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## Image of the Teacher in Educational Leadership

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# IMAGE OF THE TEACHER IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP\*

Will Parnell

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## Abstract

Is the early childhood teacher a babysitter and the banker of knowledge filling empty-headed children with meaningless information? Or, is the teacher of young children a facilitator, guide and co-learner at the round-table of learning with competent children and educational community participants? Examining teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research, this paper explores the image of the teacher as a theoretical discussion in educational leadership with a fundamental question: How can teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research inform and bolster the image of the early childhood teacher? Solutions are suggested to combat teacher image problems which include utilizing a constructivist paradigm; engaging parents, teachers, staff, and community to collaborate on the subject of teacher image and classroom learning practices; adopting the teacher, parent and child's voice in the political arena; and, supporting teachers as researchers through documentation, collaboration, reflection and narration.



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## 1 Introduction

The early childhood teacher faces challenges with the current image of the teacher. Is the early childhood teacher a babysitter and the banker of knowledge filling empty-headed children with meaningless information?

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Or, is the teacher of young children a facilitator, guide and co-learner at the round-table of learning with competent children and educational community participants? Or, is the teacher something else?

Closely examining four areas of educational leadership including, teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research, the image of the teacher is explored as a theoretical discussion. These four areas of educational leadership are examined in this paper as a recommended pathway toward educational leadership achievement. As a longtime doctoral program coordinator for an educational leadership degree states:

### 1.1

These leadership areas are logical, appropriate and powerful lenses and approaches for bringing about change in educational settings. In other words, educational improvement can occur through changes to teaching/learning processes, modifications in organizational structures, shifts in policy brought about through politics, and perhaps most obviously through inquiry and the application of research. (K Noordhoff, Personal communication, July 8, 2009)

Solutions are suggested to combat the problems with the early childhood teacher image by confronting the difficulties of the current image of the teacher, setting up a context for various lenses viewing the image of the teacher, examining the four areas of educational leadership, and drawing conclusions. In the end, propositions include utilizing a constructivist paradigm; asking parents, teachers, staff, and community to collaborate on the subject of teacher image and classroom learning practices; adopting the teacher, parent and child's voice in the political arena; and, supporting teachers as researchers through documentation, collaboration, reflection and narration. Ultimately, these recommendations hold the potential to reshape the teacher image and change the way school plays out in society.

## 2 Difficulties of the Current Image of the Teacher: A Question Emerges

Early Childhood teachers are often viewed as non-professionals by parents, teachers, children and society due to many factors such as the lack of professionalization and professional qualifications needed in the field or the longstanding traditional beliefs that children should stay at home or be in "daycare" until kindergarten age. Such beliefs inform the image of who teaches our young. Teacher images come from mass media sources such as books, standardized test outcome publications, You Tube, magazines, movies, and television. Current metaphors for "teacher" in early childhood educational research have been explored, such as co-learner, banker of knowledge, and researcher. (Curtis & Carter, 2000; Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001; and Project Zero, Cambridgeport Children's Center, Cambridgeport School, Ezra H. Baker School, & John Simpkins School, 2003). The socially constructed non-professional image affects the teacher's ability to teach effectively. The early childhood teacher is viewed in contemporary United States society as babysitter, caretaker, and omniscient giver of knowledge pouring their *right way of thinking* into empty heads as reflected in the well-known policy No Child Left Behind.

An alternate, more profound and underdeveloped teacher researcher image is emerging in innovative ways (Rinaldi, 2006). This image calls forth a trustworthy, knowledgeable, child development expert; researcher, facilitator, listener, and observer; and guide of the child's own learning experiences (Ayers, 2001; Duckworth, 2008; Silin & Schwartz, 2003).

Teacher image is defined and shaped through regulation, policy, culture, and role (Reyes & Rios, 2003; Swetnam, 1992). Current educational accountability standards promote the knowledge-giver image of teacher – especially in early childhood settings. Influenced by rhetoric, more parents pressure early childhood schools to teach using particular, measurable practices. Imagine a parent tour 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?" Parents are preoccupied with standardized schooling methods as a way to guarantee their child's later success in life (Donegan & Trepanier-Street, 1998). Research on effective developmental practices conversely shows that teachers must give equal time to social and emotional development as well as cognitive growth in open-ended

and choice-oriented spaces (Charlesworth, 1999). Moreover, learning is most effectively achieved through play and contextualized exploration for all children (Cadwell, 2003; Charlesworth, 1999; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2002). To achieve comprehensive classroom teaching and learning, the teacher must be a facilitator and co-learner with children (Chaille, 2007).

