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To cite this article: Janet Soler & Linda Miller (2003) The Struggle for Early Childhood Curricula: A comparison of the English Foundation Stage Curriculum, Te Whāriki and Reggio Emilia, International Journal of Early Years Education, 11:1, 57-68, DOI: [10.1080/0966976032000066091](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966976032000066091)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966976032000066091>



Published online: 21 Jul 2010.



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The Struggle for Early Childhood Curricula: a comparison of the English Foundation Stage Curriculum, *Te Whāriki* and Reggio Emilia

La lutte pour des programmes d'études de la petite enfance: une comparaison du programme d'études anglais d'étape de base, du *Te Whāriki* et de Reggio Emilia

La lucha para los programas de educación de la primera infancia: una comparación del plan de estudios inglés de la etapa de fundación, del *Te Whāriki* y de Reggio Emilia

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ABSTRACT *Parents, teachers, researchers and politicians often have strong and conflicting views about what is right for young children in the years before school. Curricula can become 'sites of struggle' between ideas about what early childhood education is for, and what are appropriate content and contexts for learning and development in early childhood. This paper focuses upon the way visions for early childhood are expressed through the curricula offered in three very different contexts—in England, New Zealand and Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. These three examples of early childhood curricula are compared in order to explore how a growing pressure from vocational and instrumental influences can impact on progressive and socioculturally inspired early childhood curricula and approaches. A comparison of these examples also reveals how early childhood curricula and educational systems are often forged amidst differing contexts in relation to national and local control of early childhood curricula and approaches. These differing contexts can also give rise to differing conceptualisations of knowledge, learning and pedagogy.*

RÉSUMÉ *Des professeurs, des chercheurs et des politiciens ont souvent des vues fortes et contradictoires au sujet de ce qui est bon pour les jeunes enfants dans les années avant l'école. Les programmes d'études peuvent devenir 'des sites de lutte' entre les idées au sujet du but de la première éducation d'enfance, et au sujet du contenu et des contextes pertinents à*

l'apprentissage et le développement dans la petite enfance. Cet article se focalise sur la manière que des visions pour la petite enfance sont exprimées par les programmes d'études offerts en trois contextes très différents—en Angleterre, Nouvelle-Zélande et Reggio Emilia dans l'Italie Septentrionale. Ces trois exemples des programmes d'études de la petite enfance sont comparés afin d'explorer comment une pression croissante des influences professionnelles et instrumentales peut faire une forte impression sur les programmes d'études et des approches progressifs et inspirés par des approches socioculturels. Une comparaison de ces exemples révèle aussi comment les programmes d'études de la petite enfance et les systèmes d'éducation sont souvent forgés parmi des contextes différents par rapport au contrôle national et local de programmes d'études sur la première enfance et des approches différents. Ces contextes qui diffèrent peuvent engendrer aussi conceptualisations qui diffèrent sur la connaissance, l'apprentissage et la pédagogie.

RESUMEN *Los padres, los profesores, los investigadores y los políticos tienen a menudo visiones fuertes y en conflicto sobre lo que es correcto para los niños pequeños en los años que preceden a la escuela. Los planes de estudios pueden convertirse en “sitios de lucha” entre las ideas sobre el propósito de la educación preescolar y sobre cuales son el contenido y contextos apropiados para aprender y para el desarrollo en la primera infancia. Este artículo se centra sobre la manera que las visiones para la niñez temprana son expresadas a través de los planes de estudios ofrecidos en tres contextos muy diversos—en Inglaterra, Nueva Zelanda y en Reggio Emilia en el norte de Italia. Estos tres ejemplos de los planes de estudios de la niñez temprana se comparan para explorar cómo una presión cada vez mayor de influencias vocacionales e instrumentales puede afectar los planes de estudios y acercamientos metodológicos progresistas e inspirados por tendencias socioculturales. Una comparación de estos ejemplos también revela cómo los planes de estudios de la niñez temprana y los sistemas educativos se forjan a menudo en medio de contextos divergentes en lo referente al control nacional y local de los planes de estudios y de los acercamientos metodológicos sobre la niñez temprana. Estos contextos divergentes pueden también dar lugar a conceptualizaciones divergentes del conocimiento, del aprendizaje y de la pedagogía.*

Introduction

This paper examines three differing examples of contemporary early childhood curricula and approaches. In choosing these particular examples we aim to identify, compare and contrast specific visions, beliefs and ideas about children that underpin these different approaches to early childhood curricula and pedagogy. In our exploration and discussion we will investigate the ways in which different visions of childhood can be embedded in these curricula.

