universal’ truth and standard-based practices. In this case, as Mac Naughton
(2005) writes, “Developmental truths express authoritative discourses about children and childhood” (p.24). Not only does DAP produce discourses about children and childhood, it also governs educators’ theoretical framework, practices, curricular approach, intention and orientation.

Lenz-Taguchi (2010) suggests understanding the structural power of policies, regulations and standards and the ways in which these structural systems guide theory, practice and decision making. At Delitto Preschool, as a structural power, DAP and evaluation technologies such as CLASS, ECERS, Keystone STARS, construct the understanding of what constitutes best practice. Quality and best practices here are defined as standards and criteria based on developmental theories of learning. Hence, the structural influences guiding curriculum demonstrate that teachers and other practitioners have limited power. Power comes from outside the classroom, from the institutions, organizations, and knowledge produced by scientists, politicians and civil servants. “Practice becomes an arena of passive material entities that are regulated by active structures and specific identifiable powerful subjects, who are a part of these overarching, power-producing and basically unchangeable structures” (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. 25). The strong presence of the structural powers is evident when the quality assessor regulates the curriculum of Delitto and rates Delitto’s performance using developmentally appropriate models of assessment.

With the standardized model of DAP, educators become doers who use developmental truth to “normalize, classify, distribute, and regulate children” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p.33). This standardized model assumes a curriculum implementation that takes the form of instrumentalization. The curriculum implementation in this case becomes “implementation as instrumental action” (Aoki, 1983, p. 112). Implementation as instrumental action draws from a
business model in which the curriculum producer (Creative curriculum packages, DAP and Early Learning Standard) provides a service to curriculum consumer (Delitto Preschool). Teachers simply become an employee for the service provider and service consumer. “Within this perspective, a competent teacher-implenter is one who has skills and technique oriented toward efficient control” (p. 113). Teachers’ roles are reduced to applying the curriculum-as-plan and controlling any variables that do not fit the standard measurement of quality. As Moss (2014, 2019) reminds us with standardized practices, evidence-based policy and practice, teachers become technical practitioners who comply and apply the set of norms and policies written by policy makers in the classroom. Thus, as proposed by Aoki, an instrumental view of implementation is not effective for implementing curriculum as situational praxis since it undermines the teacher’s interpretation of their practice and the opportunity to dwell in the zone between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d).

**Professionalism: Early Childhood Educators**

Early childhood educators have always struggled for recognition of their profession. A teacher’s professional identity can be understood as “how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others” (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). The advocates in the field of early childhood education have challenged the image of an educator as a babysitter or daycare provider (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2019). Early childhood educators have challenged their public image of themselves (Ortlipp et al., 2011). In Pennsylvania, teachers want to be recognized as professional educators. What prevents teachers from having equal status as K-12 educators are the low wages early childhood educators receive. The early childhood profession is also very laborious physically, mentally, emotionally as well as other ways. In addition to being with children, Delitto Preschool’s teachers perform all the housekeeping duties which include
vacuuming, cleaning the toilet, kitchen, etc. As my data shows, teachers’ turnover rate at Delitto Preschool is very high. When I discussed the issue with director Laurie, she spoke about the challenge of finding and keeping qualified early childhood educators. Therefore, there is a higher rate of teacher turnover and less interest in joining the profession. For some, the profession becomes a steppingstone for a future higher paid position outside of the early childhood field. Not having a permanent staff that can work toward Delitto Preschool’s visions as Reggio Emilia inspired center continues to be a challenge for director Laurie.

The role of an educator is central in what and how discourses get negotiated in the middle curriculum. Who is a professional early childhood educator? The answer to this question is relative and contextual. To think with a post-structural perspective, professional identities are no longer fixed identities. According to Ortlipp, Arthur and Woodrow (2011), a professional identity, like other identities, is multiple, contingent and ambiguous, and constructed through discourses. As such, early childhood educator’s professional identity is always becoming, emerging and being constructed. The discourse around early childhood education will influence the ways in which early childhood educators construct their identities. In the United States, the early childhood profession draws from DAP and NAEYC to construct their professional identity. Osgood (2006) discusses that the early childhood education field in the United Kingdom has become very regularized by the state. Early childhood educators have to grapple with demands for accountability and standardized approaches in their practice. Similarly, in the United States, the regulating bodies such as Keystone STARS, ECER, CLASS, and the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards, become agents of control in educators’ practices. The profession of early childhood and the professional identity of an early childhood educator is already defined through a standardized practice. Teachers are so submissive meeting the demands of the standard that
they are unable to negotiate and construct their professional commitment and what it means to be a professional educator. As Osgood (2006) writes, “neo-liberal policy reforms have resulted in greatly reduced autonomy as a consequence of the regulatory gaze and accompanying directives and diktats” (p. 6). A neoliberal control of profession through standards, quality assessor and ranking of early childhood settings provide very limited autonomy for teachers. Osgood uses Foucault’s (1995) notion of disciplinary power or disciplinary technology to demonstrate how teachers are under surveillance to conduct a normalized practice. Foucault (1995) states that “discipline makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustains itself by its own mechanism and which, for spectacle of public events, substitutes the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes” (p. 177). The existence of such a regulatory gaze or disciplinary technology instills fear in educators. They deem themselves accountable and work toward implementing the curriculum-as-plan to meet the state standards and other requirements.

Since teachers are pressured to draw from competing discourses in their practice, privileging one discourse over another excludes the other (Foucault, 2003). Thinking about the hegemonic power of standards, teachers give up on the “power-effect” that standards have (Foucault, 2003, p. 252). Not only is it important to understand the disciplinary effects of regulations, but it is also crucial to encourage teachers to “negotiate regulation not in a vacuum, but mindful of contextual influences” (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007, p. 117). Thus, discussing these discourses is important for understanding the lived realities of teachers as they navigate and negotiate their practices. Moreover, for educators as professionals, Osgood (2006) suggests “to critically appraise, not just themselves as professionals, but the social and political context within which they are located” (p. 11). Thus, educators need to define their practice and where they stand in relation to their context and the power dynamics affecting their practice.
In the United States, the educators have turned to DAP to construct their identity as professionals. As Tobin et al. (2009) argue “for many early childhood educators, DAP became a professional code, a source of professional pride, and the call letters in the battle against formal, academic instruction of young children” (p. 84). Delitto Preschool sees the need to be part of a professional body such as NAEYC. NAEYC’s (2009) code of professionalism advocates for outcome assessments and the use of DAP. Rather than observing children to understand their experiences, teachers instead use DAP to observe children to classify and assess them based on established categories. Knowledge of child development defines who the child is. When teachers draw from DAP their practices become more technocratic and less relational and contextualized, which tends to position children as subjects defined by their perceived needs and abilities. Teachers’ practices and approaches to learning tend to center on interventions that aim to help children meet a predetermined milestone. Developmental practices followed by screening and assessments comprise the core value of NAEYC’s (2009) standard for early childhood professionals. However, the Reggio Emilia philosophy sees teachers beyond facilitators of DAP who co-construct knowledge through play and experimentation and project-based learning with children (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2019). In fact, as Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) write, the Reggio approach is an alternative to standardized practice which relies on predefined learning outcomes. Nonetheless, it is more credible for teachers to be accredited by NAEYC’s (2009) teaching certification. Drawing from these perspectives, as my data suggested, Anna, abides by the professionalism criteria as set by NAEYC (2009) and deems her role as more than someone who simply plays with children. She facilitates developmentally appropriate art practices for children, and she ensures that children are ready for kindergarten. The success of preschool and her role can be measured when children do well in kindergarten. Holding onto the
discourse of Reggio Emilia or DAP results in different teachers’ subjectivities, then affect how teachers define their role and their job responsibilities.