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*, creating an alarming distortion with consequences serious enough to warrant the concern of all education professionals” (p. 30). Thus, an emerging alternative and innovative image is vital to the early childhood classroom.

It is essential that childhood teachers re-envision themselves as social collaborators learning with children (Rinaldi, 2006). Redefining the teacher is not well-received in an educational era of parental influence, privatization, and customer-oriented early childhood schools (Apple, 2006). The fundamental question in understanding the implications of the image of the teacher is: How can teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research inform and bolster the image of the early childhood teacher?

This fundamental question rejects “the banking model.” As Freire (1998/2001) describes it, “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” (p. 62). When valued as a total educational experience, meaningless and context-less facts and figures cannot inform life-practices. A different model is suggested by Curtis and Carter (2000) and Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky (2001) as a round-table of co-learning, termed “subject-centered” learning by Palmer (1998). In this view, 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.

Through revealing real-world problems embedded in the concept of the image of the teacher, this paper aims to theoretically explore how the teacher image informs and is augmented by teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research. In this theoretical discussion, the image of the teacher is contextualized through various lenses including values in the United States determining such teacher images like teacher as caretaker; the United States and Reggio Emilia’s differences in images; society, school and the parent affecting images; and the teacher’s self-constructed images.

Further investigation considers a teaching and learning paradigm to uncover a strong teacher image; what role organizational leadership can take in shaping the teacher image; the power of politics and policy in determining the teacher; and what research says about the image of the early childhood teacher and her/his task in schools. In the end, the emerging propositions include implications for teacher liberation through ideas for innovative image change.

### 3 Contexts for Early Childhood Teachers and Their Images

There are many lenses through which to examine the contexts of the image of teacher. To best introduce the background influences of the image of the early childhood teacher for the purposes of this study, four areas are considered more in depth: 1) Values determining the image of the teacher; 2) Out of the ashes: Another system for the image of the teacher is born; 3) Looking in on schools: Society and the parent; 4) And, who am I?: A teacher’s own perspective.

#### 3.1 Values Determining Images

“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). As Reyes and Rios (2003) have put forward, considerable problems facing early childhood education and teaching today are rooted in the images that schools uphold from society pressure, parents bring to school life, and teachers hold of themselves. These images surface in a teacher’s classroom practices. They hinder young children’s learning experiences due to the many factors of pedagogy, leadership, politics, and research practices being out of sync with a strong image. For example, if a teacher is not supported by the organization in professional development to learn

about principles and practices or about innovations in teaching and learning then students pay the price in their learning and classroom atmosphere, by having less than fully-prepared teachers. This example demonstrates how out of sync practices can further deteriorate the image of the teacher.

Additionally, the images of the teacher are dictated by our culture's historical stance of child-rearing and the United States society's overarching value of individualized family principles which leads to shielding the child's upbringing and isolation from community experiences. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) point out that "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" (p. 9). U.S. society's overemphasized value of family independence and the privatized life of the child (only impacted by what the family values, not the community) force teachers out of the researcher and educator image into an undervalued state of meager "babysitter" who cannot convey values to children. People grow up to believe that the individual family should determine the values for their child; a non-collectivist viewpoint. This belief then impedes the teachers' efforts to create a co-learning curriculum and environment with parents to help raise the child. They are seen as someone who should not transmit values, but only transmit an academic knowledge, even though they are seen as the *care-taker* or babysitter.

Reyes and Rios (2003) demonstrate the media's role in this teacher and parent value-divide, "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" (p. 4). To suggest that teachers of young children hold expertise in a child's moral and other developmental domains threatens parent competence and calls into question the respective roles of parent and teacher. This dilemma brings forth a search for strong systems of learning models which encapsulate a solid co-participation between parents and teachers, one where the image of the teacher and the parent are strong as co-participants in the life of the child. This dilemma also brings forth the question of whether this image as co-participants exists or not.