Instrumental views of the curriculum put an emphasis upon its serving an extrinsic aim or external purposes such as producing citizens who will benefit society. This can be contrasted with the view that the curriculum should serve the intrinsic aim of providing a value in its own right, so that it is seen as self-fulfilling and providing experiences that are worthwhile. Vocationalism is a particular subset of the instrumental view of the curriculum. Those that promote this view argue that the curriculum should be designed to prepare children for the world of work.

The views which have emerged in relation to the aims of the curricula and approaches examined in this paper can be placed on a continuum. At one end are the progressive views of the curriculum which emphasis the individual child and the decentring of adult authority. At the other end of the continuum are the vocational and instrumental views of education,

which stress the authority of the adult over the child, and the needs of society rather than the individual.

Progressive Ideals and the Rise of Instrumental Views

While there is a cluster of progressive views of the curriculum, they are all usually characterised by a downplaying of the role of authority and a decentring of the power of the teacher so that the teacher is often seen as a facilitator rather than controller of curriculum activities (see Silcock, 1999, for a recent discussion of progressivism and new progressivism). They also emphasise the individual child as the centre of curriculum activities. Progressive and child-centred views of the curricula have been the most influential in early childhood curricula over the past two centuries. This came about through the initial influence of Rousseau who influenced later progressivists such as Robert Owen, Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Montessori in Europe and Dewey in the USA (see May, 1997).

The progressive curriculum ideas derived from Rousseau stressed that children should be enabled to learn what they wish to learn when they are ready to do so, and stressed play enriched by unobtrusive guidance from a teacher/facilitator. Froebel, who was constructing his ideas in the early nineteenth century, is seen as the creator of the pedagogy and practice of a specialist early childhood curriculum and was the first to envisage play as a key element (May, 1997). By the twentieth century, progressive ideas of early childhood education had come to be characterised by ideas such as the central role of play and movement and the adult as guide and moderator, through the influence of John Dewey (see, for example, Dewey, 1900, 1916, 1938, 1939) and other educators such as Stanley Hall (see, for example, Hall, 1883, 1895, 1901) and Maria Montessori (1912).

The work of these educators led to an emphasis upon the need to understand and explore pupils' experience of the curriculum. Froebel felt that a child possesses a 'divine essence' which is in need of cultivation and protection rather than interference (Froebel, 1887, p. 4). Hall and others in the child study movement drew upon this romantic notion of respecting and truly listening to children. They argued for a curriculum that would stress the child's real interests, needs and learning patterns (Kliebard, 1987, p. 28). John Dewey, whose name would come to be associated with 'progressive education' and curricular reform, also argued that pupil learning is not a static one-way process. Dewey's work stressed the way in which the pupil contributes to the construction of his/her learning environment and conditions, which in turn shape his/her learning experiences (Dewey, 1963 [1938], pp. 43, 45).

During the early part of the twentieth century, educators also became aware of the importance of the sociocultural context of learning (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978). Both progressive and sociocultural perspectives drew attention to how the pupil engages with the setting in which the curriculum is being presented. This gave rise to concerns with: what is present in that curriculum setting, what the children can see and hear, how children interact within the setting and how children speak and interact with other pupils, artefacts, and the teacher.

If early childhood educators accept this view of learning as being related to pupil experience, background and needs, it becomes impossible to view the teacher as agent and the pupil as the recipient of knowledge. Pupils are not merely absorbing abstract knowledge and facts, because they bring previous experiences into their setting and are constructing profoundly different lived experiences of what they encounter in their educational setting. This view also implies that measures of pupil learning by testing, administered after the pupils have been exposed to a particular curricular activity, will not reveal the kinds and qualities of experiences pupils have had during the course of learning.