Aoki (1984) sees the identity of teachers as defining and driving the curriculum. Walkerdine (1990) demonstrates in her research that classroom teachers construct, produce and maintain the truth they create about children and childhood. Not only do classroom teachers follow the truths from the curriculum-as-plan, but they also create their truth about children and childhood. Teachers must deconstruct how and to what extent their theoretical framework as well as the truth they adhere to guide their practice and the impact of their practice on children, families and themselves. Lenz-Taguchi (2010) suggests that “teachers who felt the collective emancipative effect of thinking of power-production in terms of discourses and discursive practices started to question more actively the way they have understood what a child might or can be differently” (p. 19). When teachers question the hegemonic power of DAP and what it does or does not then they will be able to deconstruct their image of the child, childhood, education, and the image of themselves. Developmental stage theory as Mac Naughton (2005) writes, has “settled so firmly into the fabric of early childhood studies that its familiarity makes it just seem ‘right’, ‘best’ and ‘ethical’” (p. 1). At Delitto Preschool, teachers collectively need to critically reflect on their practice and understand the powerful effect of various discourses including DAP to better dwell between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d).

The early childhood profession is still struggling with the image of a ‘daycare.’ Delitto preschool, as stated on their website, is a daycare and a school. While the word daycare has the stigma that emphasizes care within the profession, it does not convey that emphasis on the idea of education. Working in a daycare simply means taking care of children. As such, educators may attend to the lived experience of children as if they live their lives with the children.
Children are provided with toys to play with and the educator’s role is to ensure the children’s safety. This notion of early childhood education is taken for granted in the middle curriculum. Instead of residing in the zone of tensionality and dwelling between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d), teachers spend the day going through daily routines and rituals with children in the same way that parents may go through their days with their children. What is the difference between an early childhood education setting and home? In this case, teachers follow an anything-goes approach to curriculum. There has to be a plan that educators should develop by dwelling between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived. Attending to the lived experience pedagogically does not only ensure children’s safety or taking care of them only, it means dwelling with children to co-construct a shared understanding and knowledge about themselves and the world.

Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) discusses the discourse of readiness in early childhood education. She writes how an adult role is privileged to categorize children as ready and not ready. In this case, “adults have legitimized the power of surveillance as pedagogy, without the need for permission or critique” (p. 118). Any event or a moment at the children's setting can be approached in two ways: as a disciplinary power or pedagogical learning moment. The teacher’s image and role in both of these situations differ and produce different pedagogies and dispositions with children. The educator with disciplinary power tries to conform children’s learning, behavior and ways of being into an established discipline to meet the standards and regulations. The child as a subject has to meet the goals set by such disciplines. When children are engaged in the act of painting, for example, teachers asking children to do a handprint demonstrate that the teacher already has an outcome in mind. Teachers meet this outcome by directing children. At circle time, based on my observation, bodies that sit and listen in contrast
to bodies that move, talk and act are the desired subjects; children’s bodies are reminded to listen and behave. Another example of disciplinary power is allocating time for children’s bodies to move. This allocation might be the only time that they can move, dance and act which categorizes the human body into functions that we want them to do versus how they want to be in a particular situation. From this perspective, a body becomes a docile body when it is subjected and used by the others. A docile body has no power and acts as a political puppet. Foucault (1995) argues that docile bodies are created through discipline. “These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines” (p.137). Discipline creates a particular subject which is a docile subject.

An alternative to disciplinary power could be to see pedagogical significance of the moment. Van Manen (2008) writes, “In everyday life in classrooms, the thousand and one things that teachers do, say, or do-not-do, all have practical pedagogical significance” (p. 1). This means that teachers make pedagogical choices all the time. Schulte (2015) writes that “pedagogy is both self-constituting and mutually constituted, contingent on the immediacy of one’s circumstances, yet determined as well by the connections that one elects to make and the unspoken values and tendencies that inform these choices” (pp. 547-548). Teachers may make pedagogical choices collectively or individually by drawing from their educational background, folk pedagogy and other discourses. What can be helpful in understanding that teachers are aware of what choices they are making is to see what kind of theoretical framework is informing their practice. They may decide to use pedagogical documentation from Reggio Emilia to better understand the processes of children’s meaning making and its significance pedagogically. Lenz-Taguchi (2010) advocates for seeing theory and practice working alongside each other and one
of the ways that the divide between theory and practice can be challenged is to understand the “mechanism, forces, and powers involved in what constitute pedagogical practice” (p. 24). Certainly, theories are powerful in guiding practice. Teachers may respond to a moment pedagogically when they can make decisions to let go of control or anything goes approach and work toward pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2006) and pedagogy of thoughtfulness (Van Manen, 2002). Anna’s project on apple was intentional. She created a gathering space to engage with children in a project on apple. She resided in the middle curriculum when sharing stories about apple and having children respond back to the story.

It is imperative to find ways for educators to participate in circles of critical reflection to deconstruct their practice and understand the impact of the middle curriculum practices on children’s learning and subjectivities. To change the perception of children as little beings and innocents requires a shift in values and beliefs and opportunities for new learning. Aoki (1986/1999) sees critical action as thoughtful action. He writes that “in critical reflection, the actor, through the critical analytic process, discovers and makes explicit the tacit and hidden assumptions and intentions held” (p. 145). According to Kind (S. Kind, Personal communication, September 21, 2020), curriculum always has an intention. What are teachers’ pedagogical and curricular intentions at Delitto Preschool? The way in which curriculum is composed in the middle curriculum and put into practice has to be intentional. Discussing what is it that has to be responded to, attended to, released or freed as teachers dwell between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live (d) can help educators understand their assumptions and intentions. Being mindful is another quality that Aoki (1992) purposes. He argues that mindfulness allows listening to what a situation is asking for. This means attending to the lived experiences of human and more than human entities while being aware of pedagogical and curricular attention.
Attunement invites teachers to listen to materials, things, and their pedagogical practices in relation to becoming sensitive to children’s processes (Kind et al., 2018). An attunement to children’s process and teachers’ subjectivities requires being with children and listening to them instead of reducing children to the demands of standards and assessments. Ross and Manion (2012) think with Tim Ingold to conceptualize curriculum as an “education of attention” (p. 310). Attuning to the presence, attuning to the children’s experiences, attuning to families and children’s culture, background, race, ethnicity, abilities, and class to understand who they are and how can the curriculum ensure that they are globally minded and locally rooted individuals. Aoki (1992) also suggests being thoughtful: “Thoughtfulness as an embodied doing and being—thought and soul embodied in the oneness of the lived moment” (p. 196). Teachers are always in the process of becoming. As such, embodying a pedagogy that is situated in place, is thoughtful, responsive, mindful, and engages in critical reflection will aid in their journey of becoming.

