

Exploring Reggio-inspired Environments: Strategies for Supporting Diverse Abilities

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Abstract

Reggio-inspired Strategies: Supporting Children with Diverse Abilities

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Inclusive early childhood education is recognized for its substantial benefits to children with and without disabilities. However, many preschoolers with disabilities in the United States remain in separate special education classes, missing the advantages of inclusive settings. The Reggio Emilia approach, with its emphasis on the rights and capabilities of every child, aligns well with inclusive education principles. This qualitative study explores the strategies employed by Reggio-inspired educators in the United States to support children with diverse abilities. Using a grounded theory approach, data were gathered from a focus group of six experienced Reggio-inspired teachers. The findings reveal that while some specific inclusive strategies, such as language and literacy inclusivity and inclusive sensory materials are used, broader practices like family involvement, communal learning, and personalized support, are integral to Reggio-inspired pedagogy. These practices foster an inclusive environment that respects and nurtures each child's individuality. However, despite these insights, the specific everyday accommodations, adaptations, and modifications teachers use to support children with diverse abilities remain largely elusive.

Keywords: Reggio-inspired Pedagogy, Reggio-Emilia Approach, Inclusive Early Childhood Education, Children with Diverse Abilities, Inclusive Strategies, Inclusive Practices, United States

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Introduction

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Inclusive early childhood education environments are widely recognized for their substantial benefits, supported by extensive research (Meek et al., 2019, pp. 59-82; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). However, despite this knowledge, a significant proportion of preschoolers with disabilities in the United States still find themselves attending separate special education classes (Meek et al., 2019). Implementing individualized, evidence-based strategies within inclusive programs allows children with disabilities to experience greater cognitive and communication development, particularly those with more significant disabilities, compared to those in separate settings (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). Studies have showcased that a collaborative approach, personalized support, meaningful participation in activities, and appropriate accommodations contribute to the success of inclusive settings (Meek et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2016; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012).

Research indicates that inclusive early learning environments benefit children with and without disabilities (Meek et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). Inclusive classrooms foster more social interactions, larger friend networks, and enhanced social competence among children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). However, to realize these benefits, children with disabilities must participate regularly in inclusive settings with appropriate specialized instructional strategies (Meek et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). When teachers effectively support peer interactions, children

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without disabilities gain from inclusive settings, showing improved academic, developmental, and social outcomes. They develop greater compassion, empathy, and a positive perception of children with disabilities, as well as a better understanding of diversity and disability (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023).

The Reggio Emilia Approach and Its Relevance

The Reggio Emilia approach is rooted in the belief that every child deserves an equal opportunity to an education, regardless of ability or background (Edwards et al., 2011; Hong et al., 2016; Reggio Children, 2022a). "Embedded in the Reggio Emilia approach to education is an image of children, families, and teachers working together to make schools dynamic and democratic learning environments" (New, 2003). The concept of the image of the child within the framework of the Reggio Emilia approach is the profound belief in the inherent capabilities and agency of young children. Professor Malaguzzi (1993) advocates this viewpoint and emphasizes that children possess strengths and rights:

Those who have the image of the child as fragile, incomplete, weak, made of glass gain something from this belief only for themselves. We do not need that as an image of children. Instead of always giving children protection, we need to give them the recognition of their rights and their strengths. (Malaguzzi, 1993)

Children are perceived as potent, active, and competent protagonists in their learning (Edwards et al., 2011). Nurturing a positive image of the child entails recognizing and affirming their rights, strengths, and interests as a human and citizen of their community rather than merely providing an education.

Reggio-inspired Preschools in the United States

The excellence of Reggio Emilia schools gained international recognition in 1991 when Newsweek magazine ranked them among the top ten schools worldwide (Firlik, 1996; Edwards, 2002; New, 2003; Gilman, 2007; Reggio Children, 2022b). This recognition gained significant traction with progressive early childhood educators in North America who began embracing the philosophy (Gilman, 2007; Edwards, 2002; Rinaldi, 2020; NAREA, 2023). Based on Reggio Emilia principles, Reggio-inspired preschools emphasize child-led, cooperative, and creative learning (Hong et al., 2016). More than 1,200 preschools in the United States have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach and identify themselves as "Reggio-inspired" (Cleaver, 2023). Professional organizations such as the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) offer opportunities to learn about this dynamic approach through conferences and study tours. Study tours, hosted in the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre of Reggio Emilia, Italy, provide insights into the unique history and context of Reggio Emilia's educational practices, including topics such as the image of the competent child, children with special rights, the role of the environment, the pedagogy of listening, and the 100 languages of children (Reggio Children, 2022b).

Research Objective and Question

The Reggio Emilia approach, emphasizing cooperative, child-led learning and the role of the environment as the third teacher, provides a robust framework for implementing inclusive practices (Edwards et al., 2011). The call for inclusive early childhood education in the United States aligns seamlessly with Reggio's philosophy, which emphasizes every child's inherent rights and capabilities. Both advocate for an educational environment that respects and nurtures the individuality of each child, promoting a sense of belonging and community (Edwards et al.,

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2011; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, 2023). This alignment is evident in the shared goal of fostering inclusive environments that provide equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their background or abilities. By recognizing each child's strengths and rights, both philosophies advocate for educational experiences responsive to the diverse abilities of all children, promoting their holistic development and empowerment as active participants in their learning. This synergy highlights the potential of Reggio-inspired practices to enhance inclusive early childhood education in the United States, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers committed to creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

However, despite the growing popularity of Reggio-inspired preschools and the emphasis on inclusive early childhood education in the United States, there is a notable lack of research specifically addressing the intersection of these areas. Searches for scholarly work on inclusive strategies within Reggio-inspired environments yielded minimal results, highlighting a significant gap in the literature. This study aims to explore the inclusive strategies employed by Reggio-inspired educators to support children with diverse abilities in the United States.

Guided by the research question, "What strategies and practices do Reggio-inspired educators use to create inclusive environments and support children's diverse abilities?" this investigation seeks to shed light on the everyday teacher actions that foster inclusivity in Reggio-inspired environments. Through this exploration, I aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse of Reggio-inspired preschools and inclusive early childhood education in the United States.

Literature Review

To contextualize my study within the existing body of literature, I researched peer-reviewed articles using various databases available through the University of Washington

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Libraries, including EBSCO, Education Source, ERIC, Academic Search Complete, and APA PsychINFO. My search criteria focused on identifying scholarly works published after 2000, coinciding with the popularity of Reggio-inspired schools and inclusion. Despite my extensive efforts, the results yielded limited findings directly related to the intersection of Reggio-inspired preschools and inclusive practices for children with disabilities. Search terms such as Reggio-inspired preschools/classrooms + children with disabilities/special rights; Reggio-inspired preschools/classrooms + inclusive strategies/practices; and Reggio-inspired preschools/classrooms + inclusion yielded no relevant results. Similarly, searches incorporating the term Reggio-inspired + inclusion also produced minimal results, only two articles were identified, one of which briefly mentioned inclusion in its abstract, “Sustaining Curiosity: Reggio-Emilia Inspired Learning” (Senet et al., 2021).