The curricula we are investigating in this paper are set in societies where mass education

and compulsory schooling have shaped the curriculum and children's experiences of schooling. Compulsory mass education has also tended to stress the homogenising of the curriculum and the need to compare one student with another. In the 1980s and 1990s many countries, which have a well-developed compulsory education system, have implemented National Curricula frameworks and have emphasised standardised testing, effective teaching and effective management. This paper will explore the impact of an instrumental/vocationally based trend in education upon three particular examples of early childhood curricula. These examples have adopted progressive and socioculturally based educational ideals to varying degrees. The impact of these recent trends towards homogenisation, standardised testing, effective management and other aspects of what can be characterised as a 'social efficiency' movement (Kliebard, 1987) has, therefore, often resulted in struggles and compromises in order to address the tensions between progressive/sociocultural and instrumental/vocational views of the curriculum.

The first example examined in this paper is the recently developed English Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance for early childhood settings in England. This national early childhood curriculum has largely been underpinned by a resurgence in instrumental beliefs, as it aims to provide guidance to early childhood practitioners and teachers so that children can be prepared for the next stage of schooling.

The second example, *Te Whāriki*, is the National Curriculum for the early childhood sector in New Zealand. This curriculum framework can be seen to have been inspired by progressive and sociocultural theories and beliefs. It also aims to take account of and promote the particular cultural influences that arise through cultural diversity and biculturalism.

The final example is based in Reggio Emilia, a prosperous region in Northern Italy. This approach provides the strongest contrast with instrumental/vocationally based views of education. The Reggio Emilia approach, unlike the Foundation Stage Curriculum in England and *Te Whāriki*, does not adhere to a National Curriculum framework or formalised curriculum policy. It represents a localised, learner-centred approach as an alternative to national centralised, uniform curricula. This context enables the Reggio Emilia approach to espouse progressive and sociocultural views of the child, without strong pressures from instrumental and vocationally oriented views of curriculum, learning and pedagogy. In this approach the child is viewed as: possessing rights, an active constructor of knowledge and a social being, and the instructor is viewed as a collaborator and co-learner with the child, whose role is to guide, facilitate and encourage research.

The Foundation Stage Curriculum in England

The introduction of a National Curriculum Framework in England in 1988 for primary and secondary schooling resulted in the first centrally defined National Curriculum based on a subject model of learning for English schools (DfEE, 1999). This centralisation has also impacted upon early childhood education in England. It has resulted in a struggle between upholding the progressive ideals held by many early childhood educators and the desire of recent governments and policy makers to create a more cohesive, centralised system of early childhood education with coherent links to the National Curriculum in primary schools.

Shortly after the introduction of a National Curriculum for primary schools, a group of expert early childhood practitioners, the Early Years Curriculum Group (Early Years Curriculum Group, 1989, p. 3) asserted the view that 'Early childhood is valid in itself not simply a preparation for work, or for the next stage of education.' These claims were countered in the early to mid-1990s by Edwards and Knight (1994, p. 40), who argued that in the past the early childhood curriculum in many settings had been neither 'explicit, planned long term, nor

coherent'. Underpinning this argument was a view that young children were entitled to a curriculum that would offer a sound basis from which they can develop into literate and numerate adults.

In 1996, a document entitled 'Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education' (SCAA, 1996) was introduced to all English early childhood settings with 4 year olds on their roll by the then Conservative government. Although it was claimed that the contents 'do not specify a curriculum' (SCAA, 1997, p. 5), the document described learning outcomes to be achieved by the age of 5. It was seen by many as an attempt by government to rationalise the early childhood curriculum across a diverse range of settings. As part of the process of creating a cohesive, centralised system, a national inspection scheme for early childhood settings was introduced and linked to funding. A formalised, centralised system of assessment was also introduced (QCA, 1998).

These centralised features added to the pressures felt by practitioners in early childhood settings, as many found that it conflicted with their views of childhood and how the early childhood curricula should be conducted. This in turn led to considerable criticism from the early childhood community regarding the prescriptive nature of the learning outcomes. It also resulted in pressure to make links with the National Curriculum in primary schools. Many early childhood educators saw these centralised features as inappropriate in relation to the ways in which young children learn (Anning & Edwards, 1999; David & Nurse, 1999). These changes were also perceived to be shaping the early childhood curriculum from the outside rather than from within the early childhood community. It was also seen to place a 'downward pressure' on those in charge of its implementation.

