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Image of the Teacher: Perspectives from Educational Leadership

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Introduction

In contemporary American life parents, teachers, and children of early childhood schools are faced with poorly developed images of the teacher. These images come from mass media such as books, magazines, movies, and television. At present, the existing metaphors for “teacher” are surfacing as an inquiry in early childhood educational research (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001 & Curtis & Carter, 2000). The study of the image of the early childhood teacher asks us to delve into how this socially constructed non-professional image has informed and affected the teacher’s ability to teach well. The early childhood teacher is presently seen in American society as babysitter, caretaker, and omniscient giver of knowledge pouring their “right way of thinking” into empty heads. In an alternate picture, there exists a more profound and underdeveloped teacher researcher image. This image calls forth a trustworthy, knowledgeable, child development expert; facilitator, listener, and observer; and guide of the child’s own learning experiences. A researcher image is lacking in our current era of standardization where teachers practice by “giving” children answers with decontextualized knowledge and an attempt to show children the “right way” to process information in order to survive and compete in schools.

Since the educational establishment shapes the teacher’s work-life through regulation, policy, and culture, the image and role of teacher is embedded in place and time within the school. Educational establishments are now pressured by the political world to meet standards and be more quantitatively accountable. This promotes a teacher image of expert giver of knowledge and a banker and storehouse of information. Applying such rhetoric, more parents are pressuring early childhood schools to teach with particular practices. Imagine touring parents through school and hearing such questions as, “do you teach the alphabet so my child learns to

read before *real* school”, and “I want my child to read by age four so she is prepared for kindergarten; do your teachers provide sit down lessons and tests for this?” All the while, parents feel confused by mixed messages about these standards and accountability which whisper to them the “right” schooling methods for their child’s later success in life. This instruction-success contributes to a poor image of the teacher and misses basic tenets of preprimary school teaching practices. Research on good developmental practices proves that teachers must give equal teaching time to social and emotional development as to cognitive growth. Moreover, learning is achieved through play and exploration which should be fun and contextualized experiences for all children (Cadwell, 2003; Charlesworth, 1999; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2002). To achieve a deep level of classroom teaching and learning, a teacher’s teaching conjures very different images than one of knowledge-bearer who dispenses *the* value-laden information to seated students who are expected to individually “soak up” the right answers. Instead, the teacher image consists of facilitator and co-learner sitting around the roundtable of learning. Rather than the traditional hierarchical image of gatekeeper of knowledge projecting from the front of a class to “empty-headed” students, this alternative and innovative image is vital to the early childhood classroom. Teaching practice fundamentally shows up differently to aid children in the construction of—and ownership in—their own meaning-making of the world around them.

The images that parental and institutional pressure imparts on teachers as bearer of the knowledge and filler of the empty vessels convey that the teacher is an omniscient messenger. Instead, a more viable image is facilitator as observer of the child’s learning interests. Or, guide along the pathway of life and learning with the child, one who helps the child uncover her own learning endeavors *along side of*, rather than for, the child. As Swetnam (1992) acknowledges,

“Problems arise from the misrepresentation of who teaches, where they teach, how they teach, and what demands are placed on *teachers*, thereby creating an alarming distortion with consequences serious enough to warrant the concern of all education professionals” (p. 30). This profound issue of teacher image not only affects teacher practices, but has serious consequences for teacher identity and the profession of teaching as a whole.

An essential factor to studying the image of the teacher and how this has helped to shape early childhood teaching identity is the aspect of how childhood teachers envision themselves influencing the classroom teaching and learning tone. Teachers of young children look to dismantle traditional images such as omniscient knowledge-bearer into more profoundly connected roles—social collaborator learning along side of children—with teaching as a way of learning and self-development. This more thoughtful way of imaging the teacher ultimately benefits children by connecting their learning to contextualized experiences. The attempt to redefine new images of the teacher is not currently well-received in a politically charged, numbers-based educational era where parents influence and pressure largely privatized, tuition-based, and customer-oriented early childhood schools. Parents—mostly influenced by the charged political climate of today—are bringing messages to schools that standards, performance-based outcomes, and test accountability are the correct methods used to compete, make children smart, and prepare them for their next school-life.

A fundamental question lies at the base of this educationally significant investigation into the image of childhood teacher: *How does the image of the early childhood teacher inform pedagogy and practice?* The significance of this question lies squarely in what is termed “the banking model” (Freire, 1998), which is currently held as the political standard and forces teachers into an instructor image. The banking model imagines the teacher as a storehouse of

knowledge and the child as an empty vessel needing a deposit of information. “The banking model tries to control thinking and action and inhibits our creative powers. It tries to maintain the submersion of consciousness. In it we are merely spectators, not re-creators” (Freire, 1998, p. 62). This image leaves children filled with meaningless facts and figures that are neither contextualized nor significantly rooted in experiences to inform life-practices. A different model is suggested by Curtis and Carter (2000) as a round-table of co-learning, termed “subject-centered” learning by Parker Palmer (1998). This is where the subject is placed in the center of the table and the learning surrounds each participant at the table. Each voice plays a critical role in the teaching and learning atmosphere and knowledge is self-and-socially constructed. Context becomes essential to the learning field to build meaning and experience into cultural understanding. Guidici, Rinaldi, and Krechevsky (2001) suggest this phenomenon to represent an intersubjective field of learning where each participant grows in their own understanding of the world through contact and interaction with another around a subject matter. In turn, the other participants shift to more profound levels of understanding along the learning journey.

Undergirding our initial question are four core education leadership belief sets which target: (a) learning paradigms, (b) organization leadership; (c) politics and policymaking; and (d) education research. The underlying educational leadership core areas inform our primary question—how does teacher image inform practices—and they significantly connect context to this study through further inquiry. (a) Where is teacher and teaching clearly defined in learning paradigms? (b) How do education leaders characterize teacher and sustain teacher growth and development? (c) Where is teacher voice and thinking in legislation? (d) What does research say about the early childhood teacher’s image and task? Through these questions we can begin to see how the images that dictate “teacher” rest paradoxically between constricting praxis in early

childhood education to the banking model (Freire, 1998) and constructing praxis toward a social-constructivist and contextualized learning paradigm (Berk, 1995, Curtis and Carter, 2000; Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001) at the subject-centered round table (Palmer, 1998).

This paper attempts to illuminate how the teacher image influences classroom practices. It explores the meaning of a teacher's life. To enhance the perspectives on image, we look through four core lenses—learning paradigms, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research—and merge together current teacher images and how they affect practice. The outcomes of this research include implications for teacher liberation through innovative image change. The conclusions also suggest central concepts such as teacher education transformation for further study into this timely subject.