A broader search using the terms Reggio-Emilia inspired + the United States and Reggio-Emilia inspired + early learning yielded twenty-two articles, indicating widespread interest in Reggio-inspired approaches within the field of early childhood education; yet none of these articles specifically addressed inclusive practices or strategies within their abstracts. During this search, I identified Emerson and Linder’s (2019) integrative review of Reggio-inspired research, highlighting that most studies have focused on exploring the phenomenon of Reggio-inspired approaches. The targeted literature comparison identified gaps within Reggio-inspired empirical work by examining the relationships between different studies. Despite the diversity of these studies, the authors identified patterns that explored various perspectives, such as the experiences of teachers, administrators, children, and parents with Reggio-inspired principles or practices, and examined the adaption of Reggio-inspired principles. The inquiries included studies on applying individual principles, measuring changes in preservice teachers’ beliefs and

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understanding, and assessing changes resulting from implementing Reggio-inspired principles (Emerson & Linder, 2019). Despite examining these articles, none mentioned inclusion, children with special rights, or inclusive classroom strategies.

Inclusive Early Childhood Education in the United States

A joint position statement by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood inclusion as follows:

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. (DEC/NAEYC, 2009)

Inclusive early learning environments are widely recognized for their substantial benefits, supported by extensive research findings (Vakil et al., 2003; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Hong et al., 2016; Meek et al., 2019). Research indicates that inclusive early childhood education benefits children with and without disabilities— inclusive classrooms foster more social interactions, larger friend networks, and enhanced social competence among children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). However, to realize these benefits, children with disabilities must participate regularly in inclusive settings with appropriate specialized instructional strategies. When teachers effectively support peer interactions, children without disabilities also gain from inclusive settings, showing

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improved academic, developmental, and social outcomes. They develop greater compassion and empathy, a positive perception of children with disabilities, and a better understanding of diversity and disability (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

Despite this knowledge, a significant proportion of preschoolers with disabilities in the United States still attend separate special education classes. Data presented in the report "Start with Equity from the Early Years to the Early Grades: Data, Research, and an Actionable Child Equity Policy Agenda," indicate that in the 2018-2019 school year 53% of five-year-olds received the majority of services in regular early childhood programs, compared to only 44% of four-year-olds and 35% of three-year-olds. This suggests that the youngest children in the United States are most likely to receive services in more restrictive settings and older children are more likely to receive services in inclusive settings (Meek et al., 2019, pp. 59-82).

Numerous studies highlight factors contributing to the success of inclusive settings, such as individualized support, building partnerships, meaningful participation in activities, culturally responsive professional development and appropriate classroom accommodations (Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Hong et al., 2016; Meek et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). The call for inclusive early childhood programs in the United States aligns with Reggio Emilia's principles, which are deeply committed to the rights and capabilities of every child (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; Edwards et al., 2011; Rinaldi, 2020; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). These principles emphasize the importance of inclusive experiences that promote a sense of belonging, positive social relationships, and the opportunity for every child to reach their full potential, regardless of their abilities.

The Reggio Emilia Approach

Reggio Emilia, a region in Northern Italy, is renowned for its unique educational philosophy, deeply rooted in a profound civic commitment to children (New, 2003; Edwards et al., 2011; McNally & Slutsky, 2016). This philosophy emerged post-World War II in the town of Villa Cella. Through a collaborative effort, parents, children, and educators sought to rebuild society and establish an exemplary system of preschools and infant-toddler centers (Edwards, 2002; New, 2003; Edwards et al., 2011). A local educator, Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994), was inspired when witnessing the townspeople building a school brick by brick (Edwards et al., 2011). Malaguzzi was pivotal in further developing the Reggio Emilia approach. This movement symbolized the physical reconstruction of educational spaces and a collective endeavor to reshape the essence of learning and childhood experiences (New, 2003; Edwards et al., 2011).

Reggio Emilia schools embraced inclusive practices before they became national law in 1971, prioritizing the enrollment of children from diverse economic and educational backgrounds (Vakil et al., 2003; Edwards et al., 2011; Gilman, 2007). Reggio Emilia's inclusive ideologies, driven by a powerful image of the child, underscore a belief that value is given to all differences and that every child has equal educational opportunities (Edwards, 2002; Gilman, 2007; McNally & Slutsky, 2016). The Reggio Emilia approach is known for its innovative educational philosophy, emphasizing the pivotal role of teachers, the environment as a facilitator of learning, a child-centric approach, and the cultivation of inclusive communities (Rinaldi, 2020; Gilman, 2007). McNally and Slutsky (2016) describe this as "an intricate system of fundamental principles that work together to create a model of democratic education." The excellence of Reggio Emilia preschools was soon globally acknowledged when Newsweek

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magazine ranked them among the top ten schools worldwide in 1991 (Gilman, 2007; Reggio Children, 2022b).

Reggio-inspired Preschools in the United States

After Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centers and preschools gained international recognition, progressive educators in the United States began embracing the philosophy (Firlik, 1996; Edwards, 2002; New, 2003; Gilman, 2007; Rinaldi, 2020; Reggio Children, 2022b; NAREA, 2023). More than 1,200 preschools in the United States have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach and identify themselves as "Reggio-inspired" (Clever, 2023). Based on Reggio Emilia principles, Reggio-inspired preschools emphasize child-led, cooperative, and creative learning (Hong et al., 2016). Professional organizations such as the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) offer opportunities to learn about this dynamic approach through conferences and study tours. Study tours, hosted in the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre of Reggio Emilia, Italy, provide insights into the unique history and context of Reggio Emilia's educational practices, including topics such as the image of the competent child, children with special rights, the role of the environment, the pedagogy of listening, and the 100 languages of children (Reggio Children, 2022b).

The literature on Reggio-inspired preschools in the United States has extensively explained its principles and widespread acceptance in early childhood education (Edward, 2002; Vakil et al., 2003; McNally & Slutsky, 2016; Emerson & Linder, 2019). According to Emerson and Linder (2019), the existing literature on Reggio-inspired preschools mainly consists of reflective works, comparisons with other early childhood education philosophies, and a few empirical studies. Through a rigorous analysis of originally 198 articles, Emerson and Linder's (2019) literature review encompassed fifty-one unique articles from journals related to early

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childhood, special education, teacher professional development, art, general educational research, and psychology. Most of the studies were conducted in the United States and aimed to explore the phenomenon of Reggio-inspired approaches rather than evaluating child outcomes or program efficacy, highlighting a significant gap in empirical outcome research. Participants were primarily early childhood teachers working with preschool-aged children, with no studies found in infant or toddler settings.

Emerson and Linder organized the articles into five topic groups: (a) teacher/administrative perspectives and practices, (b) focused inquiries, (c) preservice teacher education, (d) child or parent participation, and (e) efficacy studies. This categorization helped to identify patterns within the literature, such as perspectives from various stakeholders and the application and impact of Reggio-inspired principles. Despite the diversity in study designs and aims, this review underscores the need for more empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of Reggio-inspired practices (Emerson & Linder, 2019).

Although my research may not directly follow the Reggio Inspired Research Re-framework proposed by Emerson and Linder (2019), it aligns with their call for comprehensive investigations into the multifaceted nature of Reggio-inspired practices. My study provides empirical insights into the practical application of inclusive strategies within Reggio-inspired environments in the United States, a topic yet to be extensively explored in the existing literature. I seek to shed light on the implementation of nuanced inclusive strategies within diverse educational contexts, thereby enriching the ongoing discourse on the transposition of the Reggio Emilia approach in inclusive early childhood education.