### 3.2 Out of the Ashes: Another System for the Image of the Teacher is Born

How could examining another system of early childhood education in relation to our own influence teacher image and role? Acclaimed as one of the top ten best school systems in the country (Newsweek, 1991), the municipally-governed preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, offers a strong image of the teacher. While Reggio Emilia's strong image of the early childhood teacher is clearly articulated, their preprimary school system is not problem-free nor a model to copy (C. Rinaldi, Personal Communication, April 2004). However, their research and system do offer possible ways of considering the teacher. Their teacher image is clearly defined as one who listens, observes, researches, 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 teacher-as-researcher image is one of collaboration and documentation of children's learning experiences through "a pedagogy of listening" (Rinaldi, 2002) and close observation.

In juxtaposition to the teacher-as-researcher image in Reggio, Curtis and Carter (2000) help to define the teacher image problem in the United States by asking to find a pedagogy and vision and to "work collaboratively with our coworkers, the children, and their families" (p. xiii). Teachers have the power to work hand-in-hand with parents in the raising of the child through a learning community culture, but this work is yet to be realized in the way society views the role of the teacher in early childhood schools in the United States.

In Reggio Emilia, parents and teachers strategize together to best meet group learning goals and to develop each individual child in the context of school-life and the "other" (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). This value of collaboration in Reggio Emilia (Cadwell, 1997) influences their early childhood community's thinking about teaching, learning, and the school.

In the context of understanding the teacher image in the United States, the image of the early childhood teacher has yet to be fully defined. 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.

Preprimary schooling in the United States is becoming a marketplace for choosing what type of education a child will receive since much of preschool education is still privatized. As Davies (2002) points out, “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” (p. 10). Messages and images of who the teacher is seep into the establishment's decision-making, which influence the school administration and ultimately drive the didactic vision.

Additionally, teachers are informed about methods and practices through performance review, training programs, workshops, and seminars. The current way of evaluation and training keeps the school moving forward in a competitive marketplace by adopting the latest and greatest ideas and popular culture (buzz-word) curricula rather than for developing solid teaching skills and ongoing teaching and learning improvements. This inadequate development can also create poor-morale and low-performing teachers; perpetuating and exacerbating the meager image of the teacher and keeping unmotivated teachers working.

### 3.3 Looking in on Schools: Society and the Parent

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 that positively affect the learning atmosphere. “Open season on education continues. The media, candidates for public office, conservative pundits, corporate leaders, nearly everyone it seems, has an opinion on what's wrong with schools” (Apple, 2006, p. 1). As a political agenda accountability is paramount (Hatch, 2002). Thus, schools derive their image of the teacher from the public to better market their survival. As Swetnam (1992) makes clear, “Perceptions of average citizens—taxpayers, voters, and parents—may be shaped by the unrealistic portrayals of schools and teachers in films and television programs. . . . Without personal knowledge about schools and teachers, people form their attitudes based on fictional media representations” (p. 30). Media shapes perceptions of schools, which pressures the administration to outline the professional development opportunities of the school and the lack of system-wide support encroaches on the teacher.

There is a sense of urgency for the school administration, teachers, and public at large to come together in schools, forge an alliance, place the image of the teacher, the school, the child in the middle of the table, and make these images a focused curriculum of schools. This sort of alliance is what has happened through a long and difficult community struggle and partnership between parents, teachers, and other constituents on the rights and image of the child, teacher and school in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Barazzoni, 2000). In Reggio Emilia, parents, teachers, and children now write the city educational charter together (Reggio Children, 2002).

How parents see teachers plays a fundamental role in praxis—the connection and intersection between theory and practice. Many schools espouse parent involvement but do not actually have a defined role for parents to play in the daily life of the school. If there is no definition, parents and teachers struggle with one another's roles (Cadwell, 2003), which forms each image. As Munn (1998) states, “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 are valid assessment instruments, powerful advocacy tools and should be valued in schools, the meaning of teaching and the day-to-day learning in the school comes from teachers (teacher researchers) who document the learning field, research learning and teaching and the study along side of children daily with the aid and understanding of parents and the general society. An organized system to support parents in educating themselves about early education and care and collaborating with schools and teachers is essential for parent contributions and support for quality.

By and large, early childhood schools in the United States (in many places still called “daycare”—a pejorative term which conjures up images of babysitting) are driven by marketplace mentality in the current era. Munn (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. . .whereby 'exit' (Hirschmann, 1970) is the main option to unsatisfactory provision" (p. 390). Parent choice does affect the curriculum. School administrators are caught trying to keep parents and consumers contented while running schools, similar to learning to drive a car while driving. In the midst of this parent choice and the effects it has on schools, consider the question of where this leaves the teacher him/herself in constructing the image of the teacher.