Context and Exploration: Teacher Image Informs Practice

A considerable problem facing early childhood education programs today is rooted in the images that (1) schools uphold from society pressure, (2), parents bring to school life, (3) and teachers hold of themselves. These images show up in classroom practice and get in the way of young children's learning experiences. "Regarding real world teachers in general, it should not be a surprise that the public is offered a warped repertoire of what a teacher is" (Reyes & Rios, 2003, p. 4). To build a context around the image of the teacher, this paper first examines several frameworks for teacher images and school-life and then considers three challenging areas where image roots itself in teaching practices. Through this contextual exploration a roadmap to the four core educational frames emerges and informs future research implications.

Frameworks for Negative and Positive Teacher Images

The images of the teacher are dictated by our culture's historical stance of child-rearing and our American society's overarching value of individualized family principles which lead to a

shielding of the child's upbringing and isolation from community experiences. "Any analysis of the world in which we live has to take account of other areas and the changes they are experiencing. Economic changes are paralleled by the fragmentation of social classes; individualistic modes of thought and behaviour and an entrepreneurial culture flourish; lifestyles proliferate, and domestic life and leisure are increasingly privatized" (Dahlberg, Moss, Pence, 1999, p. 9). Our overemphasized value of independence forces teachers out of the researcher and educator image into an undervalued state of meager "babysitter." This teacher dares not convey deeply held values to children. She/he can not create a co-learning environment and curriculum with parents to help raise the child. "The debate on who should teach values [parent or teacher] and whose values are taught delays the implementation of a core curriculum where there may be a critical analysis of how the media influences beliefs and values of our society" (Reyes & Rios, 2003, p. 4). To suggest that teachers of young children share expertise in a child's development raises issues around parent competence and calls into question the respective roles of parent and teacher.

In the municipally governed preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, the image of the teacher is clearly defined as one who listens, observes, and helps raise children as an integral member of the child's community. The value of "teacher" is a launching point for further inquiry into school-life. The definition provides a pathway for continued development of intentional community learning environments. The teacher-as-researcher image is one of collaboration and documentation of children's learning experiences through a pedagogy of listening and close observation. Teachers have power to work hand-in-hand with parents in the raising of the child through community culture. They strategize within the community framework to best meet group learning experiences and to develop each individual child in the

context of school-life. This comprehensive image from Reggio Emilia is influencing the early childhood community's thinking about teaching, learning, and the school model.

In our American context, the question of the image of the teacher is important to explore as it informs our everyday classroom practices and comprehensive beliefs about what teaching and learning look like. We have yet to clearly define the early childhood teacher's image and must ask ourselves some very important questions to initiate this undertaking. Our study is not "who is the teacher?" The question asks more than that. As we unpack our archetypal question, we discover two elements to examine more closely. The words of *image* and *teacher* need clarification. What is an image? An image is a reflection of reality, a way of seeing, and an interpretation. It is not real in itself; an image is what is seen in the mind's eye as "a way" of knowing and interpreting reality.

Based on the images our culture holds of the teacher of young children, we must also ask ourselves: who is the teacher and how does she/he teach? The answers to this set of questions plays out on multiple levels. To inform these questions we will examine images which influence schools, come from the public arena such as community and parents, form teacher identity, and ultimately undergird teacher practices.

Public Images Influencing Schools: Teacher Images Pre-"faced" by the Establishment

Preschool is quickly becoming a marketplace for choosing what type of education a child will receive and from whom. Who the teachers are behind the doors of classrooms dictate how children learn and what teaching happens. However, as a school administrator or leader, the image held about teaching and teacher also informs the direction of the annual review practices, training guidelines, and pedagogy of teacher development. In this case, the teacher relinquishes power to the educational system at the school and community level. Messages and images seep

into the establishment's thinking, which influence the school administration and ultimately drive the didactic vision. As Davies (2002) points out in *Changing Schools of Thought*,

Directions for institutional change proliferate, with implications for teacher training and the principles that underpin practice. Notions of a National Curriculum and an examination system (applied to all) largely support the illusion of a common consensus for schools. However, any reading of the statistical data offers a limited grasp of the traits and characteristics of schools. The likely further fragmentation of schools is supported by the choices currently available to school governors and management teams (e.g. religious schools, progressive schools, private schools, etc.). Schools operate in a competitive market where their distinctive contribution is promoted through self-publicity (seductive glossy prospectuses). (p. 10)

Publicity is a mirror of the vision held by a schoolhouse. Are teachers involved in the marketing of a school or driving the direction of the school? Primarily, this falls under the direction of the school leadership—administrators, parents, and mentor teachers who no longer formally teach in children's classrooms. Teachers are informed about methods and practice through performance review, training programs, workshops, and seminars. This way of evaluation and training is to keep the school moving forward in a competitive marketplace rather than for developing solid teaching skills and ongoing teaching-learning development.

Furthermore, the general public—at the receiving end of publicity and prospectus—can not understand the school report card and reputation at depth, unless the school opens its doors and seeks out community participation. With participation, the community can better understand teaching and learning and contextualize the school's experiences. Currently, schools are vulnerable to public criticism and pressure to conform to statistical standards, to demands for

higher quality performance standards, and to change teacher practices. Accountability is paramount. Thus, the school derives image of the teacher from the public to better market their survival. As Swetnam (1992) points out

The perceptions of average citizens--taxpayers, voters, and parents--may be shaped by the unrealistic portrayals of schools and *teachers* in films and television programs. This may help explain why the percentage of schools graded A or B (above average) by citizens surveyed in "The Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" decreases as the respondents' personal knowledge of the schools becomes more remote. The conclusion drawn by the pollsters is that "the more firsthand knowledge one has about the public schools (i.e., knowledge that does not come from the *media*) the better one likes and respects them." Without personal knowledge about schools and *teachers*, people form their attitudes based on fictional *media* representations. (p. 30)

There is a desperate need for the school administration, teachers, and public at large to come together in schools, forge an alliance, place the image of the teacher in the middle of the table, and make the image a focused curriculum of schools. As the teacher's image becomes central focus, key elements of school-community learning experiences unfolds; collaboration, discussion, and cohesion begin to inform teacher practice directed from the home base through the school's own environment. One way to accomplish this task is by asking parents to step into the middle of the community equation. They bring participants together to better understand the teacher role and identity and grow a new image of the teacher through a holistic group perspective. Parents create a viewpoint which includes all the central protagonists of the school life.

The Crossroads of Parenting and Teaching: Parent's Influence in Schools

The parent is an essential character in the life of schools. How parents see teachers plays a fundamental role in praxis—the connection between theory and practice. Most schools espouse parent involvement but don't actually have a defined role for parents to play in the daily life of school. If there is no definition, parents will find a way in through criticism of classroom practices and a bombardment of negative energy and attention-grabbing problems. One central arena for parents to espouse problems rests in the classroom experiences. Another resides in the image parents hold of teacher and how they teach. As Munn (1998) states in *Parental Influence on School Policy*, "Over the past fifteen years or so, parents have been given new rights over their children's schooling... The focus is on parental influence on the day to day preoccupations of schools in terms of teaching and learning" (p. 379). While parent voice and concern is valid and should be valued in schools, the construction of meaning about teaching and learning needs to come from teacher researchers toward the community, with the aid and understanding of parents.