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Existing Research & Gaps

The existing literature on Reggio-inspired practices in early childhood education reveals a notable gap concerning implementing inclusive strategies within these settings, particularly for children with disabilities. Despite widespread interest in Reggio-inspired approaches, searches conducted across various databases have yielded limited findings directly addressing the intersection of Reggio-inspired preschools and inclusive practices. Queries focused on inclusive strategies within Reggio-inspired settings produced no relevant results, highlighting a critical gap in our understanding of how Reggio-inspired educators support children's diverse abilities. Similarly, broader searches within the realm of early childhood education yielded articles but did not specifically address inclusive practices or strategies. Thus, there is a pressing need for empirical research to fill this void and provide insights into the practical application of inclusive strategies within Reggio-inspired preschool settings, particularly in the United States. Exploring the nuanced strategies Reggio-inspired educators implement to support children's diverse abilities holds significance for educators aiming to cultivate inclusive practices. By conducting this study, I aim to bridge the gap in the literature and contribute to the broader discussion on inclusive early childhood education in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study synthesizes foundational theories that have significantly influenced the Reggio Emilia approach and its implementation in early childhood education settings. At its foundation are the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget, emphasizing children's active construction of knowledge through interactions with their environment; Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of social interactions and cultural context in children's learning and development; and John Dewey's

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philosophy of experiential learning, highlighting the role of hands-on, inquiry-based experiences in fostering children's understanding of their surroundings (Firlik, 1994; Edwards, 2002; Cook, 2006; Martalock, 2012). These theoretical frameworks collectively shape the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, fostering a pedagogy centered on child agency, collaboration, and inquiry that prioritizes creativity and a sense of belonging within the learning community (Firlik, 1996; Cook, 2006; Hong et al., 2016).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that involved interpreting data to investigate nuanced strategies that Reggio-inspired teachers implement to supporting children's diverse abilities. Guided by the research question, “What strategies and practices do Reggio-inspired teachers use to create inclusive environments and support children’s diverse abilities?” this investigation seeks to shed light on the everyday teacher actions that foster inclusivity in Reggio-inspired environments. Through this exploration, I aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse of Reggio-inspired preschools and inclusive early childhood education in the United States. The significance of this research lies in its potential to directly inform and improve the practices of educators and professionals in the field of early childhood education, providing them with practical strategies for creating inclusive environments.

Participants

Eligibility criteria for this study required participants to be over eighteen, reside in the United States, work or have been mentored in a Reggio-inspired environment, and have

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experience creating inclusive environments and supporting children with disabilities. Participants in this study are educators with diverse backgrounds and experiences in Reggio-inspired environments (See Table 1). They brought a range of expertise, as indicated by their years of experience as Reggio-inspired teachers and in supporting children with diverse needs in Reggio-inspired settings. Participants had spent between one to over ten years immersed in Reggio-inspired teaching practices. Additionally, they accumulated between one to seven years of experience supporting children with various disabilities and diverse needs, including speech delays, autism, physical disabilities, and vision loss. Some of the participants' preschools receive public funds to support their work, with funding sources varying from state funding to support through programs like Head Start and Working Connections. Geographically, the participants were spread across different cities and states, reflecting the broad scope of Reggio-inspired preschools in various regions. This diverse group of participants offered valuable insights into the intersection of Reggio-inspired pedagogy and the support of children with diverse needs.

Participant Recruitment

I used purposeful sampling to gain insight and understanding into inclusive strategies by recruiting participants for the study and selecting a sample that could provide helpful information to my research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Brown, 2022). I recruited experienced Reggio-inspired educators by emailing a recruitment message (see Appendix A) to the administration of twenty-one Reggio-inspired preschools in Seattle, WA, and requested permission to post on five Facebook groups, including Reggio-inspired Village, Reggio Emilia Inspired Practice, Reggio Inspired Educators, Reggio Inspired Early Childhood Educators, and Reggio-Emilia inspired Early Years Educators.

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Participant Selection

I initiated the screening process by sending introductory emails to sixteen eligible individuals, including a link to the demographics survey. Out of these, eleven completed the demographics survey. Following, eight Reggio-inspired teachers were selected for participation based on their varied years of experience, ensuring a diverse representation. Afterward, I sent consent forms (see Appendix B) to the selected eight participants via email. Seven participants voluntarily agreed to and signed the consent forms, receiving a countersigned copy from me. Although participants could schedule a virtual meeting to further discuss the study's purpose and methodology, all seven expressed confidence in proceeding directly to the focus group phase. Six of these seven attended the virtual meeting.

Participation Incentives

To encourage participation, individuals who completed the focus group received a link to redeem a \$50 e-gift card. To receive payment, participants must complete the eligibility questionnaire and demographic survey and attend the focus group. After completing the focus group, I emailed participants a secure link to their provided email address.

Data Collection Methods

Survey Tools

The eligibility questionnaire (see Appendix B) and demographics survey (see Appendix C) were administered through Google Forms and remained open for one month. The eligibility questionnaire required that participants be over eighteen, United States residents, trained in the Reggio Emilia approach, and had experience teaching children with diverse abilities in Reggio-inspired environments. The demographics survey covered various aspects, including preferred

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pronouns, years of experience as a Reggio-inspired teacher, experience in teaching and supporting children with diverse abilities in similar settings, and details about the preschool's public funding status and location. Gathering geographical data specifying the city and state of the Reggio-inspired preschool adds context to the study. Both surveys could be completed in approximately five minutes each and were accessible on computers, tablets, or smartphones for participants' convenience.

Focus Group

Focus groups work best with people who know about the topic, with a recommended six to ten participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Brown, 2022). This virtual focus group involved a single seventy-five-minute virtual focus group, totaling sixteen pages of transcripts, with six participants, providing a platform for open dialogue and an exchange of ideas among educators. The focus group session was semi-structured, allowing for flexibility while ensuring key topics related to support strategies were covered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The topics covered included identifying strategies to support children's individual needs, sharing collaborative experiences, creating inclusive environments, and any challenges educators face when implementing inclusive strategies (See Appendix E for interview protocol). The focus group was recorded on Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis plan for this study involved a systematic approach to distill meaningful insights from the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Initially, I used Otter.ai to transcribe the focus group data; then, I meticulously edited the transcript while listening to the audio recording to represent the participants' voices accurately. I conducted a thematic analysis following transcription to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories. I utilized the

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qualitative analysis software Delve to facilitate the development of themes and sub-themes through constant comparison and refinement. My analysis aimed to uncover specific, everyday teacher actions that foster an inclusive environment and support children's diverse abilities. However, I identified only two sub-themes for specific strategies after thoroughly analyzing the transcript. The remaining findings were broader, conventional practices that are often associated with inclusive educational settings.

Role of the Researcher & Positionality

I am a novice researcher with a background in Early Childhood Education and Learning Sciences and Human Development. Throughout my academic years, I have developed an understanding of various educational practices and settings. My focus has been on social and emotional foundations, culture and development, inclusive early childhood education, and early learning in the home, school, and community. Moreover, I earned independent study credits dedicated to exploring the Reggio Emilia approach. In March 2023, I participated in a professor/student tour at the Luis Malaguzzi International Centre in Italy. I gained first-hand insights into Reggio's innovative practices, unique history, and context. Tour topics included the role of the atelierista, the pedagogy of listening, the 100 languages of children, and more. Tour participants also had the opportunity to explore projects and documentation created by the children, teachers, atelieristas, and pedagogistas (Reggio Children, 2022). Motivated by this transformative experience and a keen interest in early childhood education, I pursued this research path for my master's thesis. I acknowledge my position as a novice researcher with specific educational experiences and recognize how this may influence the research process and findings. Recognizing the potential biases introduced by my background, I aim to enhance the credibility of the study's findings.

Findings

This study initially explored Reggio-inspired teachers' everyday actions and practices to create inclusive environments and support children's diverse abilities. The thematic analysis of the focus group transcript yielded minimal specific strategies; instead, participants shared more conventional approaches often associated with inclusive early education. These findings illuminate participants' collaborative and holistic strategies to ensure inclusivity, personalized support, and family involvement when supporting children's diverse abilities within their Reggio-inspired environments. Several recurring themes and sub-themes emerged through a comprehensive exploration of the transcript, shedding light on supporting children's diverse abilities in Reggio-inspired environments.

