

**“MAKING CONNECTIONS”  
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS RE-CREATING MEANING:  
CONTEXTUALIZING REGGIO EMILIAN PEDAGOGY**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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by

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## Abstract

Reggio Emilian pedagogy is an acknowledged and burgeoning world-wide influence in early childhood education, yet it claims not to be a model for emulation. Where practising teachers engage with Reggio Emilian pedagogy in their classrooms, such ‘influence without emulation’ creates a paradox in the process. This qualitative study aims to investigate the process and theorize the paradox. Following the tradition of interpretive research into teacher reflection, research, inquiry and professional development, eight Australian teachers, working across a range of early childhood contexts, were interviewed for their interpretations of the impact, influence and local relevance of this foreign pedagogy. Analysis revealed strong responses, common themes of influence and a shared perspective on the issue of translocation—engagement in an alternative process to mere replication. Findings revealed the nature of this process.

The teachers re-created meaning in a process of pedagogical incorporation and re-construction. They all made connections between Reggio Emilian thought and practice and their own myriad contexts: the philosophical, the practical, the local, the personal and the temporal. Yet disparate modes of connection and re-construction revealed the highly individualized nature of these processes. The teachers’ meaning making in response to Reggio Emilia is theorized as an individual ‘quest to contextualize’. It produced a particular kind of pedagogical re-construction that is key to resolving the paradox of Reggio Emilian ‘influence without emulation’. This is theorized in the study's conclusion: that sustained, generative pedagogical change needs to be embedded by teachers within and across multiple contexts.

The individual, personal, voluntary and extensive nature of the pedagogical change process investigated in this study holds implications for pre-and post-service professional development and for early childhood employers, regulators and researchers.

## DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis entitled “ ‘Making Connections’ Early Childhood Teachers Re-Creating Meaning: Contextualizing Reggio Emilian Pedagogy” and submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though my name is on the spine and I claim it as my own, I did not immaculately conceive this project, birth it in a vacuum, or grow it to its maturity alone. It has a history of many debts.

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My biggest debt is to the eight teachers, whose commitment to learning extended to revealing their ideas to a stranger. The transcripts are an extraordinary gift. The strengths of this thesis rest on these teachers' intellectual work, their passion and insights and their openness in sharing the what and the why of their Reggio journeys. I cannot repay this debt; I can only hope to acknowledge and honour it in the telling.