An Academic Discussion of the Curricular Approaches at Imagine Learning Center

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Introduction

Imagine Learning Center is influenced by many curricular approaches. The three largest influences are Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia. Many people in the education community view these as contrasting approaches; however, they all have similarities in their views about child development and how children learn, the ideal learning environment, their goals for the children they teach, their philosophical backgrounds and theories that influence that environment, the level of parent and community participation that is expected, and their evaluation strategies (Evans, 1975). Below, the three approaches are compared and contrasted based on these criteria with some thoughts from practitioners of these approaches included. The overall conclusion is that while valuing the individuality of each approach, our teachers can extract some aspects of each, depending on the child, the learning environment, and the individual teacher, that can enhance the overall experience if that extraction is done in a thoughtful and educated manner.

Recuperation from the aftermath of war greatly influenced all three of these approaches. Rudolf Steiner began his school with a mission to reunite his society after World War I and Maria Montessori's experiences during World War II drove her to work for peace education. The Reggio Emilia schools also have an incredibly rich history (Frasier, 2002). The first Reggio Emilia school emerged from a community that came together after the war and used what few resources they had to build a school. Children and education were highly valued by the Reggio Emilia community. Women's influence on the community was also remarkable and extremely influential to the foundation of the Reggio Emilia approach; they are viewed as strong, matriarchal figures. The influence of women on the community is strongly associated with the importance their community puts on children and education. Because of their history and their priorities regarding children and education, Reggio Emilia schools hold a philosophy based on the social constructivist approach, community participation, and collaboration; embodying the belief that it takes a village to raise a child. The emergence after war is just one aspect that these three curriculum models have in common.

Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia are educational approaches that have distinct differences as well as numerous similarities in background, theoretical foundation, and practice. A variety of criteria will be used to clarify these differences and similarities. A method for comparing and contrasting curriculum approaches suggested by Evans (1975) is adapted, discussed and utilized to analyze these three approaches.

Sections of this manuscript involve teacher interviews, which were obtained for the purpose of including some relevant examples of practitioners using these approaches. One of the teachers is a preschool teacher who is trained in the Waldorf approach and uses it solely in her classroom. She is the director and teacher of her own small Waldorf preschool. The other teacher has taught children from toddlers through kindergarten. She was trained as a Montessori teacher and discovered the Reggio Emilia approach more recently in her teaching career. She now has extensive training in the Reggio Emilia approach and it has a strong influence in everything she does in the classroom.

Montessori

The Montessori method is guided by Maria Montessori's theories about child development. She believed that there were four developmental periods, each with peaks (intense change) and valleys (slower changes) (Lillard, 1996). According to her theory, childhood has two periods, birth through age six is the first, with age three being the peak, and age six through age twelve is the second, age nine being the peak. Montessori designed her approach to accommodate the changes within each period (Lillard, 1996). Roopnarine and Johnson (2002) provide a discussion of the Montessori method of early childhood education in a broad way that appeals to most readers. Montessori education focuses on individualized learning that is based in reality. The classroom is organized in a way that allows children to select their own tasks within the teacher's guidelines. The organization of the classroom is critical to this method. The teacher prepares the learning environment to meet the needs of the children. According to Roopnarine and Johnson (2002), there are three types of experiences prepared for students: daily living exercises, sensory materials, and conceptual materials. This environment is designed to promote independence, self-control, self-reliance, and intrinsic rewards. The criticisms of the approach include the inflexible nature of learning and structure of materials because the materials are designed to be used in particular ways to develop very specific skills, the lack of emphasis on creativity and on the expression of feelings through play, and the de-emphasis of social interaction and, therefore, language development (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2002).

A concern worth considering about the Montessori method is that Montessori developed the approach during her work with children with disabilities and then from low socioeconomic backgrounds; some educators questions its transferability to other learners (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2002). As evident in her success, children with disabilities and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds thrive in the systematic, highly organized and structured environment which is provided by the Montessori method; however, that practice does not necessarily transfer to working with all children. While it is true that she began her work with those populations and she had great success using her approach with those children, she then shifted her focus to the more average learner and adapted her approach to the needs of this new population (Hainstock, 1986). Some important aspects of the Montessori program that are

transferable to all learners include a learning environment carefully prepared by the teacher, motor education, sensory education, and language education (Goffin, & Wilson, 2001).