Themes and Sub-themes

This study highlights three themes from the analysis: specific strategies, general practices, and barriers. Sub-themes falling under specific strategies are language and literacy inclusivity and inclusive sensory materials. General practice sub-themes are family involvement, personalized support, communal learning; sub-themes for barriers are short staff and limited time, as well as stereotypes and stigmatizations. Each theme draws upon the focus group transcript to illustrate key concepts and insights (See Table 2 for Coding Table).

Specific Strategies

Language and Literacy Inclusivity

Reggio-inspired teachers promote a sense of belonging and identity development within the classroom community by engaging children in meaningful discussions and activities that reflect their cultural identities. Participant 2 (P2) shared:

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We have a lot of languages in my current class, so it becomes quite a task to learn little bits of all those languages, but I feel like it's really worth the time. Not just for actual communication with the kids but because it gives them like a little bit of pride and sense of their own their own family culture. You know, like, I have a kid whose home language is very difficult for me to pronounce. I can't really get very much out there, but we talk a lot about it. And I was able to find some books about this language that have the script and everything and so I would work on that with him. And it just became a common point of conversation. And so, this was like literacy time, because we have printouts of scripts of his home language available and kids, all the kids are coloring on them. And we're talking about what the language is and what he hears about it at home. And he's talking about that experience at his own home and so it becomes like a big important part of his identity. (P2, March 2024)

P2 demonstrates how engaging children in conversations about their home language and cultural experiences fosters a rich, interactive learning environment that values each child's background. By integrating books and scripts in children's home language, Reggio-inspired teachers can create a learning experience that is both relevant and meaningful. Similarly, Participant 1 (P1) shared the observation:

Since we've noticed that shift [of diverse enrollment], we have really incorporated a lot more literacy that has the children's home languages in it. And the confidence that we've observed in those children when they get to share those books with their peers when they get to sit with their teachers and watch their teachers struggle, trying to read these books and speak in their language, and they eventually start to want to, like, teach us and teach the other kids..." (P1, March 2024)

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Allowing children to share and teach their home languages can support children in constructing a deeper understanding of their own cultural identity and adheres to the Reggio principle of child agency. This strategy not only enhances the children's language and literacy skills, but it also validates and affirms their interests and cultural backgrounds in their learning process.

Another way Reggio-inspired teachers' foster a sense of belonging and community within the classroom is shaping a strong image of the child, one of competence and capability.

P2 shared a specific strategy he used when supporting a non-verbal child:

I have an example of using learning stories as a way to kind of meet some needs.

Learning stories for anyone who's not familiar is like, you usually write a story, like as a letter, like, direct to the child talking about an activity that happened and what they learned, and it's kind of a short form documentation about a specific thing that they learned. And so, we do these for all the kids, but for a particular child, who was mostly nonverbal, but was a little more verbal like in private with the teachers, but not really when socializing with other children. So, I was able to kind of catalog several different, like interests, that they had, or jokes that they had made, or little trends that they had going where I could see that they were alerting and that they were showing their sense of humor and their personality, but most of their peers didn't notice this or didn't know about that. It really displayed this child's intelligence, and so I cataloged them, and I wrote them down. It was like a little miniature book, like this kid makes some jokes, and here it is. And so, we read that story. At our morning meeting with the children, as we read all the learning stories at the morning meeting, but that one in particular, I thought had a big impact. And you could see this child thought very proud about it. He was smiling. He was looking around at all the kids laughing at his jokes and seeing the things that he had

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done. And it was a way to like, translate his learning for all the rest of the class so they could understand that while he presents differently than them, he has his own intelligence. He's still learning things. He's still smart. He's still an important person and all that. (P2, March 2024)

Inclusive Sensory Materials

This strategy fosters a sense of community and belonging by ensuring that sensory tools are available for all children, promoting an inclusive environment where every child's needs are recognized and met. The following strategies also support Dewey's experiential learning theory, emphasizing hands-on, inquiry-based experiences. P2 highlighted:

The other part I wanted to get to was having sensory tools available, which is another aspect of the environment, and building them into the room so the children know where the different sensory items are, and you can access them at all times. Like we have squishing pads, we have chewies, we have weighted blankets, we have heavy stuffed animals, we have some, like, aromatic things around that kids can smell, we have light areas and dark areas. And so, making those a part of the environment and talking about their function and explaining that all of those items are for all of the children, like the one child who has an oral fixation isn't the only child who gets to use the chewy toys. It's for anyone, right? So, it's, it's giving them the tools that they need, and also being inclusive of their learning style, and showing that like it's that is for everyone that has a sensory need that everyone can experience. (P2, March 2024)

Reggio-inspired teachers prioritize creating sensory-rich environments and providing various sensory tools that are accessible to all children. P1 discussed how incorporating diverse

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sensory materials into the classroom has significantly impacted children's confidence and ability to self-soothe:

I was really inspired to meet sensory and schematic needs in the classrooms. And so, we really went hard in providing different materials to meet those needs. And I think it was P2 that brought it up earlier, saying that those tools aren't just for the child that has a specific need, they're for everybody to use. That has caused a major shift in our children and their confidence, their ability to self-help, and their ability to self-soothe, and the inclusivity in the classroom and understanding that we all have these different sensory schematic, physical, emotional, all these different needs that must be met. Don't seem so different anymore. (P1, March 2024)

Reggio-inspired teachers can promote inclusivity and self-regulation, which are critical for children's overall development. This strategy fosters a more inclusive classroom where all children can benefit from the accessibility of sensory tools, promoting a sense of belonging and understanding among peers.

General Practices

Family Involvement

Participants highlighted how Reggio-inspired environments and practices inherently foster inclusivity by valuing contributions from children and the community. P2 shared, "I think that because Reggio's philosophy emphasizes that the ideas in the classroom and the class culture all come from the children, from the community, and from the teachers, I think that automatically helps create a more inclusive teaching experience," (P2, March 2024). Participant 3 (P3) explained the importance of communication and ongoing dialogues:

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I think there is open communication. Like for example, using social media like emailing or perhaps, a Facebook page, you know, just to build a strong partnership, and ensuring that educators and parents work together to understand the unique needs of their children and the unique ways of helping their children by perhaps, goal setting, whereby the parents are involved with the teachers to set an individualized plan I think it fosters a sense of shared responsibility and commitment towards the child's success. (P3, March 2024)

Cultivating a collaborative community involving educators, parents, and other professionals is essential for addressing children's diverse abilities. Regular communication and partnership with families will ensure that children's unique needs are understood and supported both at home and in school. P2 added:

Communicating with the parents is a great way to kind of pick out and assess informally whether a kid is going to need some extra help. We do multiple parent-teacher conferences a year, usually one early on, one kind of mid-year, then maybe one at the end if they're particularly heading off to kindergarten. (P2, March 2024)

P1 highlighted the importance of setting requirements and boundaries to ensure comprehensive support and shared responsibility for every child's development:

Some of the ways that we engage with parents and other professionals to ensure comprehensive support are through setting requirements and boundaries from the start with everybody that comes into care for the children. As well as we utilize our social media a lot to share knowledge. We plant seeds and have ongoing conversations with families every day. And then we also do parent teacher conferences. Where we're able to

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delve into things even deeper. So, just so much communication, is how we ensure the comprehensive support. (P1, March 2024)