In 1999, new curriculum guidance was introduced which built upon the previous document. The new document entitled 'Early Learning Goals' (QCA, 1999) outlined goals to be achieved by children aged from 3 to 6, as they entered the first stage of the National Curriculum. There was an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, in line with government targets, in order to raise standards in these areas. Knowledge was presented as compartmentalised into six areas of learning, rather than integrated and holistic as in the later case studies. However, the reference to key principles and play were compatible with most early childhood practitioners' views about what is appropriate for early childhood education.

Following the protests by the early childhood community, further guidance was developed, namely 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' (QCA, 2000). This document was constructed in consultation with a wide range of representatives from the early childhood community. Although the goals for learning were retained, there was a change in emphasis to a focus on describing learning opportunities and experiences considered to be appropriate for young children, rather than on the achievement of outcomes. This made the document more acceptable to the early childhood community (Anning, 2001).

The English early childhood curriculum that was in place by 2000 embraced a stepped sequential approach to learning. It is organised through externally imposed 'learning areas' linked to the subject areas of the National Curriculum. These learning areas are in turn organised into 'stepping stones' towards the early learning goals which are loosely related to age. The view of children's development underlying this model is that learning takes place in a straightforward sequential manner, which can be assessed and itemised at predetermined levels. In structuring the curriculum and its assessment in this manner, the policy makers have made assumptions about where the levels begin and end for all children. They have also determined what specific skills and knowledge can be learnt (Miller *et al.*, 2003).

Policy makers viewed this step model as helpful to practitioners because it provided clear guidance as to how the early learning goals could be implemented consistently across all early childhood settings (Staggs, 2000). From the early childhood community's viewpoint, the

guidance for early childhood stems from a model that has been framed by people who stand outside of children's experiences and the teaching process. They are seen to be concerned more about what education is for rather than what the experience of education might entail (Miller *et al.*, 2003).

Despite the intervention of the early childhood community and subsequent collaboration with government agencies, the early learning goals were shaped by the need for pupils to attain clearly prescribed outcomes. Supporters of the early learning goals argue that they lay secure foundations for future achievement and therefore give children the best possible start in their life long learners (Staggs, 2000, p. 23). These goals are, therefore, based upon the need for schools to provide a curriculum that will equip children with the knowledge, skills and understandings that they will need for adult life and employment. This approach can be viewed as elitist, non-egalitarian and non-democratic because of the need to link with subsequent curricula that focus upon commercial and economic considerations. Some critics see this approach as ultimately driven by economic needs and an emphasis on commercial competitiveness (Kelly, 1994; Anning & Edwards, 1999). Although it is meant to be an inclusive curriculum which encompasses the needs of all children (Staggs, 2000), such a model can also be seen to prioritise competitiveness. It supports the notion that the main goal is to support those who can succeed and reach skills-based attainment targets rather than cater for individuality and access for all children.

Te Whāriki

New Zealand has developed a National Curriculum framework for early childhood, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The developers of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum were working in similar contexts to those involved in the development of the early childhood curriculum in England (Miller, 2001) in that the curriculum was linked to the National Curriculum in primary schools. Despite this constraint, the developers of *Te Whāriki* developed a framework that has implemented a bicultural perspective, an anti-racist approach and reciprocal relationships with the Māori community in New Zealand (Smith, 1999, p. 6).

Margaret Carr, Helen May and Tilly Reedy, who were responsible for co-coordinating the development of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, wished to incorporate 'equitable educational opportunities and quality early childhood policies and practices' into the framework (Carr & May, 2000, p. 53). Diverse groups of practitioners and representatives from different types of early childhood services were involved in consultations, as were people with nationally recognised expertise. Māori perspectives were a separate but integrally related framework and the document is written in both English and Māori (Smith, 1999, p. 6). From its very beginning *Te Whāriki* took into account the foundational principles assessed from Māori epistemology, via Tilly Reedy, to create a bicultural document (Carr, 2001).