The Montessori method and the constructivist approach have been compared with regard to their assumptions about the origin, nature, and limits of knowledge (Elkind ,2003). The Montessori approach is based on the belief that children simply absorb knowledge if provided the kind of environment and materials to do so; however, the constructivist approach views learning as the process each child building a personal knowledge base through interaction with the environment (Elkind, 2003). Both of these approaches emphasize the importance of interacting with the environment, however, the process is very different. Teacher observation of this process of interacting with the environment serves as a highly effective method of assessment for both of these methods emphasis on assessment in a Montessori curriculum is not as pronounced as in other methods, hence, neither method puts much emphasis on formal assessments (Elkind, 2003). One distinct difference between the Montessori and constructivist approaches, related to their views about how children learn, is that play and imagination in the constructivist classroom are replaced by practical life skills, which include everyday household activities, in a Montessori classrooms (Elkind, 2003). In a constructivist classroom, play and imagination are seen as unique and innovative happenings that allow children to construct their own knowledge base (Elkind, 2003). Montessorians and constructivists do agree, however, to put the child at the center of the educational program and that children grow through imitation, problem solving, and planning (Elkind, 2003).

Comparisons of the Montessori philosophy and Vygotsky's theory of learning are also noteworthy (Bodrova, 2003). Vygotsky saw the most significant influence on development to be social interaction; however, Montessori saw development as innate and internal in the form of predetermined stages (Bodrova, 2003). Instruction based on child development is an area in which the two approaches can agree; however, their views about child development differ. Montessori believed that children's development is through internal forces that are enhanced through a natural interest in learning in a properly constructed environment. Vygotsky, on the other hand, did not put as much emphasis on the prepared environment as he did on how social interactions shaped

development (Bodrova, 2003). Vygotsky focused much of his research on how important language is for social interaction and, therefore, the development of the child. However, Montessori felt that language is merely a tool for expressing advanced intellectual thoughts (Bodrova, 2003). The last contrasting point that Bodrova (2003) discusses is that Vygotsky held play in high regard as a very significant catalyst for later learning, but Montessori did not regard play as an essential piece of the curriculum. Montessori followers feel strongly that children be made aware of the difference between fantasy and reality (Hainstock, 1986). Rather than encouraging fantasy play in the classroom, a Montessori classroom attempts to support children's interests to emulate real life experiences. Pretend play consists of acting out stories and plays rather in a Montessori classroom (Hainstock, 1986).

Though Montessori and Vygotsky's theories about child development clash, Montessori's and Gardner's inferences about children's capabilities are well aligned (Vardin, 2003). Both of their theories emerged from their experience with people with and without disabilities. Montessori and Gardener both recognized individual differences among the people they worked with. Two differences between the two are that Montessori's theories grew from her experience educating children and Gardener's remain theoretical, and Gardener's theories focus specifically on intelligence while Montessori's ideas involve the potential of the whole person (Vardin, 2003). Educating the whole child is an area in which Montessori educators are well aligned Waldorf Educators. Both approaches attempt to aid in the development of children's minds, as well as their bodies, hearts and hands.

Waldorf

Trostli (1998) discusses three particularly relevant elements of the Waldorf approach, one being similar to Montessori's idea of educating the whole child. The first characteristic of the Waldorf approach is that education is guided strictly by Steiner's ideas about development (Lillard, 1996). The second characteristic is that teachers use the art of education to develop the whole child from the heart to the hands and the head (Lillard, 1996). The third characteristic is that schools reach their goal of educating children to be well-balanced adults who are compassionate toward people and animals, and respectful of the earth (Lillard, 1996).

Development, as seen by Waldorf educators, happens in stages (Trostli, 1998). The stages are broken up by the part of the human being that emerges at a given time. Steiner saw development as occurring in four phases: the physical, etheric, astral, and I (Trostli, 1998). All of the phases go through waves of being more or less dominant through out life, the physical body begins to develop in the womb and is in simple terms the composition of our corporal being. The etheric body is the catalyst that supports the growth of the physical body, and becomes dominant around the age of seven, when children begin losing their baby teeth (Trostli, 1998). The etheric body is then ready to accept higher levels of thinking, which include skills such as remembering (Trostli, 1998). The etheric body is not perceived in a physical manner, but experienced through the effects it has on the development of our minds and our bodies (Trostli, 1998). At puberty, the astral body becomes the dominant influence on development and primarily gives us the ability to experience emotions and be conscious. All animals have this ability; however, Steiner contends that this aspect of growth is what separates animals and humans from plants (Trostli, 1998). The last body to dominate is the I. The dominance of the I happens around twenty-one years old and it allows a person to reveal the development of individuality, freedom, and responsibility (Trostli, 1998). According to Steiner, this phase is unique to humans and it also brings us closer to divinity because of the hightened awareness of ourselves within our minds and bodies (Trostli, 1998). The Waldorf curriculum is based on these ideas about development and spirituality.