Communal Learning

Reggio-inspired teachers highlight the importance of communal learning to support children's diverse abilities. Participant 6 (P6) emphasized, “What I find really helpful is learning from you know, people who have greater experience and have worked for years,” (P6, March 2024). P2 shared the value of leveraging external resources such as therapists to provide comprehensive support within the classroom, “Having therapists who can either teach staff or sometimes be hired out by a family to work with a child in the classroom is just like a fantastic resource. I have learned so much from watching, therapists” (P2, March 2024). P1 added:

We've just really built a lot of connections and have a lot of good people on our side who are here to support any child who needs it after we've established that there are delays, differences, and special needs involved in a child. (P1, March 2024)

Participants expressed how collaborative efforts allow everyone to pool their expertise, combining their skills and knowledge to effectively address children's diverse abilities. P3 said:

... there is shared expertise you know, the collaboration allows educators and support staff to pull together expertise, that those combining their skills and knowledge to address the different needs of the children. Because I think they need to work together to address the needs. It's not something that either the educators or the support staff can do without each other. So, I think regular communication also plays a big part, and things like team meetings just provide a forum for discussion and sharing insights, perhaps of individual cases, and refining approaches, because I believe that when you're a team, people have

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different opinions. And among the different opinions, you will find a solution, unlike when you're alone. (P3, March 2024)

Participants highlighted that regular communication through team meetings provides a forum for discussion and sharing insights, contributing to ongoing professional growth. P1 shared:

I know P3 mentioned something about team meetings. And I found that in our school, we have a standing monthly staff meeting and a big chunk of that is focused on just catching each other up. And talking about problems we're facing and coming up with solutions. And I feel like that's become something that's vital to our school's culture, is time for us all to sit down, and we're in a little bit of a unique situation because we do have kids all the way from six weeks old to seven years old. So, we have all of our teachers from all ages come together and discuss their challenges and collaborate, and I think that's super important. (P1, March 2024)

Personalized Support

Reggio-inspired teachers respect diversity and recognize each child's strengths, interests, and cultural background. These personalized support strategies ensure each child's unique needs are met and they all receive the individualized support they need to succeed. Participant 5 (P5) expressed:

So, we try to prioritize the interests of the children and let them, on their own, develop their strengths, and we try to see what they like and improve our research rather than them follow the normal routine. This way, they can easily go... develop a passion for what they're doing and... [unintelligible]... make everyone win. (P5, March 2024)

P2 and others discussed Reggio's commitment to personalized support:

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I think that in a more standard traditional teaching philosophy, things kind of come from the top down, you know, children are vessels to be filled with knowledge, and here is the box curriculum and you teach it to them. Whereas, yeah, Reggio is kind of more like emanating from within its naturally individualized. (P2, March 2024)

Teachers highlighted the importance of documenting learning for progress and tailored support. P3 shared:

And I also think, you know, to create an inclusive environment, you have to know your students, so that you can have an individualized support plan for each and every of them... And also, if you document learning, you can observe individual progress, allowing you to tailor support according to each child's unique strengths. (P3, March 2024)

Documenting the learning of children allows Reggio-inspired teachers to observe individual progress and tailor support, fostering an inclusive environment where each child's unique strengths are recognized and nurtured.

Barriers

Short Staff & Limited Time

Despite the commitment to inclusive practices, Reggio-inspired educators face many barriers in supporting children's diverse abilities. Participants shared how these challenges impede providing comprehensive support and creating inclusive environments. Participant 4 (P4) shared, "Um, you know, the most difficult challenge we have now is limited resources. And, you know, we're short of staff, and we do not have much funding." P2 also expressed:

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Similarly, resources is a big deal. Extra educators are great to have. When we don't have finances for support educators, it puts the full burden on the primary educators. So that's the situation in my class. We had a support educator at the beginning of the year, and we no longer do. So, we have, you know, a third less of time to spend on projects that involve making the classroom more inclusive for instance, I find it really helpful to have a visual schedule for children, but that's something that needs to be like handmade and have photos of the classroom. And I would love to spend a lot of time on that. And I can only spend a very limited time. But I do think it's important. And, so, I try and prioritize those sorts of projects over, you know, for instance, my classroom that might not be set up at all when I start the day. Like, I might need to set everything up with the children are there because I've devoted that little bit of planning time to a separate project, and that's a sacrifice that I'm willing to make. (P2, March 2024)

Stereotypes & Stigmatization

Participants highlighted the issue of stigma and stereotypes, sharing strategies for promoting a culture of acceptance and empathy within the classroom community. P3 emphasized:

First, I think attitude barriers; and I tackle the attitude barriers by trying to promote a culture of acceptance, diversity, and encouraging empathy among students and staff... And there is also stigma, you know, stereotypes. So, you know, stigmatization is very common across students because of their conditions. But we try to combat that through promoting positive interactions and, you know, just creating inclusive environments within the school community, between the workers and the learners, and other administrators. (P3, March 2024)

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Similarly, P1 shared:

And then I think P3 said something that led me to think about the just other people's views are being put on children and brought into the classroom. That can be a barrier as well. Just like kids reflect what they hear in and outside of school. So, there are things that kids come in and say that are hurtful. And those are teaching moments, but that can be a hard thing, as well as teaching them that what their parent or what their uncle or what their neighbor says is not kind or not inclusive or that kind of thing. (P1, March 2024)

These examples underscore the complexity of creating inclusive learning environments within Reggio-inspired settings and the continuous efforts required to overcome them.

Summary of Findings

This study explored the practices of Reggio-inspired teachers in creating inclusive environments and supporting children's diverse abilities. The thematic analysis revealed that while specific strategies were less prevalent, participants frequently utilized conventional approaches typical of inclusive early education. The findings highlighted three main themes: specific strategies, general practices, and barriers. Specific strategies included language and literacy inclusivity and using inclusive sensory materials, showcasing how teachers adapt their methods to embrace cultural diversity and sensory needs. General practices emphasized family involvement, personalized support, and communal learning, illustrating the holistic and community-centered nature of Reggio-inspired environments. However, participants face significant barriers, such as limited resources, short staffing, and societal stereotypes, which challenge implementing inclusive practices. Despite such challenges, the commitment to these Reggio-inspired practices demonstrates their potential to create inclusive early learning

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environments that prioritize child agency, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education within Reggio-inspired settings, demonstrating the need for continuous effort and resource allocation to overcome these challenges.

Discussion

This study fills a significant research gap in Reggio-inspired literature, particularly in the area of inclusion, a highly valued principle of the Reggio-Emilia approach. By offering empirical evidence of practical Reggio-inspired inclusive strategies, this study uniquely highlights the intricate interplay between Reggio-inspired pedagogy and inclusive education, offering a glimpse into how early childhood programs can be both innovative and accommodating. The findings underscore the importance of fostering environments that prioritize family involvement, communal learning, and personalized support, reinforcing that inclusion is not just a policy but a practice deeply embedded in the Reggio philosophy.

This study's strengths include its in-depth qualitative analysis of Reggio-inspired strategies and practices derived from empirical data. Applying grounded theory during thematic analysis allowed me to inductively derive themes and sub-themes, frequently referring to the focus group transcript. The study upheld the ethical standards outlined by the University of Washington and carefully addressed issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and equitable representation of participants.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was constrained to a single focus group session due to time limitations, preventing a more comprehensive exploration of Reggio-inspired educators' nuanced accommodations, adaptations, or modifications to support children's diverse abilities. The absence of follow-up interactions, including additional focus

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groups or observations, limited the depth of insights gained through prolonged participant engagement. As a novice researcher, I wanted to be conscious of potential power dynamics within the focus group. However, my effort to maintain neutrality, may have hindered a fuller exploration of specific strategies—the accommodations, adaptations, or modifications, the everyday teacher actions, due to the lack of deep probing. Additionally, the semi-structured focus group questions did not fully capture the complexities of specific Reggio-inspired inclusive strategies and practices.