The initiators were also aware of accounts of national and international views expressed in recent literature and research into early childhood. The underpinning vision drew upon a sociocultural view of curriculum and childhood derived from Vygotsky. Smith notes that the sociocultural emphasis of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum is expressed in the introductory statement in the *Te Whāriki* curriculum document (Smith, 1999, p. 6). This link to sociocultural theory fits the concern with developing a bicultural document and is drawn upon by Carr to argue that the early childhood curriculum can be conceived of as a cultural site involving the construction of social reality which leads to the construction of communicative interactions between teachers and students (Smith, 1999, p. 6).

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum is usually referred to by its shortened title of *Te Whāriki* (see Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996). *Te Whāriki*, as is often the case within

Māori language, conveys multiple metaphoric meanings. This title draws upon real-life experiences of flax weaving a central area of learning within traditional Māori culture. 'Whāriki' refers to a woven mat, on which everyone can stand, yet which interweaves central principles and goals into different patterns or programmes which individual centres can develop to address their own particular learning situations (Ministry of Education, 1996; May & Carr, 1997; Carr & May, 2000). This can be seen to contrast with the 'step model' of the curriculum which underpins the Foundation Stage Curriculum in England.

Another metaphoric meaning conveyed in the title is the notion of a 'spider web' model of curriculum. May and Carr saw the notion of a web as a key feature of the conceptualisation of the curriculum document. Thus, *Te Whāriki* in name and content implies a move away from the 'step' model of curriculum assessed by measurable outcomes. The *Te Whāriki* model envisages the curriculum as a web or woven mat rather than a set of stairs:

Eisener (1985, p. 143) contrasts a 'step model' of the curriculum with a 'spider web' model. The 'step' or 'staircase' model, conjures up the image of a series of independent steps that lead to a platform from which the child exits and at which point measurable outcomes can be identified. Whilst acknowledging that many skills and concepts have a sequence, *Te Whāriki* emphasises a model of knowledge and understanding for young children as a tapestry of increasing complexity and richness. The weaving model of learning conceptualises the child's development as a series of increasingly intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning, centred on cultural and individual purpose. (Carr & May, 1996, p. 102)

Thus, *Te Whāriki* views the curriculum as a complex and rich experiential process arising out of the child's interactions with the physical and social environment. It is divided into age groups, i.e. 'infants', 'toddlers' and the 'young child'. In their development of *Te Whāriki*, Reedy, May and Carr linked local cultural views of learning in New Zealand communities to the views in recent international and child development literature, which stresses varying viewpoints rather than a universal view of child development. It has adopted a 'holistic' approach which takes into account a sociocultural view of the child expressed by Vygotsky. The 'spider web' conceptualisation of the curriculum incorporated in the weaving metaphor implicit in *Te Whāriki* is the key to understanding the linking of a child-centred, sociocultural, bicultural vision of the New Zealand child which underpins this curriculum (see Carr & May, 1993, 2000).

May and Carr acknowledged that the 1980s development of Māori and Pacific Island pre-school and primary school programmes necessitated the development of curricula which acknowledged the dual heritage of New Zealand people. These initiatives drew the attention of New Zealand educators of young children to the importance of a vision that incorporated links between culture, language and learning (McNaughton, 1996; Carr & May, 2000).

Te Whāriki represents a conscious modification of an initial government-driven, instrumental vision of child development to a curriculum policy which stresses greater diversity and learner-centred approaches.

During the consultations, early childhood practitioners expressed a 'local, situated and often personal view of the early childhood curriculum' (Carr & May, 2000, p. 53). This view did not necessarily fit with the government objective of establishing a National Curriculum framework and many early childhood practitioners had difficulties with applying the word 'curriculum' to practice in early childhood settings. Despite this pressure, a curriculum framework was developed which integrated other visions of the curriculum. Smith (1999) argues that 'The introduction of holistic, open ended inclusive curriculum guidelines in New Zealand has been a huge success' (p. 15).