In 1919, in the aftermath of war, Germany was falling apart at the seams. Steiner spoke at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory about repairing the society with social and political renewal. The owner of the factory asked Steiner to establish a school for the employees' children. Steiner agreed to open the school on four unorthodox (at the time) conditions (http://www.awsna.org, The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, retrieved Spring 2004). The first condition was that the school be open to all children. The second and third conditions were that the school be coeducational and a twelve-year school. The fourth condition was that the teachers be the primary control agents of the school with little influence from the government. This was the beginning of the first Waldorf School (http://www.awsna.org, The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, retrieved Spring 2004).

Waldorf education seeks to address the needs of growing children. It teaches to the whole child – heart, hands, and head. Waldorf educators work with the belief that young children learn through imitation and imagination (http://www.awsna.org, The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, retrieved Spring 2004). Activities that are often observed in a Waldorf curriculum for young children are storytelling, puppetry, creative play, singing, finger plays, painting, drawing, beeswax modeling, cooking, and walks in nature. The world is shaped by people, not the other way around, and Waldorf educators believe that if they help the child develop in a way that develops the whole person, the children will be able to more effectively shape the world. Preparation for the real world requires the development of a well-rounded person and Waldorf educators strive to help children develop knowledge of the world, of history, of culture, practical and artistic abilities, as well as a respect for nature (http://www.awsna.org, The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, retrieved Spring 2004). These children are also taught to be initiators. Waldorf educators strongly believe that these characteristics are essential for functioning in the real world.

Waldorf Education has utilizes many aspects of constructivism, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of play, and Waldorf educators are focused on developing the whole child. Their ideas about letting the child dictate when he/she is ready to learn to read relates to Vygotsky's work. When a child is ready, or in the zone of proximal development, with a little bit of assistance, that child can quickly accomplish the desired skill (Mooney, 2000). Waldorf educators understand the research about children's development occurring in natural stages and they keep this in mind when developing their curriculum. This awareness provides students with a strong sense of self-confidence in their abilities (Prescott, 1999).

The model of education put into practice at Waldorf schools can provide some support for re-evaluating theories and practices in our schools (Easton, 1997). One important focus of Waldorf education is that it gives teachers information that helps inspire them to create a learning community that emphasizes the development of the whole child to his/her potential (Easton, 1997). This is a similar focus to that of Montessori. Some major fundamentals of Waldorf education consist of the theory of development, a focus on professional development, a curriculum that integrates the arts and academics, a method of pedagogy that is in synch with each child's development,

the integration of teaching and administration, and the learning community that actively involves teachers, students, and parents (Easton, 1997). There is a lot of congruence between the Waldorf approach and that of Reggio Emilia.

Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is influenced by many well-known theorists (Frasier, 2002). The importance that is placed on the individual child constructing his/her own knowledge base was influenced by Piaget. The approach is also greatly influenced by Vygotsky in the importance that is placed on social construction of learning. One of the fundamental aspects of the Reggio Emilia curriculum, co-construction of knowledge between children and children, teachers and children, parents and children, as well as the community and children has its foundations in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. Gardener's multiple intelligences are accommodated in the investigative classroom as well. Dewey's theories about educating young children were highly influential in molding the Reggio philosophy. A beautiful environment is a high priority (Frasier, 2002). The idea that children learning through and in relation to living is another fundamental aspect of the Reggio curriculum. The manner that Reggio teachers view children

> no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not see them only engaged in action with objects, does not emphasize only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical, and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the affective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and other children (Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10).

Reggio focuses on education resulting in children who can think and act for themselves. Because of this focus, children are treated seriously and their ideas are respected. This respect is carried through to all children. Reggio educators make special efforts to include children with disabilities and express their respect for these children by giving them "special rights" rather than labeling them as "special needs" (Frasier, 2002). The word "rights" implies something positive, while the word "needs" implies helplessness.