Although this study provides insights into some inclusive strategies within Reggio-inspired environments, future research should address its limitations. Expanding the methodological approach to include prolonged interactions with educators, such as case studies or ethnography, could uncover the intricacies of inclusive pedagogy within Reggio-inspired environments. Incorporating direct observations and follow-up sessions would allow for a deeper exploration of the accommodations, adaptations, or modifications that support children's diverse abilities. This step is crucial for comprehensively exploring nuanced inclusive strategies. Moving forward, empirical research that delves deeper into the interplay between Reggio-inspired pedagogy and early childhood inclusion will be crucial in further enhancing our understanding and implementation of inclusive early childhood education. It is imperative that educators and policymakers leverage these insights to enhance inclusive practices within early childhood education.

Reflecting on my March 2023 participation in the U.S. Students and Professors Study Group in Reggio-Emilia, Italy, I was struck by the profound commitment to inclusivity and the celebration of diversity. A note from the tour that particularly resonated with me was, “Welcoming the differences that every person brings and the identities they bring with all their

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potential” (personal communication, March 21, 2023). This aligns closely with the strategies and practices of Reggio-inspired educators in celebrating diversity and valuing individual differences. For instance, the heartwarming story P2 shared of using observation and documentation to catalog the uniqueness and interests of a mostly non-verbal child allowed the child’s potential to be recognized and celebrated, fostering an environment where classmates could learn to welcome and appreciate individual differences.

During my visit to the Scuola dell’infanzia comunale Ernesto Balducci (Ernesto Balducci municipal nursery school), I was captivated by an interactive table in the Piazza of the school. The table featured a display titled “The International Dimension of Our Experience: The Musicality of Our Language,” with a world map and children’s quotes about different languages. Quotes included observations like, “If you speak Brazilian, you seem you are kissing while speaking,” and “Japanese seems to be angry even if he is not” and “English, it’s a classical voice.” Below the display was a table with pictures of teachers’ faces and names, accompanied by colorful buttons that, when pressed, played recordings of the teachers speaking, showcasing the musicality of their language (See Figure 1).

P1 and P2 highlighted the importance of learning some of the children’s home languages, reflecting a strategy of language inclusivity. This practice could be adapted to Reggio-inspired environments and enriched by asking families to record short messages in their native languages. These recordings could be integrated into a similar interactive setup, allowing children to listen to their peers’ home languages, fostering meaningful discussions about language, building a sense of belonging and community, and providing experiential learning opportunities.

In conclusion, while this study begins to bridge the gap in Reggio-inspired literature regarding early childhood inclusion, it also opens the door to numerous questions and avenues

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for future research. For example, how specifically do Reggio-inspired educators celebrate diversity? Are children with disabilities given priority for enrollment? What percentage of Reggio-inspired preschools in the United States have children with disabilities enrolled in their programs? Do these children attend the program full day? Addressing these questions and continuing to explore and document how Reggio-inspired environments support inclusion will enrich the academic discourse and help make these environments a benchmark for high-quality, inclusive early childhood education across the United States.

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Table 1: Participants

Participants

ID	Preferred Pronouns	Years of experience as a Reggio-inspired teacher	Years of experience supporting children with diverse abilities in Reggio-inspired environments	Diverse abilities encountered	Does your school receive public funds?	If yes, what public funds does your school receive?	City & State of Reggio-inspired school
P1	She/her	8-10 years	8-10 years	Speech delays, ADHD, Autism, down syndrome	No	-	Rochester, Michigan
P2	He/him	10+ years	1-3 years	Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, OCD	Yes	Seattle Public Schools	Seattle, Washington
P3	He/him	4-7 years	4-7 years	Autism, physical disabilities	Yes	Head Start	New Orleans, Louisiana
P4	She/her	1-3 years	1-3 years	Autism, low vision, hard hearing,	Yes	Head Start, Working Connections	Seattle, Washington
P5	He/him	8-10 years	1-3 years	Physical disabilities, vision loss	No	-	Brooklyn, New York
P6	She/her	1-3 years	1-3 years	Developmental disabilities	Yes	State funding	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Table 1 presents key characteristics of the study participants, including their preferred pronouns, years of experience as Reggio-inspired teachers, years of experience and encountered diverse abilities, public funding status, and the location of their respective Reggio-inspired preschools.

Table 2: Coding Table**Specific Strategy: Language & Literacy Inclusivity**

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P2	90	<p>“We have a lot of languages in my current class, so it becomes quite a task to learn little bits of all those languages, but I feel like it's really worth the time. Not just for actual communication with the kids but because it gives them like a little bit of pride and sense of their own their own family culture. You know, like, I have a kid whose home language is very difficult for me to pronounce. I can't really get very much out there, but we talk a lot about it. And I was able to find some books about this language that have the script and everything and so I would work on that with him. And it just became a common point of conversation. And so, this was like literacy time, because we have printouts of scripts of his home language available and kids, all the kids are coloring on them. And we're talking about what the language is and what he hears about it at home. And he's talking about that experience at his own home and so it becomes like a big important part of his identity.”</p>
P1	565	<p>“Since we've noticed that shift [of diverse enrollment], we have really incorporated a lot more literacy that has the children's home languages in it. And the confidence that we've observed in those children when they get to share those books with their peers when they get to sit with their teachers and watch their teachers struggle, trying to read these books and speak in their language, and they eventually start to want to, like, teach us and teach the other kids.”</p>
P2	586	<p>“I have an example of using learning stories as a way to kind of meet some needs. Learning stories for anyone who's not familiar is like, you usually write a story, like as a letter, like, direct to the child talking about an activity that happened and what they learned, and it's kind of a short form documentation about a specific thing that they learned. And so, we do these for all the kids, but for a particular child, who was mostly nonverbal, but was a little more verbal like in private with the teachers, but not really when socializing with other children. So, I was able to kind of catalog several different, like interests, that they had, or jokes that they had made, or little trends that they had going where I could see that they were alerting and that they were showing their sense of humor and their personality, but most of their peers didn't notice this or didn't know about that. It really displayed this child's intelligence, and so I cataloged them, and I wrote them down. It was like a little miniature book, like this kid makes some jokes, and here it is. And so, we read that story. At our morning meeting with the children, as we</p>

read all the learning stories at the morning meeting, but that one in particular I thought had a big impact. And you could see this child thought very proud about it. He was smiling. He was looking around at all the kids laughing at his jokes and seeing the things that he had done. And it was a way to like, translate his learning for all the rest of the class so they could understand that while he presents differently than them, he has his own intelligence. He's still learning things. He's still smart. He's still an important person and all that.”

Specific Strategy: Inclusive Sensory Materials

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P2	103	“The other part I wanted to get to was having sensory tools available, which is another aspect of the environment. And building them into the room so the children know where the different sensory items are, and you can access them at all times. Like we have squishing pads, we have chewies, we have weighted blankets, we have heavy stuffed animals, we have some like aromatic things around that kids can smell we have light areas and dark areas. And so, making those a part of the environment and talking about their function and explaining that all of those items are for all of the children, like the one child who has an oral fixation isn't the only child who gets to use the chewy toys. It's for anyone, right? So, it's, it's giving them the tools that they need, and also being inclusive of their learning style, and showing that like it's that is for everyone that has a sensory need that everyone can experience.”
P1	573	“I was really inspired to meet sensory and schematic needs in the classrooms. And so, we really went hard in providing different materials to meet those needs. And I think it was P2 that brought it up earlier, saying that those tools aren't just for the child that has a specific need, they're for everybody to use. That has caused a major shift in our children and their confidence, their ability to self-help, and their ability to self-soothe, and the inclusivity in the classroom and understanding that we all have these different sensory schematic, physical, emotional, all these different needs that must be met. Don't seem so different anymore.”