**Discussion 2: Neoliberal Market Economy and Reggio Emilia**

Educational institutions for young children are governed by powerful economies and neoliberal politics. Neoliberalism in the United States context, as Smith (2014), argues dates back to Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980s when he privileged privatization of public services. As Smith (2014) explains, “neoliberalism redefined the rules of obligation between governments and peoples to privilege the free operation of a global market system over the state as the primary means for solving social problems” (p. 370). This definition explains how business principles were adopted to deliver public services. This means that in the field of education, neoliberalism has favored and promoted privatization of early childhood settings, preparing children for the global job market, inventing and implementing best practice and managerial techniques for teaching, creating standards and measurement tools to ensure quality,
good citizens, competition, development, academic readiness, etc. In short, as Smith (2014) writes, it reduces education to business and commercializes the school environment. Aoki (1991) reminds us about the difference in business and education. “Business deals with materials and people as resources—as beings that are things (note, dehumanization). Education deals with people—with beings that are human, making education a venture different from business” (p. 435). This also means attempting to make curriculum a product and curricular and pedagogical cookie-cutter approaches with a desirable and predictable outcome.

Many early childhood scholars (Cho & Couse, 2008; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2019) are concerned with how the United States has favored neoliberalism and discourse of quality and high return in early childhood education. Unlike Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, early childhood education in the United States is a private endeavor, not a public one (Cho & Couse, 2008; Mintz, 2004). Like all other forms of investment, early childhood education is an investment that has to generate profit. Instead of collectively driven by the public, like the ones in Reggio Emilia, early childhood education becomes a business. Moss (2014/2019) writes about the story of quality and high return which is also a neoliberal construction. Privileging the story of quality and high return is not a global practice; however, Moss (2019) explains that studies from the United States seem to give more credibility to it. Wang (2010) writes that “in the U.S., education is currently under the spell of politicians, businessmen and the conservative public in the standardization movement” (P. 284). With neoliberal discourses, standardization or any other approaches that can maximize profit are what is valued and matters.

Neoliberal change, as Moss (2014) suggests, attempts to bring change to maximize profits. As a private business, early childhood education settings compete with each other to attract consumers. In the United States, Reggio Emilia philosophy enters the neoliberal discourse
and its inspiration is used as a service to increase children’s enrollment at the center. As Elizabeth, one of the teachers, states during her interview, “it’s good branding wise to do something different”. Reggio Emilia's inspiration, then, is turned into a business model or a new brand name. Director Laurie also told me that: “The people who know about Reggio tell us oh my god, once the people find this out, you are going to explode.” Therefore, Reggio Emilia’s inspiration becomes a commodity to serve and attract middle- and upper-class families.

**Who does/doesn’t Reggio Emilia inspiration serve?**

Looking back at the history of Reggio Emilia in Italy, the establishment of municipal schools happened due to a collective public endeavor, mainly driven by women, to challenge the political and social climax of the country and to create social movements and social change. Cavallini et al. (2011) explain that “the opening of locally-run early years education was both a consequence and engine for political, social and cultural transformation” (p. 206). This suggests that the schools of Reggio Emilia have made decisions for what they wanted and stood for and have since been committed to this work. As Cavallini et al. (2011) writes the change for which they worked toward endured conflicts of opinions and did not come easily. There were debates about the culture of childhood and school, the minimal role of the Catholic church in early childhood education and so on (Cavallini et al., 2011). However, change was not seen as impossible. What if we see a similar movement in countries outside of Italy? What is it that the early childhood settings in the United States want to stand for? Tobin et al. (2009) argues that “Reggio Emilia gets stripped of its politics, of its socialism, of the elements that are objectionable to many Americans, and what gets embraced are those parts of Reggio Emilia most attractive to American middle-class sensibilities” (p. 233). In the United States., Reggio Emilia is not seen as an inspired philosophy that can bring social change or socialist values. As mentioned
before, it becomes instead a marketing strategy for recruiting middle- and upper-class families. This means that middle-class dominant values construct the inspiration of Reggio Emilia and the philosophy of the school. Many changes have to take place in the U.S. education policy, curricular approach, and the regularization and standardization of schools by the state in order for Reggio Emilia inspiration to have the same impact in the United States as it has in Italy.

Reggio Emilia philosophy is understood and practiced as a child-centered approach. The educators at Delitto Preschool state in their interview that Reggio Emilia is about children leading the way. Letting children have full autonomy over the curriculum with no teacher intervention seemed to be also problematic for some teachers. Due to the requirements from Keystone STARS, teachers have to intervene. In this context, is Reggio Emilia a child-centered approach? Boucher (2019), an artist, who has been on the Australian study tour of Reggio Emilia, grapples with the idea of Reggio Emilia's inspiration for a while. She does not find the child or human-centric approach within Reggio helpful for fostering pedagogies that attend to more than human and posthumanism paradigms. She writes that “the child-(human) centric approach within Reggio didn’t seem to offer a way to respond to the posthuman ideas I was beginning to cobble together” (p. 47). The projects (see Cavallini et al., 2011) from Reggio Emilia paint a romantic view of child-centered pedagogy.

Aoki (1993) questions child-centeredness approach and asks: Where is “the self/other context, the dialogical context, within which any person, including the child, dwells” (p. 289). Child-centeredness is not a new concept in the United States. Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) remind us that child-centeredness is strictly tied with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). “Child-centered pedagogy perpetuates the dominant ideology that reified a universal child and describes that child as progressing through predetermined stages of human
development” (p. 117). Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) makes it clear that in the United States, DAP has long promoted the idea of child-centeredness. A child-centered approach also privileges the dominant, Euro-Western view of learning and knowledge. Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) state that children from a diverse cultural background are at a disadvantage when they have to follow the dominant culture's knowledge. At Delitto Preschool, immigrant children and children whose first language is not English struggle to be the child who can lead. They have to first conform to the dominant views before they can become a child that can make an impression.