By and large, schools are driven by marketplace mentality in our current era. The contemporary understanding of school success is prevalently confirmed through quantitative measures and outcomes-based learning techniques, and the general population of parents seeks out schools where the teaching image is one of banker. Mann (1998) demonstrates the power of parent influence in schools which remain deregulated and privatized.

Parents have had an influence on school policy through the introduction of a 'quasi-market' approach to the provision of schooling in general and through the specific mechanism of parental choice. This influence has been exerted through the choices of individual parents and mirrors a consumerist approach to educational provision whereby

'exit' (Hirschmann 1970) is the main option to unsatisfactory provision. Just as one does not patronise [*sic*] a department store supplying shoddy goods and takes one's custom elsewhere, so one leaves a school or does not choose a school whose provision is not up to standard. As several commentators have suggested, however, this commodification of education begs profound questions about the kind of society in which we live. (p. 390)

Parent choice does affect the curriculum of teaching. School leaders are caught in the pendulum between keeping parents and consumer contented and running schools that teach with a spirit of learning community in mind.

In choosing schools using a consumerist approach, children and teachers become victims. Teacher identity and voice is lost to popular culture. As Curtis and Carter (2000) see it

We need a *pedagogy* (a way of thinking about learning and teaching) that mirrors *our* [teachers] vision for children, not the existing one of the popular culture. We need to move away from commercially packaged activities and make the time to develop curriculum collaboratively with our coworkers, the children, and their families. (p. xiii)

Teacher identity and image is constructed through the community experiences of communication and collaboration, *only* with children, coworkers (school leadership), and parents working in unison. Meaning making serves as the essence of teacher image existence, constantly influencing and being influenced by classroom practice.

Teacher Identity: Self Fulfilled Prophecy

Aspects of teacher identity come from images that others hold for teachers. Once teachers believe certain images about their professional life, their being moves toward the belief to fulfill their role-identity, make it reality, and prove its existence in the world. Through cognitive science and consciousness studies (Chalmers, 1996), it is speculated that our minds

move toward thoughts not away from them to develop consciousness. Dolloff (1998) describes this phenomenon well.

When we remember people and things in our lives we can ‘see’ a mental picture of them. Sometimes we can even hear their voice, smell their favorite cologne. This mental picture is a constructed image of our experience with that person. Often, the image lays the ground work for our beliefs about not only the individual, but also people in similar roles, in similar places, of similar features. We act in the world on the basis of these beliefs. So too, how we see ourselves—our image of ourselves in the world—affects how we carry out day to day tasks, what we wear, what we choose to do, the friends we keep, the cars we drive. We imagine ourselves in situations that are congruent with our beliefs about ourselves and our place in the world. (p. 192)

As teachers dwell on certain ways of knowing their existence, they move toward this result. The mind is not focused on finding other performance methods for teaching; it is seeking out justification for what it already knows and accepts as real. As Dolloff (1999) states

We also have clear images of what certain people and professions should look like and should act like—their role identity (Knowles, 1992). We all know what teachers look like. Many of these images are created through direct experience with teachers. Others result from seeing a representation of teachers in the arts and media (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Thus, we experience teachers formally and informally every day. Our teacher images, while created by experience early in life, are fueled as much by myth as by truth. They are definitely a product of culture in which we grow, including institutionalized schooling, our homes and families, and the arts and media. (p. 192)

Teachers have spent most of their lives watching other teachers practice. The preconceived notions facing teacher image are developing into identity and reinforcing outdated teaching practices.

It is only recently that pre-service teachers are being taught to rethink teacher identity, image, and role. Through reflective practitioner habits and a routine of constructivist teaching-learning practices, the teacher gains credibility in the learning environment and works toward a learning field filled with wonder, curiosity, and contextualized learning experiences. To attain a more complex image of the teacher remains a long and arduous process and must start with acting practitioners reflecting on identity. The image can then move out concentrically toward the community and public eye. This image starts in the mind of the teacher, moves into the collaborative world of teacher and parent and outward toward the public and community.

Summary

The circles of people influencing teacher image currently work by overlapping the educational leaders with the parent-consumer voice and leaving out the teacher and her or his right to teaching expression. This achieves a narrow and static view of teacher and the role she or he plays in the lives of children.

Conversely, a fresh perspective brings a new challenge where parent, teacher and school overlap and start to influence the community outlook on the image of the teacher. This image bolsters classroom practices that sustain children's lives with meaningful knowledge. Heightened awareness breathes understanding into experiences and eventually cycles into deeper perspectives of learning and living. Under this community perspective model, children, teachers, parents, and community thrive. The central protagonists more holistically cooperate as co-

learners constructing a forum for continuous renewal of teacher as researcher in the field of learning. In the end, this field includes every member of the community as participant.

Finally, examining contemporary educational leadership frameworks strengthens the conceptual agenda of teacher image. The image can only elicit its prominence through a unified, collaborative and designed infrastructure of teacher, parent, and leader cooperating to make schools a place for meaningful co-learning opportunities.

Educational Leadership: Teacher Researcher Image Uncovered

Through the perspectives on educational leadership, a teacher researcher image can grow and become more prevalent to shift classroom practices. This shift occurs through grappling with our four leadership lenses—learning paradigms, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research—which contain both new and existing challenges as well as key elements to a much wiser existence of teaching and learning.

Learning Paradigms-Bringing Social Constructivism to the Fore

Depending on how we each believe and perceive the nature of reality around us, we choose a paradigm for teaching-learning. These paradigms influence and are influenced by the valued images of teacher. There are many positions to take on the nature of reality, and yet from a constructivist viewpoint, the suggested image of the teacher researcher comes alive.

To the constructivist, reality is changing, a creative moving force brought about in the synapses of the human mind, and formulated and reinvented as people interact with the “other.” Reality is relative to context, perceived history, and our own experiences. In the constructivist view, reality is comparative, it is “apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (Lincoln and Guba, 1994, p. 110). Reality is subjective and created as humans move, act, and live life. To

understand reality and learning is to further articulate relationship between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Through shared views and values on how we come to know, teachers build a framework to their practice under a more esteemed, constructivist-influenced teacher image.

There is a song that depicts understanding of and belief in how we come to know. It was written by D. Pomeranz and harmonized by John Denver. “It's in every one of us to be wise. Find your heart open up both your eyes. We can all know everything without ever knowing why. It's in every one of us by and by” (Dancer, ¶ 1, 2003). In this view, the kernels of knowledge are already within us and we tap into our understanding of the world through experimentation, theory, and the history—reminded-story—that stands before us.

As Lincoln and Guba (1994) assert, a constructivist “sees knowledge as created in interaction among investigator and respondents” (p. 111) and believes that the “investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigator proceeds” (p. 111). In other words, we must play with, feel, sense, see, and experience the world around us as we develop understanding as teachers and learners. In this way, information is discovered, explored and understood; it is assimilated as personal and unique and then it becomes tangible and able to be revealed anew.