Carr and May describe the collaborative process that enabled this outcome as resulting from consultation and compromise where childhood organisations and practitioners were aware that

they needed to offer an alternative ‘defined’ curriculum to prevent the New Zealand National Curriculum, which had been developed for primary and other educational sectors, ‘trickling downward’ into early childhood settings:

During consultation it became clear that early childhood organizations and practitioners were wary that a national early childhood curriculum might constrain their current freedom of philosophy and practice. Nevertheless they saw that there was a danger in not defining an early childhood curriculum: the new national curriculum for schools might trickle downward into early childhood curriculum, particularly as the Government was introducing more systematic assessment guidelines during the early school years. Practitioners saw the value of an early childhood curriculum statement that would make clear links with school and would reflect the integrity of distinctive early childhood aims and practice. (Carr & May, 1993, p. 10)

There are, however, tensions that arise from this compromise between catering for children’s individual needs and diversity while adhering to a national framework designed for a country with mass education and large groupings of pupils. McNaughton notes that in New Zealand early childhood settings the learner’s actions are ‘mediated through specific activities and it is through these activities that development takes place’ (McNaughton, 1996, p. 191). Although a learner’s needs are seen as central, the broader curriculum prescribes a developmental sequence, even if that sequence is seen as relatively flexible. In this situation the individual learner cannot be the sole source of curriculum development, as stated in the *Te Whāriki* document. There is, therefore, an inherent tension within the compromise struck by adapting a curriculum framework to learner-centred experiences. Opting to define a curriculum, even in a flexible manner, could restrict the child’s active role in co-constructing and reconstructing personal meanings and limit the ability of teachers to co-collaborate with children through shared meanings and understandings where children take an active and inventive role. This tension is heightened by the acknowledgement of the sociocultural, Vygotskian framework as being central to the sociocultural emphasis of *Te Whāriki* (Smith, 1999, pp. 6–8).

Reggio Emilia

The final example examined in this paper represents another vision of a child-centred practice within an educational context. Reggio Emilia, like *Te Whāriki*, is based upon sociocultural principles and emphasises a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning. However, unlike *Te Whāriki*, Reggio Emilia is not a compromise between the demands of a National Curriculum framework and a learner-centred curriculum framework. In this example the tension between a learner-centred curriculum and having to implement prescribed, pre-selected guidelines and learning activities does not arise, because Reggio Emilia educators do not follow any predetermined national framework and is often referred to as an ‘approach’ or ‘educational system’ (see, for example, Mercilliot Hewett, 2001).

The Reggio Emilia approach can be firmly located at the progressive, learner-centred end of the continuum of beliefs that shape early childhood curricula. It is a community-supported, localised and activity-based schooling system which is a realisation of progressive education. It stems from the inspiration of one particular educator, Loris Malaguzzi, rather than from centralised policy making and national guidelines. The political contexts which Malaguzzi encountered during the Second World War and post-war Italy inspired him to engage in the struggle to implement his vision of a child-centred curriculum which would not be part of national guidelines.

Malaguzzi’s work stems from his experiences of the war and a fascist regime, which had taught him that people who blindly conformed and obeyed were dangerous. He believed that

a new society should nurture a vision of children who could act and think for themselves. This led him to give priority to children's views of the world and to design an early childhood education system founded on the perspective of the child. Children were seen as unique individuals with rights rather than just needs.

In order to achieve this vision, Malaguzzi left his state school teaching post to become involved in community initiatives to build and run schools created by parents near the town of Reggio Emilia in the Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy. This move facilitated the implementation of his belief in a pluralistic approach which involved the commitment of children, parents, teachers, administrators and politicians. By 1967, all the parent-run schools were under the administration of the municipality of Reggio Emilia, which demonstrated its support by allocating 12% of the Town Council budget to funding the early childhood programme (Malaguzzi, 1995; Dahlberg, 2000). The inspiration for Malaguzzi's vision for working with young children can be seen to include the work of Dewey, Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky.