Another aspect of the child-centered approach is the notion of giving choice to children. It is assumed that in Reggio Emilia schools’ children have many choices. To follow children’s lead is to let them make choices of their own. Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) states that choice is an illusion. Children may choose the material to work and play with, however, adults control the choices that are given to children by bringing specific materials and by curating a particular environment. Furthermore, an additional aspect of the child-centered approach is following children’s interest in the curriculum. Delitto Preschool also conceptualizes Reggio Emilia's pedagogy as following children’s interests. When presenting some aspects of my research project at a conference, I was asked how an educator can follow the interests of many children. Whose interest is prioritized and whose is not? At Delitto Preschool, Lucy shared in her interview that she brought dinosaurs out for children who were interested in them. Yet, Aoki (1993) offers a different perspective on approaching children’s interest, he writes:

We might begin to be more alert to where we are when we say "a child is interested" or "a teacher is interested." "Interest" comes from "inter/esse" (esse—to be), being in the "inter." So "to be interested" is to be in the intertextual spaces of inter-faces, the places
where "betweens" and "ands" reside, the spaces where "and" is no mere conjoining word but, more so, a place of difference, where something different can happen or be created, where whatever is created comes through as a voice that grows in the middle. (p. 282)

Aoki’s conceptualization of the curriculum asks us to enter the space in-between where something different or new can be created. He asks us to dwell in the midst of the middle to compose inquiries, narratives, stories, intentional engagements in an artistic and poetic way. With a child-centered approach, we are only attending to the curriculum-as-lived, focusing on the lived experiences of the children without attending to a curricular and pedagogical plan that embraces the middle curriculum and the multiplicities of the curriculum.

Aoki (1993) wants us to decenter the child-centered curriculum. Curriculum for him lives in the space between and among the child, the teacher, or the subject. A Reggio Emilia inspired school in West Coast Canada challenges the child-centered approach from Reggio Emilia. Kind et al. (2018) explain that in this school, “we are not always interested in documenting children’s meaning, because our image of the child challenges the rational and objective thinker” (p. 42). They borrow from feminist philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway to write that their image of the child comes from this idea of “subjects become-with rather than already exist as bounded individuals” (p. 42). They contend that a child constitutes her/his subjectivity as they encounter other human beings and entities beyond humans.

However, Cannella and Viruru (1997/2008) critiques child-centeredness because it promotes western middle-class capitalist values and liberal goals which emphasize the development of autonomy, personal choice, and isolated individuals. Boucher (2019), who has worked at Reggio Emilia inspired schools in Australia, finds it challenging to embrace a static Euro-Western materials discourse. She found that a common world framework (Taylor &
Giugni, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015), where nurture and culture are entangled and constitute each other, offered her movement beyond a humanist paradigm practiced in the Reggio Emilia approach. Lenz-Taguchi (2010) writes that understanding learning in terms of “different matter – human and non-human – making themselves intelligible to each other, the inter- and trans-disciplinary classroom and its practices that set out to go beyond the theory/practice binary divide will offer multiple possibilities of understanding and knowing” (p. 6). Recognizing learning as constructed through engagement with different materials offers multiple possibilities for knowing and learning. This is relevant to Delitto Preschool’s case. While the school understands Reggio Emilia as nature and natural materials, the approach to working with these natural materials is guided by the humanist paradigm where the material’s agency is not considered (see Kind et al., 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). A common world framework asks us to think about relations between and amongst humans and more than humans (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Taylor, 2017). Humans, in this case, is a part of an interdependent web of relationships with the more-than-human world. Moss (2019) suggests that “relations, not the child, are central to everything” (p. 152). Aoki (1993) echoes this when he states that the curriculum should center on relationships between humans and the world. Lenz-Taguchi (2010) calls us to attend to an intra-action relationship, a relationship between humans and more than human entities, materials, things, and the environment. According to her, materials have an active role in shaping reality and discourses. Similarly, Jardine, Friesen & Clifford (2006) suggests that “teaching the curricular abundance around us is less a behavior we “do” than “a way we carry ourselves in the world, the way we come, through experience, to live in a world full of life, full of relations and obligations and address” (p. xii). Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., (2017) writes that our pedagogies respond to the
relations we have with the world. How might Delitto Preschool’s middle curriculum attend to a relational pedagogy? What curricular obligations and pedagogical shifts are necessary to attend to human and more than human relations?

There could be different understandings and interpretations of Reggio Emilia in the United States and outside of the United States. These understandings come from the cultural and political context of the place or the transformation of information. It is also possible for concepts to get lost, recomposed or revived in translations. Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) explain that the Reggio approach became a cultural object through the deliberation of books, DVDs and exhibitions. They also write that most of the cultural objects from Reggio were translated into the English language. In these processes of translation, Anglo-Americans have ascribed their cultural meaning onto Reggio's cultural objectives. For example, at Delitto Preschool, Reggio Emilia's inspiration is understood as also incorporating loose parts in the curriculum. However, the idea of loose parts comes from American scholar Simon Nicholson. In fact, Delitto’s understanding of pedagogical documentation aligns more with DAP than Reggio Emilia’s conceptualization and purpose of pedagogical documentation. Children’s developmental milestones are communicated through pedagogical documentation. This suggests that meanings and ideas shift as they are practiced. Since language and culture are intertwined, through translation of Reggio Emilia's cultural object into English language, it supports English cultural values even outside of Italy. As such, there is the danger of misrepresentation or the beauty of innovation in translation of ideas.

According to Aoki (2000), “Western ideology dominated for five centuries as the only valid source to ‘knowing’” (p. 326). However, he is optimistic that the Western world is becoming more accepting of different worldviews. In diverse places such as the United States,
with multiple cultures, languages, knowledge, and conceptions of children, art and aesthetics collide in a single place, how might teachers dwell with such multiplicities in the middle curriculum? What gets privileged? Whose lives, practices, and knowledge become marginalized? Tuck and McKenzie (2015) argue that “these places-specific differences do not amount only to ‘diversity,’ but rather in many cases exemplify and help establish forms of inequity, colonization, and other forms of oppression” (p. 36). Diversity in educational settings are not equally valued and celebrated. In a local place including the school settings, majorities rule over minorities. Dominant culture, knowledge, values, systems, and beliefs influence the daily lives and practices of all people who live within a particular place and likewise the lived curriculum of the children’s center. At Delitto Preschool, the majority of the children and educators are visibly European-American. Thus, the lived experience of children from diverse religious, linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds are marginalized. Additionally, the local knowledge of the Indigenous people, particularly the Susquehannock people whose land Delitto Preschool is situated in, is not part of the curriculum. There is no children’s storybook that discusses the knowledge of Susquehannock people.