The role of the teacher in a Reggio Emilia school is to create relationships with all children, families, and the community through the promotion of communication. Building

relationships is the foundation of Reggio Emilia and, therefore, one of the core values (Frasier, 2002). In Reggio Emilia schools, the environment is a reflection of values. A huge value in the Reggio approach is the image of a strong child (Frasier, 2002). The environment must encourage investigation and be open to change in order to respond to the demands of active learners. It should also be designed to welcome, have visual documentation, promote social interaction, and a sense of community (Frasier, 2002).

Documentation is a record of the process in which children and teachers engage in while learning (Frasier, 2002). It is visible evidence of learning experiences. Art is deeply embedded into the Reggio Emilia curriculum and is used as documentation. This is an example of what Reggio educators call the hundred languages of children, meaning that children display their experiences in as many as a hundred different ways and educators should be trained to recognize this kind of expression (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Documentation helps children and teachers make connections, review and plan for future experiences. Documentation is an ongoing process that heightens teachers' awareness of what actually happened during a given experience. It helps teachers learn to teach from children's own learning. Children may correct and expand earlier understandings and compare their ideas with others. Parents and other visitors should be able to see the theory, philosophy, and purpose that underlie the experience from the documentation (Frasier, 2002). This leads into a discussion on the form of curricular planning used by teachers in Reggio schools: the negotiated curriculum. This type of curricular planning emerges from the interests and ideas of children, but should be negotiated between all involved.

Comparing the Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia Approaches

Some universal agreements about teaching and learning exist among educators. Evans (1975) suggests that these agreements include recognizing readiness for learning and accommodating for that, developing individualized instruction with the resources that are available, and the belief that all children are capable of learning if provided the environment to do so. Evans points out, however, that educators do not all agree on what conditions are involved in organizing that environment (1975). Some commonalities among successful programs include clear goals that guide the planning

and instruction of the curriculum and holding to the notion that what children do in school should create feelings of intrinsic confidence and happiness (Evans, 1975).

The major differences among curricular approaches are generally rooted within the philosophies and theories that guide each approach which transfer into practice. For example, some programs are guided by philosophies and theories about behavior modification, some programs focus on cognitive development, while others strive to promote self-actualization (Evans, 1975). Other differences that distinguish one approach from another are the significance of parent participation in the program, the methods used to research and evaluate the students and the program, and the value placed on the process of learning versus the products of learning (Evans, 1975). Many elements make up a particular curriculum approach and they are all on their own continuum. Where each element lies gives insight into the values of the given curriculum. Some elements on the continuum include the approach's assumptions about child development, assumptions about how children learn, ideas about the appropriate learning environment, the nature of short- and long- term goals for children, the guiding philosophy, the value of parent and community involvement, and the methods of evaluation. The following section breaks down the Montessori approach, the Waldorf Approach, and the Reggio Emilia approach into the items on the continuum.

Core beliefs about child development

Waldorf and Montessori educators' views are based on the founder of each of their approaches, whereas Reggio Emilia educators pull in a variety of theorists, including Piaget and Vygotsky, to make up their beliefs about child development.

One Waldorf teacher's description of her core beliefs about child development:
Children come with a personal destiny that they need to complete. When a child enters my program, there's a vast richness to that individual that I may not be able to see. My job is to supply a safe, loving environment for them to develop their capacities to take up their potential destiny.

And one teacher trained in the Montessori approach but incorporating the Reggio Emilia approach said:

I believe children are strong, with inherent rights and abilities. I think that we can facilitate growth, or stand in its way, as obstacles. I think that children should be able to follow their own path, and we can enhance

that pathway, provide numerous options and materials, tools for them and that our role is to model, facilitate, guide and offer possibilities. But to include the Reggio model, there's a shift from just guiding children - teachers make predictions, hypotheses and through observing, they provoke situations where children can bring forward their ideas and thoughts.

Both teachers described a child's predetermined path or destiny and the teacher's responsibility to provide an environment or guide the child on that path. There are subtle differences within the linguistics of each description; but the major difference is the level of teacher interaction in the equation. The Waldorf teacher describes her guidance as an source of support through the preparation of the environment and affection, while the Montessori and Reggio teacher describes her role as more hands on and interactive in the learning process. This is an example of the how similar these approaches are regarding beliefs about the child, yet how different they are in practice.