Related to the thinking on knowledge, understanding, and learning, Plato’s ideas stand out as an early influence on the image of the teacher. *In Perspectives on Learning* by Philips and Soltis (1998), they illustrate Plato’s theories through myth.

Knowledge is innate, it is in place in the mind at birth. At the end of his famous work, *The Republic*, Plato included a myth describing the adventures of a young soldier Er who appeared to have been slain in battle, but who revived nearly two weeks later and was

able to describe what had happened to his soul during the time he seemed to be dead. Er...was able to gaze on the realm of everlasting reality, and thus come to learn the truth. Er also witnessed how souls camped overnight on the banks of the Forgetful River. They were forced to drink from the river...by the middle of the night all souls had forgotten all that they had seen in heaven, and then they were swept away to their new lives on earth. The strong implication is that those who drank too fully would not be able, in the new life, to remember anything about reality, and these individuals would remain ignorant. Those who had drunk only the minimum, however, could with great effort—and with the prompting of education on earth—recall the insights into reality their souls had received. ...for Plato learning was a process of recalling what the soul had already seen and absorbed...teaching is simply the helping of this remembering process. (p. 10)

Plato's vision exposes a metaphysical view of learning and the nature of knowledge. It may not stand provable in concrete terms at this time, but it does linger in the mind—conceptualized as insight into the unknown—into the theoretical frames of living. As evidenced in Lincoln and Guba's (1994) work, "The reader cannot be compelled to accept our analyses, or our arguments, on the basis of incontestable logic or indisputable evidence; we can only hope to be persuasive and to demonstrate the utility of our position" (p. 108). Plato's view clearly demonstrates one "way" of knowing. His beliefs preface additional important philosophical viewpoints.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1994), the purpose of espousing a view of the nature of knowledge and learning is to describe a belief which informs our teaching methods. Therefore, our view of the nature of reality informs the relationship between knower and what is known, which in turn, enlightens how we go about finding what can be known. From early profound

writings and thinking such as Plato's, philosophers, scholars, and educational researchers have further developed the thinking about paradigms informing and guiding inquiry. They have added new and complex layers of philosophy to the currently varied beliefs on learning and knowledge.

Bateson (1994) names the way we come to know—learning—as “homecoming” and “adaptation,” Sosniak (1987) as “a process of change,” and Mezirow (2000) as “making meaning.” Bateson's work on Learning as Coming Home in *Peripheral Visions* is revealing to teacher image. “It is not that we do not value learning that comes as recognition, but that we have despaired of making it the paradigm of all learning” (p. 202). Her suggestion is poignant as she states that our culture is hopelessly led to believe in a pinnacle of learning which has come through “transmission of knowledge” or the banking system. In this case, the teacher is left with an image of banker as the validated and right way to teach. In contrast, Bateson (1994) continues by suggesting that evolution has played a part in the make up of our learning and how we come to know and that this informs practice differently.

The human species has been honed through aeons [*Sic*] of evolutionary change for readiness to learn, in small ways as well as in the dramatic ways I have been speaking of. Each new recognition of pattern, each appropriated skill, could offer a moment of homecoming, building toward an understanding and a capacity to participate in a complex social and biological world. It is in this sense that the model of learning as coming home can inform schooling. (p. 203)

Furthermore, there are others who maintain the view that knowledge exists in our genes and that we are able to carry forth our ancestry's educational legacy as we move along in our own journey of life (Hillman, 1997). Yet, the radical constructivists believe that we are co-creating a reality as we live, move, and breathe and that knowledge exists only as each of us

constructs it. (Von Glaserfeld, 1995; Segal, 2001). These ideas are a choice in conviction. Once the choice is made how to believe about the nature of reality and knowing, the images of teacher are called forth differently and the meaning of classroom teaching is transformed.

If learning *is* a coming home experience, an awakening to what is already there before us—seen or unseen—then to uncover the elements to our profound desires seeks to know a subject and live inter-subjectively (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). Intersubjectivity is the dance that exists between the various participants as well as between knower and that which can be known. In this intersubjective way of life, the relationship between the knower and that which can be known is defined and developed inside of the mind and thoughts of the knower and reflected in that which is known.

Moreover, the constructivist paradigm purports that knowledge is both individually and socially constructed and the existence of the knower creates and molds their particular reality—their way of seeing life—in the social stratum. This notion is supported in Lincoln and Guba's (1994) work on the four paradigms. In their analysis, as seen through the constructivist view on methodology, "The variable and personal (intramental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents" (p. 111). It is through the social learning lens that we hope to "distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions" (p. 111). In the end, teaching and learning become more complex as we build on negotiated learning experiences with others and through their ideas, just as many scholars have done with Plato's works.

The human condition allows us to delve into a rich context called lifelong learning. We can experience a subject because we so desire it and it overtakes our being. This integration of

self and subject comes out of us in our own way—through our own life lens—to teach and learn in a more deeply connected way with children. The optimum moment is when we make meaning, exchange ideas, and grow. In these intersections of finding what was there, of coming to disequilibrium, and of integrating ideas, education and learning become the inner beauty of our humanity. This type of learning is suited to a “strategy of the possible” in our human relationship to knowing and living life.

Organizational Leadership: Is the Leader Going Down a Rocky Road?

Quality in human relationship is a core value in early childhood education school organizations. As Bolman and Deal (1991) point out in *Reframing Organizations*, any organization can fall into an age-old trap of “us versus them”, even schools. “The wide chasm between managerial intent [school vision] and organizational accomplishment [teacher work] is an increasingly pressing problem, and one that is made all the more acute by the growing dominance of organizations in our lives” (p. 4). Generally, early childhood education programs practice what Bolman and Deal (1991) term the “human resource frame” of reference, even though the theoretical perspectives behind this frame are not overtly recognized in most early childhood settings. “The human resource frame focuses on the fit between individual and organization” (p. 179).

However, some of the innovations presented by Bolman and Deal (1991) regarding the human resource frame are still underutilized in school settings, such as *Theory Z*. The blending of American and Japanese ideology for managing emphasizes that any worker’s life is whole inside and outside of the organization. The worker is treated to working conditions which reflect both productivity and self-esteem through subtle, implicit designs that include the collective voice in decisions and organizational change. Employing organizational development, survey

feedback, self-managing teams, workplace democracy and other central concepts from the human resource frame, organizational leaders still witness shortcomings and causes of poor teacher image and practices as well as idealized solutions to scarcity and inadequate teaching practices.