It is possible to discuss colonization with younger children, elementary school-age children and older. It is important not to censor certain topics since it is a lived reality for children and most others residing in that same environment. McCoy, Tuck, and McKenzie (2016) write about how a critical engagement with colonial legacies is absent from the United States place-based education. From their perspective, settler-colonizers perspectives share their knowledge without considering other knowledges. They define colonization as a phenomenon that is very much alive in this day, even more so than the past. For example, the Delitto summer camp teachers took children to Columbus Chapel and Boal Mansion Museum. The Columbus
Chapel and Boal Mansion Museum showcase a collection from Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer who first came to North America in 1492. Chapel and Boal Mansion Museum (n.d) state on their website that “the Columbus Chapel is the most important Columbus collection on the North American continent. It was part of the Columbus Castle in Austria, Spain, and was inherited in 1908 by Mathilde de Lagarde Boal from her Aunt Victoria Columbus and imported to Boalsburg in 1909 by her husband, Colonel Theodore Davis Boal” (paras. 1). The children and educators saw the Columbus collection and celebrated Christopher Columbus as a heroic figure who discovered North America. After their visit, children drew what they saw at the mansion. Josh drew an armory and a few other children drew other interesting encounters from their visit. However, there was no discussion about how Columbus colonized the country and what happened to the Indigenous people. Columbus was depicted as a ‘success story’ while his efforts to strip the Indigenous peoples of their land, culture, and identity were absent from the narrative. McCoy, Tuck, and McKenzie (2016) hope that place-based education seriously contextualizes settler colonialism and work toward decolonization. Decolonization work deconstructs power relations between the oppressed and the dominant group. Understanding our current locality of State College without paying regards to its many years of history will not only be unjust to many stories and past histories but it will also be a disservice to the children of that area. The kind of stories we tell children about the places we inhibit matters in how children create an understanding of the place and its human and more than human entities. “Stories thus carry out labor; creating, maintaining, and/or shifting narratives about the places in which we live and how they produce us and them” (McCoy et al., 2016, p. 34). The story of Columbus discovering State College disregards the Susquehannock people’s millennial civilizations and stories. The stories we tell about Columbus and other historical figures without considering different dimensions of
that story and the power relation is incredibly problematic as it alters history in favor of the dominant group.

**Can and should Reggio Emilia be recreated?**

This thesis aimed to present the middle curriculum of a Reggio Emilia inspired school with its various complexities. Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) write that there is a need to critically examine Reggio Emilia's inspiration especially when it is presented in parts. I have presented one story of a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool in a small town in the United States, however, Reggio Emilia inspiration can be expressed differently in other parts of the United States.

My study highlights the complexities and the context of an early childhood center curriculum. The encounter between Reggio Emilia's inspiration and Delitto Preschool has created a space of tension in Delitto Preschool’s curriculum. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) remind us that “encounters that are not necessarily good or bad. These are risky, worldly encounters that affect us, provoke us to think and feel, attach us to the world and detach us from it, force us into action, …bring us into questions” (p. 1). Understanding Reggio Emilia's inspiration as an encounter suggests a space of confrontation and opportunity. Thinking deeply about such an encounter, it forces us to see what it does and what did it generate or produce. It has created a rupture, as Aoki (1986/1991) writes, a space of tension or a pedagogical third space. Aoki (1986/1991) explains: “In fact, it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung” (p. 162). The space of tension is enabling and emergent spaces. It shakes the status quo and the taken for granted approach to early childhood curriculum, pedagogy, and practices. Being in this space is
productive because it forces educators and the directors to think about what Reggio Emilia is or how different is Reggio Emilia from their current or previous approach. Teachers at Delitto Preschool reside in this space of tension. However, in the last few days of my research study, I asked Lucy, one of the teachers, and director Laurie about whether there are any difficulties in being a Reggio Emilia inspired center. Sometimes there is a tendency for teachers to say that they have figured Reggio Emilia inspiration out. This thinking is shared because the director and the teachers do not want to be seen as vulnerable. However, teachers should not move away from the pedagogical space of tension as it generates newness and it unsettles normative and hegemonic practices.

Reggio Emilia’s inspiration takes a new form at Delitto Preschool which may be contrary to how it was intended. Emily, one of the teachers, told me in an interview that Reggio Emilia is not a curriculum but a philosophy of thinking. Understanding and merging Reggio Emilia’s thoughts with the local context of the school has been a challenge for the teachers. Reggio Emilia philosophy does not contain a method, nor a prescribed curriculum, but rather principles (Stremmel, 2012). What does it mean for the teachers to be inspired by Reggio Emilia and how does an early childhood center leverage these inspirations? While Delitto directors, and teachers are certain about their interpretation of Reggio Emilia, they find it hard to implement those ideas as intended in their local context due to the powerful discourses (Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards, DAP, ECER, Folk Pedagogy) affecting the local philosophy and pedagogy. For instance, pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia drives pedagogy and curricular approaches, make learning visible, open up spaces for dialogues, interpretation, and transformation (Rinaldi, 2012, Dahlberg, 2012) whereas, at Delitto Preschool, it is interpreted as communicating with parents and assessing children’s development. Sorzio and
Campbell-Barr (2019) writes that “becoming incorporated into objects that travel in a globalized society, the Reggio approach undergoes the risk of receiving a different set of meanings when recontextualized into different socio-political conditions, because it requires a relevant financial, architectural, and pedagogical investment” (p. 8). When merged with teachers’ folk pedagogy and their beliefs about education in their local context, Reggio Emilia principles take a new form.

Art and aesthetic make the foundation of learning in Reggio Emilia schools in Italy (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). Children’s artistic projects and processes of experimentation are given considerable attention. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) explain that “they [Reggio Emilia schools] have engaged with the arts, not as an add-on or extra, a subject of study, or even a brief experiment, but as a deep, sustained commitment to artistic ways of knowing and being” (p. 11). At Delitto Preschool, art and artistic practices are not separate from developmentally appropriate practices. Art is used as a medium to develop children’s fine and motor skills and bring out their inner self-expression and creativity. Based on my interview with Anna, one of the teachers, parents view Reggio Emilia inspired art as a free expression or blob art (See figure 21). When children are given the brush to paint what they want, it ends up being blob art. According to the teachers, parents like planned and uniform art better (see figure 22). Despite the existence of various discourses, parents create new discourses for teachers to work with. As per Anna’s interview, parents prefer artwork that looks cute and finished. In response to parents' preference for uniformed and planned art, the teachers cut paper in animal shapes or flowers and then have children glue loose parts or paint on it. Providing children with loose parts and glue sticks to glue are neither art nor Reggio inspired. Making such crafts is more product-oriented and the process of creating and making as well as children’s ideas and stories that emerges through the process of
making are not given considerable attention. Kind et al. (2018) reminds us that in early childhood education, artistic creation is seen as an “individual and interior process” where the work emerges from the child’s mind and becomes visible through materials (p. 43). Delitto Preschool relies on a developmental understanding of children’s artwork where children’s inner creativity emerges as they take the brush to paint what resides in their innate imagination.

Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) is concerned with how the inspiration from Reggio Emilia is taken in North America. They write that “in Reggio-inspired schools and practices, there is a tendency to try to make things look like Reggio rather than trying, as Lehrer describes, to figure out how things work” (p. 11). Often, the schools are inspired by the way Reggio Emilia schools look. Boucher (2019) echoes this statement when she writes that “I was hyper-aware of the uptake of the Reggio aesthetic as a particular ‘look’ and a marketing spiel about how services were ‘doing Reggio’” (pp. 45-46). Similarly, Delitto Preschool has conceptualized Reggio's inspiration as having natural and loose parts for artistic projects, having natural and artificial lights to brighten the space, and crystal-clear plastic or glass jars that have natural materials in it, etc. Focusing on the look of Reggio Emilia is problematic because the goal becomes copying and replicating what is seen regardless of the context in which the centers are located or the ideas and
theories guiding the work. What gets forgotten in the act of copying is the theoretical framework, philosophy, and principles of Reggio Emilia. Reggio Emilia's inspiration gets reduced to particular things that are put in particular areas inside the center. We are reminded by Rinaldi (2006) that “but perhaps most important, Reggio is a unique body of theory and practice about working with young children and their families, produced from a very particular historical, cultural and political context” (p. 1). Pedagogy of listening, art, aesthetic and relationship, emergent curriculum, project-based learning and the concept of the hundred languages of children all offer a theoretical framework. Reggio Emilia schools in Italy should be studied in light of the theories and practices that are very cultural, historical and political. Some of these theories, such as pedagogy of listening, like any other theoretical work can be taken outside of Italy and live in contexts that give life to it.

Capilano University Children’s Center, located on the West Coast of Canada, draws inspiration from Reggio Emilia. Kind et al. (2018) explain that “while certainly finding inspiration in Reggio Emilia, our effort has also been to find out, in emergent and experimental ways, what is unique to us – what is singularly ours in ethical, aesthetic, pedagogical, and curricular senses on the west coast of Canada” (p. 41). The ethical, aesthetical, pedagogical and curricular choices have to be grounded in the context of the school. This comes when teachers dwell between the curriculum-as-live (d) and the curriculum-as-plan. Reggio Emilia may offer inspiration to some of these choices. However, ethical and political choices are always situational and have to be made based on what happens at a given moment in a particular place. Kind et al. (2018) borrows pedagogies from Reggio Emilia without copying them. They discuss that “we innovate as we constantly create something new” (p.42). One can innovate something
when they know what it is that they are innovating from. Understanding Reggio Emilia's inspiration first is important to challenge it and then to innovate new ways with and from it.

Reggio Emilia inspired centers, such as Delitto Preschool, have to go beyond the surface of the pictures they see on the internet to contextualize Reggio's inspiration in their context. Elizabeth mentioned in her interview that Reggio Emilia is a “loose philosophy. It can translate in a lot of different ways as long as you are out there, and you are involved.” When something is seen very loose it can be used in any way that fits and is not forced or prioritized to become the core philosophy. Reggio Emilia inspired schools in the United States are not accountable to Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. The inspiration from Reggio Emilia, in comparison to Keystone STARS, does not hold the same level of accountability and power at Delitto Preschool. Thus, Reggio Emilia's inspirations become part of the curriculum as they fit. Although Reggio Emilia's inspiration is seen as an alternative to DAP and standardized approaches to education, (Sorzio & Campbell-Barr, 2019; Moss, 2019), at Delitto Preschool, it does not challenge DAP or standardized approaches. Moss (2019) advocates for “treating early childhood education (like all education) as first and foremost a political practice involving choices that need to be made between conflicting alternatives” (p. 6). Delitto Preschool may have to make choices between many conflicting discourses to situate their curriculum.

As mentioned in the previous section, early childhood settings outside of Italy study Reggio Emilia's inspiration through textbooks, journals, study tours to the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, the Wonder of Learning exhibitions, and internet sources. The stories told in these cultural artifacts represent a complete and finished story. We only see some pictures with a beautiful story in which a child and a teacher are engaged in project work. Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) discuss that “the fine-grained interactional situation is not available,” which includes
“the set of educational presuppositions that orient the participants in the appropriate interpretation of the discursive acts in a communicative situation, the register of speaking and the culturally appropriate frames of reference” (p. 7). We do not read about the underpinning values and how the story was made. Sorzio and Campbell-Barr (2019) go on to argue that “the children’s thinking is separated from the background of cultural presuppositions about the children’s status in schools, the implicit role of adults, the learning outcomes that are valued within the approach” (p. 7). These snippets and glimpses of beautiful moments we get from Reggio Emilia are then transported in little parts to Reggio Emilia inspired schools and becomes a challenge to understand how the Reggio approach works. Also, we do not often hear about the challenges faced amongst the teachers in Reggio Emilia schools. How are these teachers prepared to think in Reggio's way? How are the Reggio schools in Italy working with children who come from different racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds? We are aware of the immigrant population in Reggio Emilia schools, but we do not hear about how the immigrant children are assimilated or not assimilated into Italian culture. According to Cagliari et al. (2016) Italy saw mass migration from Egypt, Ghana, Tunisia, Morocco, China and Eastern Europe between 1970’s to 1990’s. When I was listening to the story of a person of color who has been to a Reggio Emilia study tour in Italy, she shared how White Reggio Emilia schools are and how children of color were marginalized. Thus, examining the Reggio Emilia approach in the context of Italy will also aid in getting a complete understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach.
The purpose of the research study was to learn how a Reggio Emilia inspired center in the North East United States dwells between its local context and inspirations from the Reggio Emilia philosophy. By presenting the middle curriculum of Delitto Preschool, the third space between the curriculum-as-live(d) and the curriculum-as-planned, the thesis aims to provide a holistic picture of the preschool and highlights the various zones of complexity and tension as Reggio Emilia inspiration encounters the lived experiences of Delitto Preschool. An encounter always produces something, it asks of us to find new ways of perceiving and acting with and in the world (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). This suggest that the encounter between the Delitto Preschool and the Reggio Emilia approach have opened up the third space, a space of challenges, ruptures, disruptions, but also hope, newness, possibilities, generativity, and potentiality.
The results of this study suggest that Reggio Emilia's inspiration gets entangled with various other discourses at play in the middle curriculum. According to Moss (2019), “the term ‘entanglements’ is often used to convey a sense of the multiplicity, complexity, and inescapability of the relationships involved” (P. 143). This thesis demonstrates that rather than being a universal and agreed upon notion, Reggio Emilia's inspiration is contextually contingent. There are varied understandings of the notion of Reggio Emilia inspirations amongst the educators and the director and that these various understandings may be contingent on multiple features, including but not limited to their educational background, past work experiences, their current educational practice, the ways in which they negotiate the discourse of academic readiness, state regulations, standards, policies and curriculum, families requirements, and their local and national context. The context of the place socially constructs the concept of learning, knowledge, an image of the child, an image of the teacher, values, and beliefs in early childhood education which all become influential in how Reggio Emilia's inspiration informs the curriculum and pedagogical approach at Delitto Preschool. Malaguzzi (as cited in Cagliaiari et al., 2016) reminds us that “going from child to context means accepting a complexification of the issue” (p. 369). As illustrated in Figure 23, this thesis intends to highlight the different complexities and discourses which shape how children, childhood, early childhood education, curriculum, pedagogy, and practice are experienced at Delitto Preschool. There are different early education policies, regulations, and standards in each state across the United States. As such, the ways in which Reggio Emilia's inspiration was practiced in Delitto Preschool is one such example and cannot be generalized to represent the inspiration of Reggio Emilia in the United States context more broadly.
Lenz-Taguchi (2010) suggests understanding the structural power of policies, regulations, and standards and the ways in which these structural systems guide theory, practice, and decision making. At Delitto Preschool, as structural power, developmentally appropriate practices and evaluation technologies such as CLASS, ECERS, Keystone STARS, figure what counts as best practice in early childhood education. Here, quality and best practices are defined as standards and criteria based on developmental theories of learning. Other early childhood settings may encounter different discourses in their curriculum-as-plan when drawing inspiration from Reggio Emilia. Aoki (1993) invite us to pay attention to what is growing in the middle. As teachers dwell in the middle curriculum, they deconstruct the discourses at play and find ways to negotiate and mitigate those discourses in situational praxis, always to differing degrees. “From a dwelling perspective, curriculum-making is precisely the process of the coming together of teachers, learners, generations, materials, and places, to remake these relationships” (Ross & Mannion, 2012, p. 312). This act of dwelling midst the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-live(d) is necessary for teachers to cultivate and inform their pedagogical commitment and curricular intention.