Core beliefs about how children learn

Montessorians believe that children learn through exposure to reality and interaction with environment (Hainestock, 1986). The Waldorf approach is oriented toward children learning through imitation of reality, but imagination and fantasy also play a large part in the curriculum. In a Montessori classroom, children do act out stories and plays (Hainestock, 1986), but there is a clear distinction between fantasy and reality. The most evident differences among the three models are seen in the classroom. Walking into a Montessori classroom, one would notice that children are busy at tables or on the floor, usually working alone or with a partner. A Waldorf classroom is noisier during free playtime, and children are playing in social groups, mostly active throughout the entire room, not sitting at tables. Some words from a Waldorf educator, "Children learn through play. They make sense of their environment and the world around them through play." A Reggio room has a combination of the two – children may be hard at work on a project, but are working in a group, collaborating. One of the most distinguishable aspects of the Reggio educators is their vision of how children express what they learn. Reggio educators recognize that children express what they learn in many ways that are not always easily acknowledged by adults. They call this the hundred languages of children. Their knowledge is often displayed through

their art and other creations. All three approaches agree that children learn through interaction with the environment and through imitation.

The Waldorf method builds a strong foundation, allowing children to discover the wonders of the world for themselves. According to Couler (2003), Montessori education does not take children on that journey; it shows children the wonders and then goes back and introduces the journey. The negotiated curriculum used by Reggio educators takes into account the child as a co-constructor of knowledge, which is a belief shared by the Montessori philosophy. A similarity between Montessori education and the Reggio Emilia approach is that both view children as the directors of their own learning through an innate desire for growth and knowledge of the world (Edwards, 2003). Words from a teacher trained in the Montessori method who has adopted the Reggio approach sheds some light on some of the similarities from a practitioner's perspective:

I believe the experts, that children are naturally curious, playful, creative, natural learners who learn and make meaning of the world through interacting with it. Reggio educators say children have the right to be, to learn, to express themselves in a fertile ground, in a place for building knowledge, as opposed to delivering or consuming knowledge. Children learn by mimicking, by experimenting and exploring and building relationships, with people, with ideas and within the context of society. They are natural scientists, artists, actors, anthropologists, philosophers and we can, as Montessori said, "provide the means and remove the obstacles, beginning with herself, for she may be the biggest obstacle of all." Planning therefore becomes responsive, provocative, hypothesizing, flexible, responsive to children's ideas.

Vision of an ideal learning environment

Free choice is highly regarded by all three approaches. The amount of child input about the choices that are provided varies for each approach. The Montessori classroom is set up by the teacher and the child chooses from what is there, but engages in the materials in a predetermined manner. The Waldorf classroom is also set up by the teacher, and the child makes choices about play based on the materials that are provided. The primary difference in a Waldorf classroom is that children make the choice about how to interact with the material as well. The Reggio classroom uses a

thoughtfully organized classroom, but goes even further outside the box by allowing children to choose the direction of the curriculum according to their interests.

Though the practice of Montessori and Reggio methodologies appears different, the goals remain the same. Both Montessori and Reggio teachers aspire to be compassionate partners and guides in learning, they both depend on thoughtfully organized, beautiful environments as a pedagogical tool, and they strongly value respect for children and a working relationship with families (Edwards, 2003). Some words used to describe the Reggio environment from a teacher who uses the approach, "reciprocity, reflective, transparent, responsive, respectful, circular, full of light, organized (organization as a value), rich, thoughtful, disorienting, borderless, relational, soft, hard" (Davies, 2004). Montessori education has a strong focus on the outside world, whereas Waldorf focuses more on the world the children live in. Emphasizing this point, a Waldorf teacher says that her vision of an ideal learning environment is, "a place that is safe, clean, warm, inviting, where materials are available to children at their level and are easy for them to use. A place where the care givers are warm, engaging, and genuine." The Montessori method emphasizes the materials used, the environment that is set up, order, and practicality while the Waldorf method focuses on imagination, feeling, and beauty.

Long and short term goals for children

The Montessori method has the main objective of teaching children the skills to take their place in society where Waldorf education taps into the imagination of its children and focuses on the arts (Couler, 2003).