The divide between the skills a teacher requires to manage daily classroom experiences and the direction and vision of a school can be wide. Managers are pulled in so many different directions that they cling to outdated methods of teacher supervision and evaluation and never get to professional teacher development in a lasting and meaningful way. This problem affects a teacher's long-term ability to teach affectively and stay fresh in an innovative arena of education. As Bolman and Deal (1991) assert,

As a result of early research on human relations in industry, it came to be generally accepted that managers [and teachers] needed more skills in human relations. Training program and departments began to proliferate...many of the early programs focused on training managers how to be more sensitive.... However, while the programs produced a great deal of enthusiasm, they seemed to be short on substance. After enough failures, the question was asked, Is there a problem with our methods of teaching human relations? If people cannot learn to play tennis or a violin by listening to a lecture, why should they be able to develop human relation skills that way? (p. 164)

The early childhood education leader is mimicking the training program approach in teacher professional development.

Workshops, seminars, and "shot-in-the-arm" training sessions have been school leadership's solutions to helping teachers grow and become professionals. The problem in this method rests in sustainability of practice. The human resource method scopes out individuals

who best fit the organization. However, teachers are unable to sustain success in a changing educational environment where the primary belief structure is a match between current skill and current practice. Furthermore, time for human interaction and collaboration on childhood research is inadequate for teachers during their workday and this is a basic requirement for sustainable professional development. Scarce resources and power issues play a major role in critique of the human resource frame.

Human resource theorists hold a mistaken conception of human nature and seek to impose an academic, middle-class value system on everyone else. These theorists ignore individual differences and the imperatives of organizational structure [change]. They are optimistic about the possibility of integrating individual and organizational needs, and they underplay issues of power, conflict, and scarcity in organizations. (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 177)

Scarcity prevails in educational settings. Teachers are underpaid, overworked, and not given enough support—assistance in classrooms, time away from children, ongoing collaboration with colleagues, mentorship, research tools—to practice professional development to keep up in the changing and competing marketplace of modern schools.

Several questions, which inform our early childhood school frameworks study, necessitate additional examination into the topic of teacher development. Has the current organizational model developed a teacher researcher image? Are preprimary schools even aware of organizational theory and models for high-quality workplace practices? Are children learning under the best of circumstances and from teachers who practice using theoretical models of teaching-learning that work? We look for answers to these questions in the organizational framework which calls forth teacher's image and ability to teach well supported by a system.

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) suggest that while we try to fit and organize ourselves into a higher order as organizations, we miss the natural organization of life itself. “After so many years of defending ourselves against life and searching for better controls, we sit exhausted in the unyielding structures of organization we’ve created, wondering what happened. What happened to effectiveness, to creativity, to meaning? What happened to us? Trying to get these structures to change becomes the challenge of our lives” (p 94). They purport that slowing down, remembering, listening to, and partnering with nature—to life around us—is one solution to our organizational woes. “Life invites us to partner with these motions of coherence. For some this is a welcome invitation. But many of us have lived so long in contrary beliefs that we are alarmed by the suggestion... The invitation to join with life will restore us to the world and evoke what is best about us” (p. 95). This may sound simplistic and easy, but frequently organizational matters are unnecessarily overcomplicated and burdened with programs and bureaucracy.

To date, there is no formula to organize ourselves in ways that shift the worker—the teacher—toward a higher consciousness of teaching practices. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) advocate that “we are invited to be more present in the moment as it opens around us, less lost in reverie about plans and goals” (p. 96). While the human resource framework would encourage us to fit the individual to the organization and build human relationships around the program structure, Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) accept that, “Systems can’t be known ahead of time. Until the system forms, we have very limited knowledge of what might emerge. The only way to know a system is to play with it... Human organizations are not the lifeless machines we wanted them to be” (p. 97).

Early childhood researchers report similar claims as Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) of learning to listen, to collaborate on children's learning, to reflect on teaching practices and to slow down to life's rhythms (Cadwell, 2003; Curtis & Carter, 2000; Edwards, 1993). Most of these early childhood researchers are influenced by experiences in Reggio Emilia, Italy; experiences which demonstrate a meaningful, relaxed, joyful, balanced, and life-driven cultural perspective in organizations unlike our own in the United States. In our culture, we tend to stress racing toward our future lives through money and material success and knowing facts. This creates a rushed, stressful, and unbalanced existence which comes with an inability to slow down and listen to life's rhythms, and for the breath of life of the people in organizations.

Overall, Bolman and Deal (1991) deliver an innovative theory in the human resource frame. *Theory Z* looks at Japanese and American organizational cultures and shares how school organizations could benefit from this blended view of managing. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) remind leaders to slow down and listen to the life of and within the organization. Organizational leadership is a fantastic and difficult work. Through pedagogical listening, rhythm reading, and taking care of the care-takers through time, commitment, and development of sustainable workplaces, we can revolutionize the image of the teacher and sustain teaching practices that achieve results with merit.

Politics: Teacher Rights and the Silenced Voice

A good example of the power that politics and policy-making displays in the early childhood education arena around teacher images comes out of the latest Head Start initiative called *Good Start, Grow Smart* (Bush, G.W., 2002). Teacher accountability has become a hot topic for the second Bush administration. The national policy trend is calling for accountability through testing at all levels. This call serves to move education toward a stated goal of increased

performance. The sum total of children's learning and teachers' teaching will now be tallied from three to five-year-old children's test scores attained through standardized testing of Head Start children. Testing at this age has not been practiced as an educational norm. *Good Start, Grow Smart: The Bush Administration's Early Childhood Education Initiative* requires that every local Head Start program

Assess all participants between the ages of 3 and 5 on these indicators [learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills] at the beginning, middle, and end of each year and to analyze the assessment data on the progress and accomplishments of all enrolled children. Federal program monitoring teams will conduct on-site reviews of a program's implementation of these requirements. (Bush, G.W., 2002, p. 9)

I resist standardized testing as a measure of children's skills and knowledge and of teachers' ability to teach well. Testing for the sake of assessing teacher's ability to produce quality presents a dilemma. There exists a paradoxical nature in the *Good Start Grow Smart* initiative and political history, worth critique and further understanding.

To best construct an analysis of this policy I will use the conceptual frameworks of conflict and power and education reform and change. The purpose of this analysis is to draw out the political underpinnings of its induction and witness the way policy and politics informs teacher image and practices. Articulating my opinion makes it difficult for me to reside in the paradoxical context of this educational policy enactment. I aim to maintain detachment from one side by placing my beliefs on the table and compelling myself to live in paradox.

I have chosen not to filter my analysis through other forms of critique—such as political culture and values, interest groups, or federalism—selecting instead the intriguing nature of conflict and power and education reform within the issues surrounding this policy. These two

frameworks show the balance of interests and the contradictory nature each side holds as beliefs of Head Start accountability. Accordingly, this balance of perspectives leads the analysis down the political tightrope, to cross the sympathetic threshold of the political actors and their issues.

Conflict and Power

Conflicts in education happen when people with differing points of view or beliefs come into contact and forward their agenda using persuasive, coercive, or forceful means—using their power to manipulate or create cause and change. Conflict and power have been persistent in most educational settings and throughout the history of Head Start. The latest political consequences from conflict and power are brought to bear on its program once more through the *Good Start Grow Smart* initiative. The use of accountability in this initiative is conceptually new to the discussion of Head Start standards due to its direct impact on children under the age of five years and teachers' way of teaching.