According to Aoki (2003), living pedagogy happens when teachers dwell with the tensions they encounter between the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-live(d). Delitto Preschool finds itself in a space of tension, where they made to figure out what it means to do Reggio-inspired teaching in relation to a vast network of local, state, and federal influences. This tension-filled space positions the educator to have to make difficult, often imperfect, decisions about what is best, right or appropriate. As Aoki (2000) says, “It is a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence” (p. 317). It is not simple, nor is it easy to favor Reggio's inspirations over state mandates and other assessed requirements. Rather, the challenge of this ambiguity is to
constantly be in a position of negotiation—that is, to have to choose between the practices of different and often conflicting discourses. Thinking with Aoki’s reconceptualization of curriculum, teachers are to move beyond simply implementing a curriculum-as-plan. Bridging the curriculum-as-plan with the curriculum-as-live(d) is necessary to make curriculum responsive, relational, and contextual.

Aoki (1992) writes that Canada is a place with a multiplicity of cultures and thus he coins the term “multiplicity of curricula” (p. 273). With a curriculum of multiplicities, there are multiple curricula as much as the children. He states that “we can see that if there are 25 students in the class, there are apt to be 25 lived curricula. Quite a multiplicity!” (p. 272). Following Aoki, there is also a multiplicity of curricula at Delitto Preschool, with each child bringing their own unique identities and ways of thinking and working in the world. For Aoki, the self is not a complete being grounded in a lived experience (Pinar, 2005). “Rather, who we are is produced by the effects of movements among layers of difference” (Pinar, 2005, p. 24). The self is always becoming and so is the curriculum-as-live(d). The middle curriculum lingers with multiple lived experiences and is continually challenged by the diversities of each child as a living curriculum.

Aoki (1993) asks us to think of curriculum implementation beyond child-centered, teacher-centered, society-centered, and discipline-centered. He problematizes curriculum centredness because it promotes individualism by ignoring the social context. The social context refers to “the self/other context, the dialogical context, within which any person, including the child, dwells” (Aoki, 1993, p. 289). Thus, Aoki (1991/1993) sees curriculum acted in a relational site, the relationship between human and the world as well as human and human relationships. This suggests that the middle curriculum decenters curriculum and allows for the emergence of a dialogic and relational space where the child, teacher, family, environment, and materials' lives...
become entangled. By deconstructing child-centredness and teacher centredness, the middle curriculum does not give agency to the child or the educator but rather invites children and educators to attend to the spaces in-between. Thus, curriculum and pedagogy emerge and becomes alive as children and educators “personal and group intentionalities” come together in this third space (Aoki, 1984, p. 121).

An early childhood curriculum can never be child-centered and neither teacher-centered. This tension is clearly expressed by educators at Delitto Preschool. While Aoki problematizes the notion of centeredness, he advocates for relations. To create a relationship between child-centered, teacher-centered, and discipline-centered, the educator needs to create conditions for these relationships to nurture. This calls for understanding the role of the teacher as a professional and deconstructing folk pedagogical beliefs as well as the child-centered approach. Creating a space of open dialogue where children and educators are both participating can allow for a relational curriculum. For instance, Lucy tries to create a culture of dialogue amongst children when they have conflicts. In this case, the educators and children “become ‘co-actors as they dialectically shape the reality of classroom experience,’ creating together ‘a crucible of the classroom culture’” (Aoki, cited in Pinar, 2005, p. 4). From this perspective, educators interpret children’s experiences as they live the situation and they see the uniqueness of the situation itself. Teachers may draw from the practice of pedagogical documentation from Reggio Emilia to attend to the pedagogical significance of the situation. The practice of pedagogical documentation may also allow teachers to embody an artist/researcher/teacher identity who embraces the tensions of being in space-in between this and that and works toward figuring things out as they connect, intersect and disconnect (Springgay, Irwin, Kind, 2005).
Furthermore, to be able to center the middle curriculum, Aoki (1984) suggests critical reflection not only on the reality that teachers live but also on their own identities. The teachers’ identity for Aoki is not fixed. “our identities, who we are as teachers and curriculum supervisors, are ongoing effects of our becomings in difference (Aoki, 1993, p. 205). This suggests that the identity of the teacher is always in the process of becoming. Delitto Preschool’s educators' pedagogical practices are becoming as they encounter many differences in their practices and ideas. They linger on what conditions are necessary to create similar experiences for children at Delitto Preschool as Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. In this case, they continue to interpret Reggio Emilia's inspiration from their own situation. Leggo (2004) writes that “as interpreters, we need humility and humor and a sense of skepticism about our world-making” (p. 108). Teachers find themselves in doubt about their praxis. Amidst this doubt, the educators construct their pedagogical orientation, dispositions, and their practice in order to respond to the emergence space of the middle curriculum. They may engage in dialogues with pedagogista to develop professionally and to make new ways to respond to the emergent and unpredictable space of the middle curriculum. An atelierista may help educators create conditions for dwelling with children in pedagogical space of curriculum making. Atelierista designs the space, the environment, and brings materials for children and educators to engage in an inquiry project in an artistic, responsive, and pedagogical way. Thus, teachers are always becoming, and the curriculum informed by Reggio Emilia's inspiration is also in the process of becoming. 