### 3.4 Who am I?: A Teacher's own Perspective

Aspects of teacher identity come from images that others hold for teachers. 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" (p. 192). She goes on to say that our constructed image leads to our beliefs of "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" (p. 192). Our consciousness of the other seems to always be in relation to the ways we see ourselves and what is familiar to us from our past experiences. So, too, is this accurate for the images we hold of a teacher.

Moreover, Dolloff (1999) explains that the teacher's mind is not focused on finding new images for teaching; it is seeking out justification for what it already knows and accepts as real. She goes on to state that, "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 and listening to other teachers practice (Preskill & Jacobvitz, 2001). Preconceived notions brought on by watching teachers practice develop into an identity and reinforce outdated teaching practices, thereby supporting the poor image of the teacher. For example, if a teacher utilizes negative inducements to discipline children, and this is the technique a newer teacher sees of classroom management practices, the practice is most likely repeated unless or until professional development introduces other possibilities.

Only recently are teachers being asked to research and rethink teacher identity, image, and role at a profound enough level where this new image of the teacher reshapes the power and rights of the child and school (Project Zero, Cambridgeport Children's Center, Cambridgeport School, Ezra H. Baker School, & John Simpkins School, 2003; Rinaldi, 2003). To attain a more complex image of the teacher remains a long and arduous process and most likely starts somewhere with documentation and bringing learning visibly into the community whereby the teacher demonstrates their learning and teaching practices and shows the powerful image of the child, which in turn bolsters the image of the teacher. This achievement must start with acting practitioners reflecting on identity and researching good places where that strong identity is already present, such as in the schools of Reggio Emilia where over 78 countries are visiting and exchanging dialogue on such important matters as the image of the child, teacher and school.

In the end, the early childhood teacher faces challenges with the current image of the teacher as can be seen through values in the United States; Reggio Emilia's intentional stance on images; U.S. society, school administration, the parent, and media; and the teacher's own self-created images. This paper confronts these difficulties through four lenses of educational leadership (teaching and learning, organizational leadership, politics and policy, and educational research) in order to develop potential solutions to the crisis in the image of the teacher's impact on early childhood education schools.

## 4 Reality, Constructivism, and Intersubjectivity: A Strong Teacher Image in Teaching and Learning

Depending on how teachers each perceive reality, they choose a paradigm for teaching and learning. These paradigms influence and are influenced by the valued images of the teacher. 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” (Denzin & Lincoln, 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.

There is a song that depicts understanding of and belief in how we come to know. “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, 2003, ¶ 1). 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 in Denzin and Lincoln (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, teachers must play with, feel, sense, see, and experience the world around them to develop understanding and learn about teaching. 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 Philips and Soltis (1998), they illustrate Plato’s theories through the use of myths. They remind us that Plato believed in knowledge as innate and in the mind from birth. Through the story of Er, they tell again of his soul’s memories during death. “[Er] 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” (p. 10). Philips and Soltis (1998) further explain that those who drank too much could remember nothing from the past life, but those who drank only a little could “recall the insights into reality their souls had received” (p. 10) through arduous earthly education. In the end, they say, “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.

Plato’s view 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 Denzin and Lincoln’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 demonstrates one way of knowing. His beliefs preface additional important philosophical viewpoints. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the purpose of espousing a view of the nature of knowledge and learning is to describe a belief which informs our teaching methods and how the teacher is perceived.

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 (1994) work on Learning as Coming Home is revealing to the image of the teacher, “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 and through this image validates the use of correct teaching strategies.

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.... Each new recognition of pattern, each appropriated skill, could offer a moment of homecoming” (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, 1996). 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). Once the



choice is made on how to believe about the nature of reality and knowing, the images of the teacher are called forth differently and the meaning of classroom teaching is transformed into one where the teacher is a co-learner, co-creating reality to construct meaning.

If learning is a coming home experience then it becomes an awakening to what is already there before us—seen or unseen. To uncover our profoundest desires in life means that we seek to know a subject and live intersubjectively, awakening to what exists in front of us (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). Intersubjectivity is the dance that exists between the various participants as well as between the 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. Only through an intersubjective understanding can we project a strong teacher image affecting classroom practice that merits a rightful place in the school community.