General Practice: Family Involvement

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P2	204	“Communicating with the parents is a great way to kind of pick out and assess informally whether a kid is going to need some extra help. We do multiple parent-teacher conferences a year, usually one early on, one kind of mid-year, then maybe one at the end if they're particularly heading off to kindergarten.”

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- P2 415 “I think that because Reggio's philosophy emphasizes that the ideas in the classroom and the class culture all come from the children, from the community, and from the teachers. I think that that automatically helps create a more inclusive teaching experience.”
- P1 494 “Some of the ways that we engage with parents and other professionals to ensure comprehensive support are through setting requirements and boundaries from the start with everybody that comes into care for the children. As well as we utilize our social media a lot to share knowledge. We plant seeds and have ongoing conversations with families every day. And then we also do parent teacher conferences. Where we're able to delve into things even deeper. So, just so much communication, as how we how we ensure the comprehensive support.”
- P3 519 “I think there is open communication. Like for example, using social media like emailing or perhaps, a Facebook page, just to build a strong partnership, and ensuring that educators and parents work together to understand the unique needs of their children and the unique ways of helping their children by perhaps, goal setting, whereby the parents are involved with the teachers to set an individualized plan I think it fosters a sense of shared responsibility and commitment towards the child's success.”

General Practice: Communal Learning

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P1	188	"We've just really built a lot of connections and have a lot of good people on our side who are here to support any child who needs it after we've established that there are delays, differences, and special needs involved in a child."
P2	379	“Having therapists who can either teach staff or sometimes be hired out by a family to work with a child in the classroom is just like a fantastic resource. I have learned so much from watching, therapists.”
P6	402	"What I find really helpful is learning from you know, people who have greater experience and have worked for years."
P3	507	“... there is shared expertise you know, the collaboration allows educators and support staff to pull together expertise, that those combining their skills and knowledge to address the different needs of the children. Because I think they need to work together to address the needs. It's not something that either the educators or the support staff can do without each other. So, I think regular communication also plays a big part, and things like team meetings just provide a forum for discussion and sharing insights, perhaps of individual cases, and

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refining approaches, because I believe that when you're a team, people have different opinions. And among the different opinions, you will find a solution, unlike when you're alone."

- P1 544 "I know P3 mentioned something about team meetings. And I found that in our school, we have a standing monthly staff meeting and a big chunk of that is focused on just catching each other up. And talking about problems we're facing and coming up with solutions. And I feel like that's become something that's vital to our school's culture, is time for us all to sit down, and we're in a little bit of a unique situation because we do have kids all the way from six weeks old to seven years old. So, we have all of our teachers from all ages come together and discuss their challenges and collaborate, and I think that's super important."

General Practice: Personalized Support

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P5	127	"So we try to prioritize the interests of the children and let them, on their own, develop their strengths, and we try to see what they like and improve our research rather than them follow the normal routine. This way, they can easily go... develop a passion for what they're doing and... (unintelligible)... make everyone win."
P2	417	"I think that in a more standard traditional teaching philosophy, things kind of come from the top down, you know, children are vessels to be filled with knowledge, and here is the box curriculum and you teach it to them. Whereas, yeah, Reggio is kind of more like emanating from within its naturally individualized."
P3	468	"And I also think the documentation, like the documentation of learning, you know, if you document learning, you can observe individual progress, allowing you to tailor support according to each child's unique strengths."

Barriers: Short Staff & Limited Time

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P4	251	"Um, you know, the most difficult challenge we have now is limited resources. And, you know, we're short of staff, and we do not have much funding. So, I think the solution would be partnerships and maybe donations from the community."
P2	259	"Similarly, resources is a big deal. Extra educators are great to have. When we don't have finances for support educators, it puts the full burden on the primary educators. So that's the situation in my class. We

had a support educator at the beginning of the year, and we no longer do. So, we have, you know, a third less of time to spend on projects that involve making the classroom more inclusive. For instance, I find it really helpful to have a visual schedule for children, but that's something that needs to be like handmade and have photos of the classroom. And I would love to spend a lot of time on that. And I can only spend a very limited time. But I do think it's important. And, so, I try and prioritize those sorts of projects over, you know, for instance, my classroom that might not be set up at all when I start the day. Like, I might need to set everything up with the children are there because I've devoted that little bit of planning time to a separate project, and that's a sacrifice that I'm willing to make."

Barriers: Stereotypes & Stigmatization

ID	Line #	Transcript Excerpt
P3	236	"First, I think attitude barriers; and I tackle the attitude barriers by trying to promote a culture of acceptance, diversity, and encouraging empathy among students and staff... And there is also stigma, you know, stereotypes. So, you know, stigmatization is very common across students because of their conditions. But we try to combat that through promoting positive interactions and, you know, just creating inclusive environments within the school community, between the workers and the learners, and other administrators."
P1	300	"And then I think P3 said something that led me to think about the just other people's views are being put on children and brought into the classroom. That can be a barrier as well. Just like kids reflect what they hear in and outside of school. So, there are things that kids come in and say that are hurtful. And those are teaching moments, but that can be a hard thing, as well as teaching them that what their parent or what their uncle or what their neighbor says is not kind or not inclusive or that kind of thing."

Table 2 outlines the coding scheme used in this study to analyze the strategies and practices of Reggio-inspired educators. The table includes the coded theme and sub-theme, participant IDs, line numbers of transcript excerpts, and examples from data. By providing specific examples from the data, the coding table facilitates a structured and in-depth analysis of patterns in educational practices, contributing to the study's comprehensive understanding of effective Reggio-inspired methods.