The test-based *Good Start Grow Smart* agenda rests on how to measure teaching-learning accountability. As Stone (2002) asserts, “People with power and resources to stop a problem benefit from the social organization and resource distribution that keeps them in power, and so maintain these patterns through control over selection of elites and socialization of both elites and nonelites” (p. 196). In the case of *Good Start Grow Smart* the projected power sits with the Senate Education Committee as well as the President, First Lady, and their constituents—the political elites. Laura Bush has brought in “experts,” such as Grover Whitehurst and others from the office of educational research and improvement. They represent the political and education elites, to demonstrate child development and cognition needs and to show their banking model teaching practice beliefs are best for children’s learning. Through this tactic, Mrs. Bush gains support of the Senate to enact the accountability policy. Ultimately, this gives the Bush

administration the power to attack under-accountability in Head Start organizations through implementing a national policy that produces changes and results for the party's desired ends.

In Head Start, through the negative inducement of withholding federal money, teaching staff will comply with the new federal accountability policy. The results of not meeting the national accountability demands are loss of funding for programs and jobs for non-compliant teachers, and the potential demise of comprehensive programming for low-income children and families. In this case, the power of federal coercion produces the desired outcomes of quantitative accountability through direct instruction teaching and then testing of children. This forces the teacher image to stay in line with political party motives and compels thoughtful teacher-researchers out of the system as they do not fit the portrayed image.

The perceived powerlessness of Head Start teachers, the early childhood community, and the families utilizing the programs is planned in the political media. "People who are victimized by a problem do not seek political changes because they do not see the problem as changeable, do not believe they could bring about change, and need the material resources for survival provided by the status quo" (Stone, 2002, p. 196). The federal government supports Head Start with \$4.66 billion toward the programming which runs on staff as well as 1,315,000 individual volunteers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). To lose the federal aid would deplete Head Start of its primary source of income, devastating the system. This problem rests on the backs of the teachers and children to teach and test well. Additionally, both the house and federal education committees, which hold the power to create and maintain educational rules, are currently dominated by conservative-pro Bush administration voices. Under these circumstances, the feeling of helplessness and the idea of rebuttal or "biting the federal hand that feeds you" helps to silent the voices of teachers and children.

This powerlessness and teacher silence is a *perceived* phenomenon. There is evidence of the Head Start parent, staff, and early childhood community's lobbying during Reagan's 1980's attempt to end federal Head Start involvement. Reagan's purpose was to create state block grant money for these services. As Hacsí (2002) insists, "The program's supporters rallied to its defense, and the White House was flooded with calls and letters opposing the change" (p. 40). The serious issue facing the political players and their power or lack of it, resides in the way the inducement is put forth. According to Stone (2002) conflict abounds when negative inducements are used. "Negative inducements, such as fines, tariffs, and embargoes, create a climate of conflict and divide the two parties, even if the threats are not carried out" (p. 273). In this case, the threat of federal un-funding and loss of jobs causes apathy, conflict, grassroots campaigning *and* power struggle for a large number of political actors. It also reinforces poor banking model teaching strategies as the solution to stay accountable and employed.

Given that the federal government did not facilitate buy-in within Head Start's administration, teachers, and families, the conflict between the current Bush administration's elite interest groups and the National Head Start Association (NHSA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is alive and well. "NHSA calls on Head Start community and friends to take action. NHSA will work with...like minded national organizations [NAEYC] to...make sure the program is not dismantled and sent to the states" (J. Santana, personal communication, February 6, 2003). It almost goes without saying, the power struggle and conflicts Head Start and the federal government are facing about the nation, its children, and early childhood teachers are excluding the most important voices at both the micro and macro levels.

In the final analysis, the real victims of the proving accountability power struggle and tension are Head Start children and teachers. They are pulled into the political arena without voice, understanding, and prior knowledge—promoted as needy. The image of the child as “a broken and empty child”—one who must be protected and spoken for—is upheld in this political arena. The image of the teacher imprints itself as drone that must fill children with the right knowledge. A “child of rights” has their represented voice in determining how we create quality experiences with accountability and learned knowledge, usually through teachers who work with them. A “teacher of rights” is portrayed as a knowledgeable and critical player in the political interest of children’s lives. Those speaking for children and teachers sit on both sides of the issue, but do not ask for their input. On the one hand we have Laura Bush and her elite educational scholars. On the other, we have Head Start officials, supporting agencies and scholars—NAEYC and NHSA. Each side wants what they believe is best for teachers’ teaching and children’s learning. This clash forces to the surface the paradoxes of the policy issue. This is done through power struggle and conflict, which influences the future of Head Start—a program on the verge of enacting educational reform, changing teacher pedagogy, or entering its demise.

Education Reform and Change

Organizational change is an inevitable and natural way of living inside programs. As Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) elucidate, “Everything is in a constant process of discovery and creating. Everything is changing all the time: Individuals, systems, environments, the rules, the process of evolution. Even change changes. Every organism reinterprets the rules, creates exceptions for itself, creates new rules” (p. 13). Education reform and change is needed as life

unfolds and takes its various twists and unknown turns, as we change in our society, and as we grow to think differently.

Head Start standards and system norms have been called for since the inception of the program. Almost forty-years later, *Good Start Grow Smart* is now “pushing the envelope” and creating greater accountability and measurements for pedagogy, practice, and *every* child’s learning. Educational reform in Head Start and the larger arena is viewed as necessary in our economic times. Due to \$4.66 billion in tax money spent on the Head Start as well as the Bush administration’s insistence on lowering federal taxes, we witness a shift in thinking about federal programs’ viability and measures of accountability, which raises many common questions.

On the heels of Head Start’s latest Reauthorization Act (Congress of the U.S., 2002) and enactment of the new policy, the questions seem to be (1) should we test all 3 to 5-year-old Head Start children three times a year to gain accountability results?; (2) should Head Start reforms be a pull-down of testing standards and norms now placed on third grade children?; (3) why is literacy development the main locus of control?; (4) and *most importantly to this study*, does the policy support development and funding for teachers linked to the accountability enforcement?

In answering these questions, we must maintain a macro political perspective to frame our analysis. The base of power, elite knowledge, opposing national organizations, and resources all operate at this level of the policy’s politics and implementation. Iannaccone and Lutz (1994) uncover a major trend in educational politics. “Over the years, the state and federal governments have appropriated increasingly greater portions of educational policy making” (p. 39). It is at the National level that Head Start’s educational reform and policy changes are enacted and brought down to the local systems for rule enforcement.