One influence that can be seen in Malaguzzi's thinking is Dewey's notion of a learner-focused view of learning, which recognises and emphasises the experiences and understandings that the child brings to his or her experience of schooling. Malaguzzi, like Dewey, stressed interaction and participation in the learning process and the value of working through a project. Central to achieving this was a view of the development of knowledge through a collaborative partnership between children and adults (Mercillott Hewett, 2001, p. 95). Malaguzzi also drew on Vygotsky, hence the nature of the relationship between child and adult is central to the work in Reggio Emilia. Patricia Ghedini, head of Early Years services in the Emilia Romagna region, highlights Reggio Emilia practitioners' belief in Malaguzzi's progressive philosophy with its emphasis upon individual difference, pluralistic approaches and processes, and their opposition to a focus on standardisation, outcomes and economic productivity. She states, 'If a society based on the myth of productivity (and therefore profit) needs only half human beings—steadfast doers, industrious reproducers—then it must be wrong and it must be changed. In order to change it, we need people who are capable of using their imagination' (cited in Whalley, 1995, p. 6).

Also central to the development of Malaguzzi's vision has been an ongoing dialogue within Reggio Emilia schools, which questions and challenges existing scientific, philosophical and educational viewpoints and accepted teaching practices and approaches. This dialogue is shared with the children, parents, teachers, administrators, politicians and educators from other countries. Through this ongoing dialogue, the teachers of Reggio Emilia have challenged the dominating discourse and accepted practices of early childhood pedagogy by 'deconstructing' the dominant ideas and theories that have shaped our conceptions and images of children and childhood (Dahlberg, 2000). This contrasts sharply with the development of other approaches to curricula discussed in this paper. Malaguzzi has articulated a distinctive vision of the child as a starting point for the curriculum. His ideas are grounded in his personal philosophy, which has been influenced by progressive educational theorists and from working with and listening to the views of parents, teachers, children and the wider community of other educators and stakeholders.

A criticism of the Reggio Emilia curriculum has been that in the absence of a written curriculum there is a lack of accountability to the wider society. Advocates of the Reggio Emilia approach argue that there is a detailed recording of the curriculum process, which opens their practice to criticism and scrutiny. This is achieved through documenting the children's work through photographs, slides and film, and in the form of publications and travelling exhibitions (Dahlberg, 2000). This is a very different form of accountability to the external inspection process, which often accompanies other curriculum frameworks and approaches.

Malaguzzi's philosophy is to make the teaching of Reggio Emilia visible to others in order to share, extend and enrich his curriculum vision.

Summary

The curricula and debates examined in this paper have tended to be polarised around progressive, learner-centred views about formal versus informal learning and the role of play in learning and the acknowledgement of cultural difference in early childhood curricula. The examples we have looked at have also reached differing arrangements in the way in which they conform to or reject a National Curriculum and the pressures for centralised curricula in early childhood.

At the centre of the English Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance is a view of the child as a future pupil. This has led to curriculum content which emphasises 'subject'-related learning goals and has resulted in practitioners feeling the need to prepare children for entry to school through more formal teaching approaches. Play is seen to be marginalised. In contrast, in Reggio Emilia the child is viewed as a powerful partner who 'actively co-constructs' the content of the curriculum with a more able 'other'. Within the *Te Whāriki* curriculum framework, although content is broadly mapped, the bicultural nature of early childhood is celebrated through a curriculum which allows for the individual mapping of 'strands and threads' to reflect the needs and interests of local groups, including members of the indigenous culture, parents and early childhood practitioners.

The Foundation Stage Curriculum in England is an example of a centralised, competency-oriented curriculum, as it establishes and specifies national educational goals and content in advance. An alternative viewpoint argues for more localised and individualised models, generated to meet local needs in order to support collaborative community visions for young children. The Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum offers this alternative view, as it regards a centralised, prescriptive approach as stunting the potential of children by formulating their learning in advance. Reggio Emilia educators advocate an approach in which adults outline flexible, general educational objectives, but do not formulate pre-specified goals. These two examples could be said to be at opposite ends of a continuum. Somewhere in between these two approaches is a 'framework consultative' approach to curricula, such as *Te Whāriki*, which provides the main values, orientations and goals for the curriculum but does not define how these goals should be achieved. Interpretation and implementation is left to local decisions (Bennett, 2001). These three examples could be said to fit along a continuum ranging from localised, individualised models through to centralised goal-oriented frameworks.

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