## 5 Organizational Leadership: What does it Offer in Professional Development?

Where are the leaders in early childhood education and how are they leading? Organizational leadership has many definitions. Our definition shows that every educator can be a leader (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999), deconstructing the notion that the teacher is guided by someone in an office, removed from daily practices. As Whalley (2008) states, “Each member of the staff team needs to be involved in contributing to change in practice” (p. 6). However, we reside in a system where scarcity of resources, time, and consideration of the role of teacher, child, school, parent and community prevails in educational settings; demands placed on the teachers prevents them from engaging in leadership practice and focus on aspects of teaching that exist beyond their daily routines.

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 means to stay abreast of the changing and competing marketplace of modern schools (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Several questions about teacher development and leadership remain unanswered as we know that “most school leadership practices create temporary, localized furries of change but little lasting or widespread improvement” (Hargraves & Fink, 2004).

These unanswered teacher development questions lead to more questions for the current organizational models in the United States, such as if there is a developed a teacher researcher and leadership image in early childhood organizational models. Are any preprimary schools in the United States 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 and learning that work? We look for answers to these questions in the school’s organizational framework which calls forth teacher’s image and ability to teach well supported by a system where every protagonist partakes in leadership, a shared decision-making processes, and collaboration as co-participation (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001; Project Zero, Cambridgeport Children’s Center, Cambridgeport School, Ezra H. Baker School, & John Simpkins School, 2003).

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.

### 5.1

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.

## 5.2

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 reflection is slowed by bureaucracy and as Friedman and Meer (2007) state, “Change is a slow dance” (p. 1).

While Bolman and Deal’s (1991) human resource framework would encourage us to fit the individual to the organizational structure holding the image and role of the teacher in place, 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). Rodd (2006) points us in the same direction suggesting we play within the system with an “holistic, inclusive, and empowering process” (p. 33).

Early childhood scholars 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, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). Most of these early childhood teacher-researchers are again influenced by experiences put forward by the organizational leaders of Reggio Children; experiences which demonstrate a meaningful, relaxed, joyful, balanced, and life-driven cultural perspective in organizations.

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) remind educational leaders to slow down and listen to the life of and within the organization. This ability to listen leads programs away from training and shot-in-the-arm workshops that bolster the teacher’s practices, but does little in the way of the teachers ongoing growth as a professional. To extend professional development initiatives and work alongside of teachers in their daily practices, struggles and collaborations (Parnell, 2005) makes lasting developmental changes for the teacher (Smith-Burke, 1996). The ability to listen to and aid in the long-term formation of a teacher’s development shifts away from former images of the teacher and builds toward a better understanding of who the teacher is in the school, community, and society (Rinaldi, 2006).

To move away from training models and consider the teachers’ role more profoundly with the teacher in ongoing professional development is akin to Lieberman and Miller’s (2004) concept that we must “build an environment for the continual learning and participation of the adults” (p. 26). This way of thinking not only shifts the teacher’s practice but also shifts the image of the teacher in the overall organizational structure (Smith-Burke, 1996). They naturally become leader rather than solely classroom teacher through collegially sharing in practice and what they learn (Rodgers, Anderson, Conley, LeVasseur, & Turpin, 1993). Given this alternative teacher leader image, resources will shift in the political arena toward a model of teacher-as-learner (Palmer, 1998) who must be engaged in the ongoing and lifelong learning of teaching (Smylie, 1995).

## 6 Mucking About: Politics and Policy to Reform the Teacher’s Image

A good example of the power that politics and policy-making displays in the United States early childhood education arena around the teacher image comes out of the U.S. federal Head Start programs; more poignantly in recent years, through the initiative called *Good Start, Grow Smart (GSGS)* (Bush, 2002) that was reinitialized in 2007 and runs through 2012. Teacher accountability has become a topic of great importance in current U.S. times (Salinas, Kristonis & Herrington, 2006). As the GSGS initiative demonstrates, 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 test scores attained through standardized testing of Head Start children.

Testing at this age has not been practiced as an educational norm. The *GSGS* initiative requires that every local Head Start program “assess all participants between the ages of three and five on these indicators [learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills] at the beginning, middle, and end of each year”

(Bush, 2002, p. 9). The policy also asks teachers “to analyze the assessment data on the progress and accomplishments of all enrolled children” (p. 9).