Moreover, rules are an important political tool in educational reform and change. As Stone (2002) sets out, “Rules are never made by neutral legislators with no stakes in them, but rather negotiated by interested parties who stand to lose or gain” (p. 295). The Bush administration stands to gain the perception of school accountability through the enforcement of this policy’s rules. The rules of this policy are to an extent vague. “Vague rules allow for the incorporation of what Michael Polanyi calls tacit knowledge, the things people know but cannot put into words, much less formulate as rules” (p. 290). As the *Good Start Grow Smart* initiative states, “Assess all participants between the ages of 3 and 5 on these indicators [learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills]” (Bush, G.W., 2002, p. 9). “Assess” is not explicit in this policy statement and conjures up diverse images depending on how an educator views assessment and its tools. This aspect of the rule is problematic and illuminates the reasons for our first two questions: (1) Will we test? (2) And, are we using the same third grade methods of measuring knowledge for preschoolers? These are common questions in current educational reform ideology.

Furthermore, to scratch at the surface of the inquiry on (3) literacy reform, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Public Affairs (2003) professes,

Research tells us a great deal about the skills and knowledge children need to be successful in school. Among preschoolers, vocabulary, letter knowledge, and phonological awareness, in addition to social and emotional factors, have a significant impact on later success in school. For example, reading scores in the 10th grade can be predicated with surprising accuracy based on a child’s knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten. (p. 1)

This statement, coupled with the notion that most children from poor families enter school behind in academic skills, conveys a balanced view of our macro political tension. This pressure serves as the reason the Bush administration wishes to enact educational reform—especially in language, literacy, and cognitive development—in Head Start.

Finally, our question (4) regarding adequate staff development funding remains essential in the educational reform and change arena. The *Good Start Grow Smart* initiative states that “project STEP, Head Start’s Summer Teacher Education Program, will provide all Head Start the opportunity and funding to participate in a series of intensive early literacy training activities” (Bush, G.W., 2002, p. 9). There is mention of follow up mentoring and coaching for individual teachers. This aspect of the policy is critical in portraying itself as educational reform versus a mere symbolic gesture of accountability. It mandates a comprehensive change in the structure of Head Start teaching and learning by ordering the program to adopt specific methods for producing the desired changes and outcomes.

Summary

The policy analysis as seen through the lens of conflict and power as well as education reform and change brings up demanding issues of our day. Our biggest challenge is how we can provide measures of accountability for teaching and learning in federally-funded Head Start programs and if they will lead to improved outcomes or demise. The political tension between the elites and the national education organizations provides us a basic framework for witnessing the macro political level of this policy’s politics. The less visible political actors, at the micro political level, include the Head Start teachers, parents and children. Each set of political actors brings to the table power struggles, conflicting issues, reforms and changes and become

intertwined in the same goal with opposing expectations—children, family, and Head Start’s best interests at the heart of the matter.

Head Start’s tension will not end with *Good Start Grow Smart* policymaking. The boundaries of child development lie at fertile ground with many new and exciting political stories to seed and grow. How to best give a child an educational “head start” can be a debated question for years to come.

We are only beginning to develop ways to check accountability and produce quality outcomes for children’s education. Although I may disagree with the current political climate’s way of producing results, I do believe that we are standing at the threshold of greatness regarding the images and realities of children, families, teachers and most importantly, the human being. Political critique of children’s educational policies is one way for teachers to find their way into this arena of greatness, to fervently voice their understandings, and to develop a strong image of the teacher.

Educational Research: Teacher as Researcher? The Image is there

Finding balance and meaning in qualitative and quantitative research methods is an essential component to healthy research practices. Presently, a prevalent way to demonstrate accountability and sustainability in early childhood teaching practices is formulaic in the Reggio way—through qualitative documentation of classroom and community work and thinking. There is much research emerging from Reggio Emilia, Italy and from inspired practitioners of this approach which reveals solid evidence of the usefulness of socio-constructivist teaching techniques and teachers’ image. In turn, a teacher’s documentation, collaboration and reflection occurring at the round table of learning about children’s projects, cognition, and work prove that a strong image of the teacher can be accomplished.

In the recently saturated literature on the Reggio Emilia approach, there appears to be much written about the history of the making of the schools as well as reasons why they came into existence. This historical insight plays a significant role in the development of the overall principles and practices of this approach to early education. Specifically, informing the research on teacher image and praxis are three areas of literary investigation including (a) Rinaldi's (2001) emerging notion of intersubjectivity; (b) praxis and the theoretical principles of learning undergirding the Reggio way, and (c) early childhood teacher development through reflection, documentation, and collaboration. These theoretical perspectives are ubiquitous in work and dialogue around the teacher image informing practice and are highlighted in both American and Italian research and writing. We shall explore their meaning and context through the literature and the life-lens of the storytellers and researcher-writer participants.

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity means that the more teachers, children, and community relate with the world and beings in it, the more they understand and know themselves. This important pedagogical framework extends from Carla Rinaldi's (2001) writings in *Making Learning Visible*. She declares that school is "a place where a personal and collective culture is developed that influences the social, political, and values context and, in turn, is influenced by this context in a relationship of deep and authentic reciprocity" (Giudici, Rinaldi & Krechevsky, 2001, p. 38). Moreover, individual and collective growth through the community's contextualized experiences becomes central in the educational life of teaching and learning. Intersubjectivity is expressed as central, inseparable, and evolving.

Intersubjectivity is not widely explored in early childhood didactic research and must emerge through the words, ideas, and thoughts of teachers' engaging in reflection and action

with pedagogical documentation—the crux of the qualitative research. In Rinaldi’s words, intersubjectivity

Is vitally important for the future of humanity itself. The relationship between the individual and others, between Self and Other, is a key issue for our future. To choose whether our individual construction is independent from others or exist with and through other, means resolving not only the traditional pedagogical and psychological debate, but also the one regarding different images of the human being and humanity. It is a question of political and economic choices that can influence the entire educational system, and also the social system. (Giudici, Rinaldi & Krechevsky, 2001, p. 40)

Overall, as teachers locally engage with the work and thinking of children, learn to collaborate as educators, and reflect on their own practices, they grow in their understanding of education, life and commitment to a better community of learning. The teachers’ image shifts and contextually matures in meaning. “Documentation stimulates the teacher’s self-reflection and produces discussion and debate among the group of colleagues... The group discussions serve to modify, at times radically, the teacher’s thoughts and hypotheses about the children and interactions with them” (Edwards, 1998, p. 119) The value of intersubjectivity engages the early childhood teacher in a journey to discover the nature of how we come to know, which in turn, serves to unravel the complexities of teaching-learning and reveal their inseparability.

Praxis & the Intersection of Teaching and Learning

In the literature, American educators propose that the primary field of early childhood teaching and learning is socio-constructivist and comes from the influence of Lev Vygotsky (Berk, L., & Winsler A., 1995; Hendrick, J., 1997; New, R.S., 2000). As described by Laura Berk (1995) in *Scaffolding Children’s Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education*,

Vygotskian teacher research principles are widespread throughout the Reggio approach. “The Reggio Emilia system of early childhood education echoes central Vygotskian themes. Its reliance on small-group collaboration is highly compatible with a theory of development and education in which thought processes originate in social interaction. The teacher as a creator of activity settings designed to stimulate dialogue and co-construction of knowledge is reminiscent of the concept of scaffolding” (p. 145). Ultimately, teachers engage in the learning dialogue and grow with children in the understanding of the subject at hand.