Aoki (1986/1991) writes that curriculum implementation will happen in the tension between the language of the situation and the language of “third space”. Dwelling between the situation and the “third space” is imperative for Dellito preschool. Reggio Emilia is not a prescribed curriculum, but rather a philosophy with principles and values. As such, the educator
is mitigating the principles of Reggio Emilia based on their interpretation in their practice. For example, the practice of emergent curriculum at Delitto Preschool responds to each child’s needs and development. This is because Delitto Preschool integrates the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards and cannot fully follow a child-centered curriculum that emerges from children’s interest. This suggests that the practice of Reggio Emilia has to bend and flex in relation to a local context to make it a local cultural project. The middle curriculum is entangled with the complexity of both “this and that” and as such embrace and embody the metonymic space (Aoki, 2000).

When discussing language, culture, and curriculum, Aoki (2000) reminds us that different ways of understanding and knowledge making manifest in culture and language. Delitto Preschool, and any other school drawing from Reggio, are performing cross-cultural work when bringing Reggio inspiration in relation to the local context. The encounter between the two has formed a hybrid, or different thing, from “in an inter-linguistic and inter-cultural space of difference” (Aoki, 2000, p. 328). This reminds us that a new or different kind of understanding and interpretation of something is always created when cultures encounter each other. Any concept and philosophy are open to interpretation and has been interpreted based on individual lived experiences and cultural lens. In such spaces of difference, Aoki warns us against binary thinking and invites us to move into the cracks and seeing the curriculum as a living entity. Delitto’s local context puts great emphasis on school readiness. To bring their interpretation of Reggio Emilia in relation to school readiness, they have used loose parts to teach literacy and numeracy. This demonstrates an improvisational and creative act that is situational and perhaps productive for the local context. As cultural inspiration is borrowed, they are continuously interpreted and translated in the midst of the interplay of culture and language in the middle
curriculum. Aoki (2000) views translation as transformation which is “not completely old nor completely new. Translation as transformation is an ambivalent construction, as Homi Bhabha stated—a signification that is ever incomplete and ongoing” (p. 328). Reggio Emilia's philosophy continues to form itself as it encounters cultural constructs in global communities and is always changing in the same way that Reggio Emilia's inspiration is always becoming. This suggests that knowing and knowledge is never fixed or finished; rather, it is always emerging and being constructed. And that’s the beauty that pluralistic and diverse cultural perspectives bring to knowledge-making and ways of knowing.
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Appendices

Appendix Screen Shots of Delitto Preschool Website

When you come to visit us at our school, you will see that we are uniquely different from your traditional early childhood educational facility. Upon entering our school you will notice that we make a special effort to make our school a very warm and welcoming classroom/school community. It is our goal to make children feel safe and loved in their learning environment. We find it is important to cultivate genuine caring relationships with our DueFinizia families, so that the children can have a positive and successful early learning experience.

We believe the learning environment has a significant impact on their cognitive, social and emotional development, as a result, our classroom environments are viewed as our children's third teacher, the first being the parents and the second being the classroom teacher. We strive to create a classroom environment that is purposeful and one that promotes exploration, which allows our teachers to act as facilitators and mentors in your child's educational journey. We foster independence and a feeling of competence by promoting engagement between children and teachers, we do this by facilitating appropriate social interactions, and by nurturing children's healthy development and sense of self. Our physical spaces are thoughtfully planned so that our teachers can provide experiences that will engage children in active, creative and meaningful exploration through play and inquiry. Our teachers encourage our students to share their discoveries by encouraging communication and expression in all forms.

Our school is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach using The Emergent Curriculum in conjunction with The Creative Curriculum. Play is a vital path to learning as children's natural curiosity and enthusiasm drives their need for knowledge and learning. With that being said, it is our belief that the child is capable of being a key element in their own learning process. Because we cultivate a strong relationship with our families, this enables us to be collaborators in the learning process. Through teacher observations, our teachers take time to reflect and act on their observations, thus giving us a greater understanding of each child's individual needs, allowing for thoughtful and individualized programming.
Are we a School or a Daycare?

We are a School First and a Daycare Second

Some folks ask us, "Are you a daycare or a school?" The answer is we are a school that offers wrap around child care services. We are licensed by the PA Department of Education which means we are a school, and we are approved by the PA Department of Education State School Board to offer Preschool/PreK and Kindergarten. While we are open 7am until 5:30pm, our "formal" school hours are from 8:30am to 3pm, and the hours outside of 8:30am and 3pm are considered wrap around care, or daycare if you will.

Being that we are licensed by the PA Department of Education, all of our lead Preschool/PreK and Kindergarten classroom teachers must hold a valid PA PreK-4 certificate. It also means that we are held to the strict standards in the Pennsylvania Code chapter 51. We must follow the PA Early Learning Standards to ensure that the children are being properly educated at Dall'Inizio DaySchool. We are also licensed by the PA Department of Human Services so that we may offer child care to children under 2.5 years old and also to provide the wrap around care for our older students.

We are a Reggio Emilia Inspired school. All Reggio Emilia schools are different from each other. The reason that no 2 Reggio schools are alike is that the people who make up each school are different and the approach is one that follows the love and the needs of the children enrolled.

Assessment

We discover child growth and progress through observations in the classroom and the use of assessment tools. Observations and assessments help us understand each child's unique learning process and show us how to challenge and stimulate a child's learning. Our teachers will record a minimum of 1 observation per child weekly.

The teachers at Dall'Inizio will complete an age appropriate Ages and Stages Screening tool within 45 days of enrollment based on their initial observations in the classroom. These results will be recorded and shared with families and placed within the child's file. The teaching staff will also utilize the Ounce Scale (Birth - 3 Years) and the Work Sampling (3-5 Years) screening tools every October, February, and May. These assessment tools look at growth and development and help to drive the curriculum in collaboration with the teacher's observations. Results will be recorded and shared with families prior to being filed within each child's file.

Suggested Resources

“The Emergence of Emergent Curriculum”
North America Reggio Emilia Alliance:
http://reggioalliance.org/
“The Reggio Emilia Approach”
https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/reggio-emilia-approach/
Our Curriculum

Emergent Curriculum

utilizes the Emergent Curriculum in the classrooms. The Emergent Curriculum is a project-based curriculum that focuses on being responsive to each child's needs and developmental level. Lesson plans are developed to support the children's interests and integrate the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards. Our educational goals for children include becoming socially and emotionally intelligent, academically prepared for the primary school setting, and successfully joining the classroom community.

The Reggio Emilia Approach:
The Reggio Emilia approach is used throughout the world, but originates in Reggio Emilia, Italy. It is an education of relationships that first began as an early childhood educational approach constructed after World War II. It is fluid rather than a packaged program, allowing us to continually refine our practices and adapt in meaningful ways to our community. The core of the approach is a collection of principles, which guides educators and families. Reggio inspired