Montessori hopes that her children will have such a foundation that they will work for world peace. Steiner hopes that his children will work for the development of the culture. Both approaches come from concern, compassion, and honor for the whole child (Couler, 2003). Reggio teachers' main objective is for the education they provide to help children develop into people who can think and act for themselves. I think that this idea is congruent with both Montessori's and Waldorf's goals. Children who can think and act for themselves will hopefully work for the betterment of the culture, society, and the world. Some more immediate goals from a Waldorf preschool teacher for her students are, "that they continue to have an environment that supports normal development, appropriate of the young child, where they can just enter into childhood. I don't think that

there is much of that anymore, where they can just be kids. There is so much pressure now for academics from parents and schools." On the same note, an early childhood educator who uses both Montessori and Reggio is her classroom expresses that she thinks that,

> children should be given time, time, time, to develop, to explore, to
> play, to develop relationships with each other, with their teachers, and
> with the environment and to learn. Even the use of the metaphor, "to be
> given time" reflects our role in either taking the time from them or
> allowing them to have the time already theirs, we just steal it away, in
> some misguided notion of saving it for them for the future. They are
> building and working towards the moment, the now, which is what they should be
> doing, and we mistakenly are working towards "the future child, the future citizen"
> and miss the child of now, of today.

Both teachers emphasize the value of childhood and are appreciative of the present. This reflects the level of importance placed on this particular phase of development by all three models and the similarities among the short-term goals that they share.

Educational philosophy and the theories that drive that philosophy

Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio philosophies all support the idea that puts the child in charge of the personal learning that takes place. Gardner's theories also align with all three models. While Vygotsky and Montessori clash more than Vygotsky and Waldorf and Reggio do, ultimately they all have the same goal in mind – to help children grow to their full potential. The interpretation of theories and philosophies is evident in practice, and the practice of each of these three models looks very different. Couler's (2003) attempt to liken the Montessori and Waldorf approaches to the masculine and feminine, yin and yang, or reverse symmetries is significant. Rudolf Steiner was an early 20th-century spiritual teacher who articulated a vision of human growth, wholeness, and evolutionary change (Marshak, 2003). His theories are the main influence that guides the Waldorf curriculum. When asked what theorists guide curriculum, one Waldorf teacher answered, "Primarily Steiner, but we do some Piaget stuff and to a lesser degree, Maslow. Primarily, Steiner though." While a teacher using both Montessori and Reggio approaches answered, "Montessori, Reggio Emilia and the Italian theorists (Vecchi, Gambetti, Rinaldi, Malaguzzi, Gianni Rodari) Bruner, Vygotsky, Gardner,

Chard, Chomsky, Fritof Capra and Mihaly Cskiszentmihali are my pedagogical influences."

Expected level of parent/community involvement

Relationships with families and respect for children are two major themes throughout all three philosophies. All three approaches rely on parent involvement and support of the educational program. Community involvement is also an asset to each of these approaches. The Reggio approach makes special efforts to include members of the community into the school and the classroom. "A bridge between home life and school is essential. It builds the community of the school and helps the children know that their parents support their school." This is a reply regarding parent participation by a Waldorf preschool teacher. Although community involvement is viewed as an asset by practitioners, it takes a special relationship between the school and the community to break that barrier. In the original Reggio Emilia school, the community had a vested interest in the school and, therefore, the partnership has sustained.

Methods of evaluation

Evaluation in all three approaches is similar in the early childhood setting. Observations, both formal and informal, are utilized and evaluation of the progress often occurs through observation of the process a child goes through during a given activity. Reggio Emilia teachers specifically develop portfolios of childrens' expressions of the hundred languages of children. Waldorf teachers focus less on the products that come out of these processes and more on the process itself through observation. This method is described by a Waldorf preschool teacher:

> If we're lucky enough to have them for a couple of years, then we get to watch their development and we get to strengthen our relationship with their family. We spend time observing our children and have a good understanding of their development just by spending time with them.