Edward’s (1998) work suggests that, “The emphasis of our educational approach is placed not so much on the child in an abstract sense, but on each child in relation to other children, teachers, parents, his or her own history, and the societal and cultural surroundings” (p. 115). This emphasizes the elements of interconnectedness and socio-educational context as a primary way of educating young children. *It is a way of rearing children—developing them from within—rather than instructing and filling them full of information from the outside.*

Just as we strive to accomplish this socio-educational learning field with children, we recognize that teachers grow and change in such an environment. As Freire (1998/2001) shows us, “Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (p. 31). Through this, a central concept emerges: Teaching and learning are tied together and aid in the formation of liberatory education—where schools do no harm, where students attempt to discover their own subjectivity, and where teachers act as learners.

Teacher Development: Reflection, Documentation, & Collaboration

It is through *The Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform your Teaching*, created by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter (2000) and inspired by the Reggio approach, that preschool pedagogy is brought forth as an inextricable act of teaching and learning. “Teachers

can develop themselves from closely watching the development of children” (p. xvi). Through using observation and listening as a guide to teaching, teachers learn about the student’s abilities, their learning, and themselves. Students inform teaching practice and create potential moments for self-awareness. “If we listen to and watch them [students] closely, they will teach us to be more observant, inquisitive, and responsive in our work” (Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. xii). For without students, there would be no teaching and without keen awareness in the teachers, there would be no reciprocity in teaching and learning.

Aiding in the teaching-learning relationship, awareness, and meaning-making is pedagogical documentation. Documenting children’s learning is at the same time mind expanding and carries limits and biases for teacher interpretation, reflection, meaning, and future research. “We are aware that the medium we choose for documenting the experience observed—in other words, for making it visible and sharable—contains limitations and sources of bias that can be favorable only when multiple documents, media, and interpretation are placed side by side” (Edwards, 1998, p. 121). Documents such as panels, books, pictures, and the like, support communication and daily interaction for children, teachers, parents and community visitors. It is an ingenious way to “offer the teacher a unique opportunity to listen again, see again, and therefore revisit individually and with others the events and processes in which he or she was co-protagonists, directly or indirectly” (Edwards, 1998, p. 121). Documentation leads the teacher to further (self) reflection as well as collaboration with colleagues, parents, and others.

“Sharing documentation is in fact making visible the culture of childhood both inside and outside the school to become a participant in a true act of exchange and democracy” (Edwards, 1998, p. 122). Teachers not only collaborate with children and raise awareness in their own

thinking as a teacher of the young child; they call out for others to participate with them in this journey. Parents, colleagues, and professionals in our community partake in the making and remaking of childhood. “Documentation offers the possibility for parents to share their awareness to value discussion and exchanges with the teachers and among their group, helping them to become aware of their role and identity” (Edwards, 1998, p. 122).

As teachers develop children’s work into a visible and valued marker in time and place, conversations and dialogue emerge and the identity of the teacher grows. “Realizing the importance of building one’s experience within the daily life of the school, through ongoing sharing and exchange with others, has underscored once again how essential it is for us to learn to take on responsibilities, with a constant effort to analyze and develop” (Giudici, Rinaldi & Krechevsky, 2001, p. 135). Documentation and collaboration brings teachers back around in the circle to reflection on children’s work and self-reflection on their own work as they capture it.

Summary

The literature on Reggio philosophy is strongly influencing teacher research choices in teaching-learning meaning. It impacts the research and weaves together a picture of the human stories of teaching, documentation, collaboration, and learning. As Beverly Erlich and Navaz Bhavnagri (1994) state in a teacher change case study,

Despite all of this voluminous new information being published and disseminated about the Reggio Emilia approach, there has been little to none research on documenting the shifts of a teacher’s reflections when exposed to the Reggio philosophy. There is a need to document the process a teacher experiences when making a change from a non-Reggio to a Reggio Emilia approach so that others may gain further insight from her or his reflections. Hopefully, examination of the reflections on the process of change in turn

would support other early childhood educators who are also attempting to transform their beliefs and practices. (p. 7)

Through the concepts of teacher awareness, educators uncover the richness and complexities in daily life with children and begin to construct new meanings for teacher development and growth. The qualitative nature of this research becomes essential and a life giving force to present and future teachers wanting to live a quality educational life where teachers and their images inside and outside of schools are visible and valued in every precious moment.

Conclusions and Implications for the Future of Early Childhood Teachers

How the image of the teacher influences their classroom practices continues to stand out as a complex issue and question of our times. Are teachers to be bankers storing the information and doling out the facts into vulnerable and empty minds? Or, are teachers to reside at the round table of learning situated in a community context where teacher, child and parent are co-learners driven by a subject matter into unknown areas of educational understanding?

As this educational leadership inquiry reveals, there are steps to a balanced and holistic perspective in becoming, not the teacher you once had, but instead the teacher you always wanted in your precious childhood moment of teaching-learning. Who was that friend? What did they look like? What was their support system? Did they have a voice in the shape of education and within their own schools? What was studied and most researched about them? The answers to these questions force out the image of the teacher into an ever expanding school culture and complex system of life.

The implications of the study of teacher images influencing practices are far reaching. (a) To playfully go forward into choosing a constructivist paradigm and seeing the world as the clay to be molded and reshaped in one's own hand is as simple as conviction and knowing a

visionary teaching purpose. (b) Asking parents, teachers, staff, and community to collaborate on the subject of teacher image and classroom learning practices forges the alliances necessary to build the meaning of schools. Promoting school leaders who pedagogically listen for passion and the impulses of a teaching life and let go of the bureaucratically designed and fragmented system, results in fruitful change-agent relationships and innovative teaching-learning strategies. (c) Adopting the teacher and child's voice in the political arena and learning to analyze policy from the perspective of paradox become effective ways to influence lasting education policy changes. This informs teacher image and ensures that better teaching practices are brought to the political table for deliberation. Finally, (d) to study the research of schools that support the teacher, her or his work and voice, and quality of work-resources is to move the world into higher form and energy around the practice of teaching. While all research methods are valuable, qualitative research brings the teacher's story to life; it begins to image teacher in her or his own words and walk through his or her existence.

In conclusion, the effect of research on the teacher image is paramount and only works to drive a faltering system when the community—children, teachers, parents, school leaders, and those surrounding the school—stand beside the teacher and strongly develop his or her image in harmony. Teaching practices inform and are informed by the way teachers are held in society's collective mind. The image of the teacher can and will strongly thrive when the community practices strategies of slowing down to listen, to collaborate, and to change the way we envision the education of our young.

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