Standardized testing as a measure of children’s skills and knowledge and of a teachers’ ability to teach well, present a dilemma. This policy is worth critique and further understanding especially as it relates to power in early education and developing a political voice and an image of teacher as political participant. 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 *GSGS* the projected power sits with the Senate Education Committee and the political elites and not the teachers, parents and children (non-elites) on whom the initiative is enacted. This policy adopts the image of the teacher as the banker of knowledge and non-elite—not able to enact changes on national decisions for quality assessment practices of a child’s development. Instead, teachers must be trained in standardized test-giving (Bush, 2002) and allow political elites to make decisions about classroom practices.

In Head Start, through the negative inducement of withholding federal money, programs and their employees will comply with the new federal accountability policy. The results of not meeting the national accountability demands are loss of funding and the potential demise of comprehensive programming that is afforded to low-income children and their families. In this case, the power of federal coercion produces the desired outcomes of complete accountability through testing of the children. This policy reinforces the poor banking model teaching strategies as the solution to stay accountable and employed; the initiative expects that teachers train in the literacy testing administration process and perform in testing their children for literacy, language and numeracy norms.

Overall, the perceived powerlessness of Head Start staff, the early childhood community, and the families utilizing the programs is planned in the political media realm.

## 6.1

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. Under these circumstances, the feeling of helplessness and the idea of rebuttal or “biting the federal hand that feeds you” helps to maintain silent voices.

However, this powerlessness is a perceived phenomenon. There is strong evidence of the Head Start parent, staff, and early childhood community’s lobbying during the 1980s Regan attempt to end federal Head Start involvement. The results from lobbying, rallying participation, and grass-roots campaigning was favorable for the affected groups—children, families, and programs. Regan’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 losing federal funding causes apathy, conflict, grassroots campaigning and power struggle for a large number of political actors.

Due to the federal government’s lack of facilitating buy-in within the Head Start program, its administration and staff, and its families, the conflict between the federal government and interested groups such as 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). The power struggle and conflicts

Head Start and the federal government are facing about the nation's children is with and between adults at both the micro and macro levels.

In the final analysis, the real victims of this how-to-prove-accountability power struggle and tug-of-war are Head Start children, teachers and parents. Children's needs (not rights) are pulled into the political arena without the voice, understanding, and prior knowledge of the children themselves—promoted as needy by politicians, rather than as children with rights. The image of the child as a broken child—one who must be protected and spoken for—is upheld in this political arena. A child of rights has their voice represented in determining how we create quality experiences *with* them (not for them). Where is the image of the teacher in this arena? In this problem of promoting the needy child rather than the child of rights, the teachers' voice (due to the teachers' image) seems non-existent and powerless.

The political actors speaking for children sit on both sides of the Head Start issue, without asking the children for their input. On the one hand, the federal government enacts policies that seek to only protect the child, not to grant them rights to high quality educational experiences. On the other, we have Head Start officials, staff, families and supporting agencies—NAEYC and NHSA debating the issues of children and family's needs. Each side wants what they believe is best for children and Head Start. This clash forces to the surface the paradoxes of the policy issue without really coming to what the rights of the child to high quality educational experiences are exactly. 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 its pedagogy or entering its demise.

Now, Head Start children and families and teachers gain only in small ways from the current policy enactment; however these gains do not outweigh the costs, thus the Head Start families and teachers become the afflicted groups.

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. However, engaging families and staff in the political process can change systems for the better as we've found out in Head Start's own history during the Regan era (Hacsi, 2002).

The teacher as political actor, engaging the children and especially the parents in activism makes a difference in the lives of young children. It shifts the teacher image from the local (one of classroom policy enactment) to the global (influencing national political elites) and thrusts the teacher image into political participant where they demonstrate the child of rights and bring voice to the power in learning and teaching through making learning visible and acting as political agents of change in their community.

## 7 Educational Research: Teacher as Researcher? The Image is There

Finding meaning in early childhood education research is an essential component to healthy teaching practices (Borgia & Schuler, 1996). Presently, a prevalent way to demonstrate accountability and sustainability in early childhood teaching practices is available and present through qualitative documentation of classroom and community work and thinking (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). 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 as researcher (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). 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 as researcher can be accomplished (Rinaldi, 2003).

In the Reggio Emilia approach, much is written about the history of the making of the schools as well as reasons why they came into existence (Barazzoni, 2000). This historical insight plays a significant role in the development of the overall principles and practices of childhood educational research. Specifically, informing the teacher as researcher image are three areas of literary investigation including Rinaldi's notion of intersubjectivity (Giudici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001); theoretical principles of learning (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998), and early childhood teacher image development through reflection, documentation, and collaboration as a research intersection (Parnell, 2005).