Combining the Approaches in the Classroom

When working in the classroom with young children, it is invaluable to have many resources to pull from to build strategies for developing the curriculum. One curriculum approach, on its own, can supply ample resources; but, being able to have the flexibility to internalize different approaches and utilize the components that will enhance the

program takes a different kind of thought process. Evans (1975) warns practitioners that no approach is right for every student in every classroom in every school. The teacher must be confident in the choices made about the use of an approach and skilled in the delivery of that approach to students. Insecurity and lack of vision can hinder the success of even the most well respected curriculum approaches (Evans, 1975). Below is a Waldorf teacher's thoughts about using more than one approach to influence the curriculum, she seems to agree with Evans' (1975) cautionary note:

> I think that if you have specific reasons why and you've really penetrated the information and made it your own, then I think that's ok. But if you're using it as a cookbook, then I don't think that works. Even with Waldorf, the classrooms may look similar, but the way the curriculum is brought to the children varies from individual to individual, depending on the teacher and the child.

Case Studies

Episode in a Waldorf preschool classroom

The children gather around the already prepared tables. Painting boards are laid out with watercolor paper that is already wet. Individual settings of three colors of watercolor paint tablets and a cup filled with water is at each. The teachers sing a high pitch, low volume song about the painting fairies while each child waits for a paintbrush with hands on above of his or her head in a cupped position. The children, all three- and four-year-olds, paint relatively silently, reminded with a sweet comment to remain that way if an occasional peep erupts. The children paint and when they are done, they quietly bring their paint boards with their paintings still on them to the drying rack.

> "The day is a series of out breaths and in breaths. If we let them have too much out breath, it can take over. We try to provide a balance. The children go into their full extension during free play and then with clean up we help bring them in and then painting is their in breath. Painting is a quiet time, the children use this time to reflect and relax, they just paint with watercolors. The in breath is a time when they go within themselves. We are trying to promote the process rather than the product, the experience that they are having is the most important."

- reflections by a Waldorf preschool teacher on painting relating to the use of the Waldorf approach in the classroom.

Episode in a kindergarten classroom

An example that happened this year... we had traveled all around the world, through the year, studying continents, and countries, voting on ways to travel such as a submarine, a train and a hot air balloon. We just kept giving the children opportunities to decide what, what, what, where, where, where, how, how, how, always listening to their ideas and then somehow facilitating an encounter with the idea in a deeper way.

When we had exhausted all the continents, we were technically all back in Australia. The assistant to Kindergarten said What should we do now? We've been everywhere?" and suddenly someone said "We haven't been to space!" The room erupted into applause and cheers and they all said "Yea! Yea! We are going to space!"

What else could I say but Yes, we are going to Space..

It becomes a moment of listening or of resistance......

I could have said something like Oh no children we have to study Insects now... or no, no , we have to do the city. We'll go to space some other time...That's resistance and living to a timetable that doesn't know the children and doesn't listen. But Reggio is a pedagogy of listening, Montessori is a pedagogy of staying with the child, through their ideas and both expect the educator to go deeper, to facilitate the learning,,, the creation of knowledge from exploration into ideas, instead of just plowing through, or gobbling up facts and knowledge. The environment respects and reflects this exploration through openness, through organization, as the environment is the third teacher, a principle that dominates Montessori thought and is a key principle in Reggio pedagogy.

- Reflections from a teacher who incorporates the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches in her classroom.

Summary

There is more to teaching than the dissemination of knowledge. Children are active participants in the process, and are even able to direct their construction of knowledge in ways that enhance both teaching and learning. Teachers can enhance the process by having a thorough understanding of child development, knowing their students, and having a repertoire of strategies and influences from which to choose. The Montessori, Waldorf , and Reggio Emilia approaches are only three of many methods of curriculum. As stated above, these philosophies have many differences and similarities to each other. Many educators focus more on the differences among these approaches rather than acknowledging that a blend of inspiration from each of these philosophies can open the classroom to a whole new educational experience. While valuing the individuality of each approach, teachers can extract some aspects of each, depending on the child, the learning environment, and the individual teacher, that can enhance the overall experience. The three approaches emerged after the destruction of war as an attempt to look forward toward the future and unify the community. The primary goal of every approach is to enhance children's lives and the most influential person in every learning environment should be the child. Evans' (1975) thoughts about planned curricular variation hold the beliefs that thoughtful and knowledge based experimentation is a positive influence in the classroom and that there is no structured approach that best fits every child. The overall conclusion of this project is that while valuing the individuality of each approach, teachers can extract some aspects of each, depending on the child, the learning environment, and the individual teacher, that can enhance the overall experience if that extraction is done in a thoughtful and educated manner.

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