Figure 1: Sketch from Balducci Center

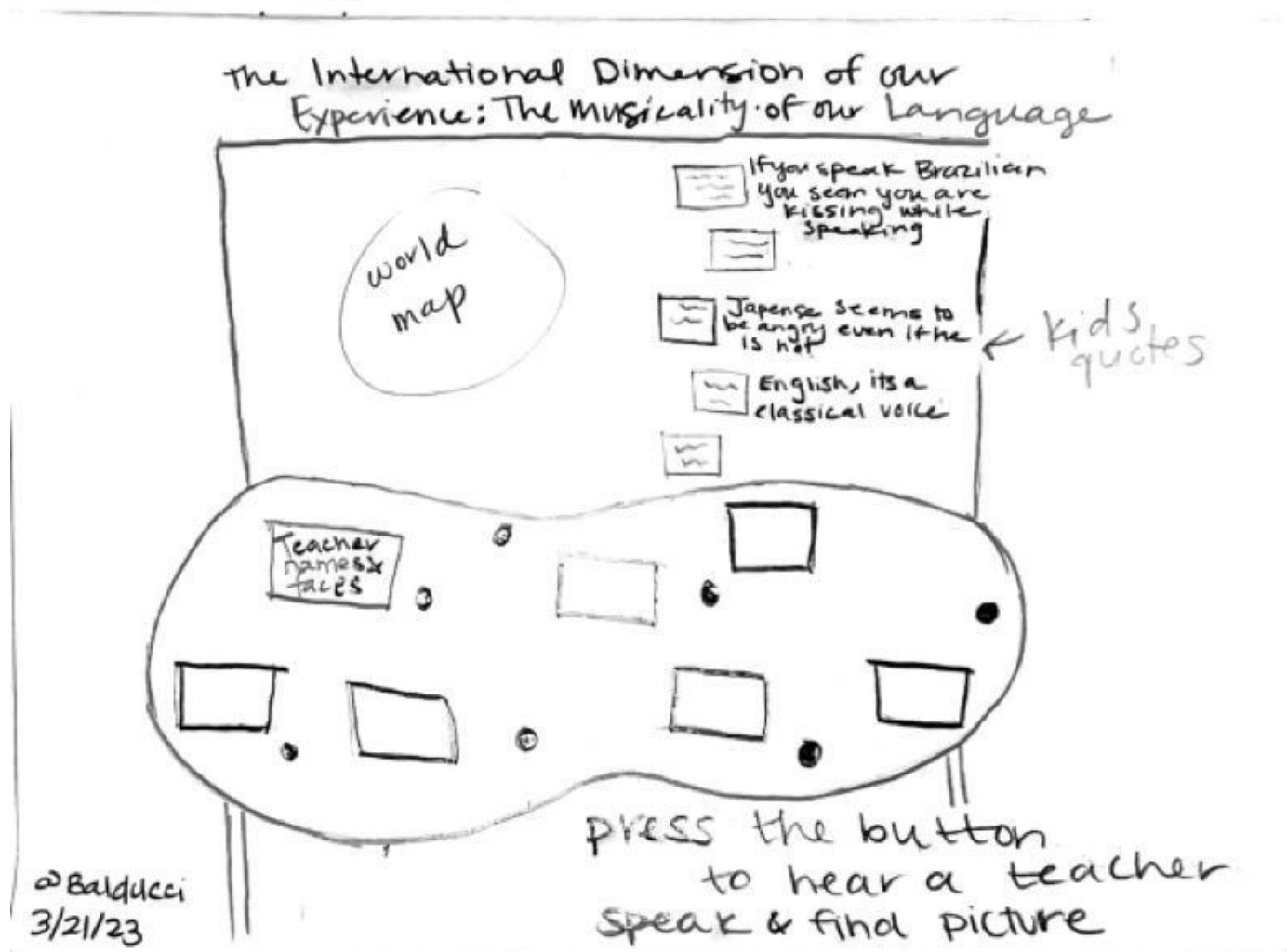


Figure 1 presents a sketch of an interactive table located in the Piazza of the Scuola dell'infanzia comunale Ernesto Balducci. The table features a display titled “The International Dimension of Our Experience: The Musicality of Our Language,” adorned with a world map and children’s quotes about different languages. Below this display, the table showcases pictures of teachers’ faces along with their names. Colorful buttons are positioned next to the pictures; when pressed, these buttons play recordings of the teachers speaking, highlighting the musicality of their respective languages.

Appendix A: Recruitment post

Calling All Reggio-Inspired Preschool Teachers!

- Are you a passionate Reggio-inspired preschool teacher in the United States?
- Are you over the age of 18?
- Have you been trained or mentored in the Reggio Emilia approach?
- Do you have experience teaching children with disabilities in a Reggio setting?

Your experiences and practices are valuable, and I am eager to hear from you!

In pursuit of my master's degree, I am conducting a qualitative research study. This study aims to explore the exceptional efforts put forth by professionals like yourself in supporting children with disabilities in Reggio-inspired environments.

Study Details:

- o 90-minute virtual focus group
- o Share your insights on strategies used to support children with disabilities
- o Anonymity and confidentiality are respected
- o \$50 e-gift card for completing the study

Why Participate?

- o Contribute to the understanding of Reggio-inspired inclusive practices
- o Elevate the voice of Reggio-inspired educators

If you're interested in participating or learning more,
*please scan the QR code or email **rmdean@uw.edu***
to see if you are eligible!



Exploring Reggio-inspired Strategies for Inclusion

Appendix B: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT TO RESEARCH

STUDY OF EXPLORING REGGIO-INSPIRED INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Principal Investigator (PI): Rosanne Dean
Affiliation: College of Education, University of Washington
Contact information: (360) 865-7043 | rmdean@uw.edu

Researcher's statement:

My name is Rosanne Dean, and I'm a Learning Sciences and Human Development graduate student conducting research for my Master's Thesis.

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring Reggio-inspired inclusive pedagogies. This study aims to understand how Reggio-inspired preschool teachers support the learning and development of children with disabilities.

Procedure:

If you decide to join this study, you will be asked to attend a virtual focus group and engage in a reflective discussion about your experiences as a Reggio-inspired teacher working with children with disabilities. We'll ask you to share any specific accommodations, adaptations, or modifications you may use to support the educational and developmental needs of children with disabilities in your classroom.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the University of Washington.

Risks and Benefits:

There are minimal risks associated with this study, but some of the questions will require you to reflect on past experiences. Potential benefits include gaining insights into innovative strategies for supporting the learning and development of children with disabilities and contributing to research on Reggio-inspired practices.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during this study will be kept confidential. Your identity will be anonymized, and data will be stored securely.

Incentive:

As a thank you for being in the study, you will be given a \$50 e-gift card after participating in the ninety-minute virtual focus group. If you agree to be part of this study, you can sign your name at the bottom. You will receive a copy of this form after you've signed it.

You can contact me anytime if you have questions about the study. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call the UW Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Researcher's signature

Date

Your statement:

Participation Consent:

This research has been explained to me. I have read and understand the information provided above. I agree to participate voluntarily in the research study on Reggio-inspired Inclusive Pedagogy. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have more questions, I can ask the researcher.

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix C: Survey Tool, Eligibility Questionnaire

Please choose responses that best describe you for the following:

Are you over the age of 18:

Yes *No*

Do you live in the United States:

Yes *No*

Do you understand and speak English:

Yes *No*

Do you currently work in a Reggio-inspired preschool:

Yes *No*

Have you been trained or mentored in the Reggio Emilia approach:

Yes *No*

Is your experience teaching children with disabilities or special needs in a Reggio-inspired preschool equal to or greater than 1 year:

Yes *No*

Contact information (kept confidential):

Appendix D: Survey Tool, Demographic Survey

Please choose responses that best describe you for the following:

Preferred Pronouns:

She/her/hers

He/him/his

They/them/theirs

Years of experience as a Reggio-inspired teacher:

1-3

4-7

8-10

10+

Years of experience as a Reggio-inspired teacher working with children with disabilities or special needs:

1-3

4-7

8-10

10+

Please briefly specify the type of disabilities or special needs you have worked with:

Does your Reggio-inspired preschool receive public funds (e.g., Head Start, ECEAP, Working Connections, etc.)?

Yes

No

Unsure

If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question please briefly specify which public funds your Reggio-inspired preschool receives:

Location of the Reggio-inspired preschool you work at:

City

State

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Focus Group Protocol

1. What are some general strategies you employ to create an inclusive environment for all children?
 - a. Can you provide examples of specific adaptations or modifications commonly used in your classrooms?
2. How do you identify and address the individual abilities of diverse learners?
3. Could you share specific examples where you've successfully supported a child's unique learning requirements?
4. How does collaboration among educators and support staff play a role in meeting the needs of children's diverse abilities?
 - a. How do you engage with parents and other professionals to ensure comprehensive support?
5. What challenges do you face in implementing inclusive strategies, and how do you overcome them?
6. What has been your experience with professional development related to inclusive education?
7. How do the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach guide your approach to inclusive education?
 - a. In what ways do you adapt these principles to meet the diverse needs of all children?
8. Any final comments or reflections anyone would like to share?