In Giudici, Rinaldi and Krechevsky (2001), Rinaldi states 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” (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 between researcher and that being researched.

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:

### 7.1

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)

Intersubjectivity becomes an essential component in the dialogue of re-searching or collaboratively looking back into what was experienced—a phenomenological stance in action research that evolves and creates the unique (Pine, 2009).

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 their 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, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 119) Through this act of collaborative research, 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 and learning and reveal their inseparability.

In the literature, educators in the United States propose that the primary field of early childhood teaching and learning is socio-constructivist and comes from the influence of Lev Vygotsky (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Hendrick, 1997; New, 2000). As described by Berk and Winsler (1995), Vygotskian teacher research principles are widespread. They also suggest:

### 7.2

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, Gandini, and Forman’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 teachers strive to accomplish this socio-educational learning field with children, they recognize their growth and change in such a collaborative research environment. As Freire (1998/2001) shows, “Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (p. 31). Through

this quote, 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, and thus listening researchers (Gedin, 1998; Rinaldi, 2002).

Curtis and Carter (2000) demonstrate that preprimary school 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 children’s abilities, their learning, and themselves. Children inform teaching practice by engaging the learning and they create potential moments for teacher self-awareness to arise. “If we listen to and watch them [children] closely, they will teach us to be more observant, inquisitive, and responsive in our work” (Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. xii). For without children in classrooms, 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:

### 7.3

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, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 121)

Documents such as panels, books, pictures, and the like, support communication and daily interactions 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 revisit individually and with others the events and processes in which he or she was co-protagonist, directly or indirectly” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 121). Documentation leads the teacher to further (self) reflection as well as collaboration with colleagues, parents, and others.

As teachers help organize the children’s work into a visible and valued marker in time and place, conversations and dialogue emerge and the identity of the teacher grows.

### 7.4

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 and assist in their becoming researcher.

The literature on intersubjectivity, theoretical principles of learning, documentation, collaboration and reflection impacts teacher research and weaves together a picture of the human stories of teaching, documentation, collaboration, and learning. As Erlich and Bhavnagri (1994) state in a teacher change case study,

### 7.5

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 reflections. (p. 7)

Their notion of documenting, narrating, and disseminating teachers’ learning demonstrates the very nature of the research on teachers and teaching needed in early childhood education today.

Through the concepts of teacher awareness and listening, educators uncover the richness and complexities in daily life with children and begin to construct new meanings for teacher development and growth. The

action research and phenomenological (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.

## 8 Through the Image Looking Glass: Conclusions and Propositions 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 the 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?

There are steps to a balanced and holistic perspective in becoming the teacher we always wanted in our own valuable childhoods. Who was that friend? What did they look like? What was their support system? What was studied and most researched about them and their story? The answers to these questions force the image of the teacher into one with increasing complexity.

Implications of looking deeply into the image of the teacher are far reaching. Propositions for the future of the early childhood teachers include:

- a. To playfully go forward into choosing a constructivist paradigm and see the world as the clay to be molded and reshaped in one's own hand, which requires conviction and knowing a visionary teaching purpose.
- b. To ask parents, teachers, staff, and community to collaborate on the subject of teacher image and classroom learning practices; forge the alliances necessary to build the meaning of schools; and promote school leadership in us all by pedagogically listening for passion and the impulses of a teaching life and letting go of the bureaucratically designed and fragmented systems.
- c. To adopt the parent, teacher and child's voice in the political arena and learn to analyze policy from the perspective of paradox in order to effectively influence lasting education policy changes, inform teacher image and ensure that better teaching practices are brought to the political table for deliberation.
- d. To research schools that support teachers, their work and voice, and quality of work-resources, which increase the quality of learning and teaching practices. To recognize that all research methods are valuable and that phenomenologically-based action research brings a teacher's story to life; and to begin to imagine teachers in their own words and walk others through the phenomenon of teaching and learning by telling teachers' stories of learning with children.

In conclusion, the effect of research on the teacher image is paramount and only works to drive away a faltering system when the community—children, teachers, parents, the leader in us all, and those surrounding the school—stand beside the teacher and strongly develop her/his image in harmony with the child, school and family. Teaching practices inform and are informed by the way teachers are held in our minds, collectively. The image of the teacher can and will strongly thrive when the community practices the strategies of slowing down to listen, to collaborate, and to change the way we envision the education of our young.

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