The Process of being a Teacher in a Reggio Emilia-Inspired Preschool: A Phenomenological Study[*]

Tugba AYDEMIR OZALP[**]
Hatice Zeynep INAN[***]

Abstract: The current research aims to examine how Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool teachers in Turkey make sense of being Reggio Emilia-inspired teacher and what they experience during this process. In this research, one of the qualitative research methods, namely, Phenomenological Research Design, was used. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. In this study, 20 preschool teachers in Reggio Emilia-inspired schools located in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir provinces were included. Participants were determined using the purposeful sampling strategy. For data analysis, this research was conducted using the thematic analysis in which categories and codes were created upon similarities found in the data. The findings obtained in this study revealed that a teacher who was inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach experiences five stages of transformation. These stages were as follows, respectively: 1. Hearing the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time, 2. Affective reaction 3. Internalization 4. Comparison 5. Placement. Participants in the current research stated that being a Reggio Emilia-inspired teacher was a pleasant, enjoyable, intensive process and an endless journey in which they helped children construct their knowledge.

Keywords: Early childhood education, reggio emilia approach, reggio emilia-inspired teacher, phenomenology.

Introduction

The Reggio Emilia approach refers to a democratic education system, also called "alternative education" in early childhood education. The foundations of this system were laid after World War II. People decided to build a school for their children by selling a few tanks, trucks and horses that remained in their hands after the war. To the primary school teacher, Loris Malaguzzi, this idea initially seemed unbelievable, but then Malaguzzi and the village people worked day and night to build their school (Malaguzzi, 1998; Thornton & Brunton, 2010). Thus, in the Reggio Emilia approach, education is structured as a community movement. Adults and children share their culture by discussing, making discoveries together (Edwards, 1998; Inan, 2012).

Foundations of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia pedagogy, which is highly influenced by the constructivist understanding of Jean Piaget and the social constructivist understanding of Lev Vygotsky, is structured on six basic principles. These are a strong and interested "Child Image", a new "Teacher Image" with a wide range of roles, "The Environment as Third Teacher" which supports children's education and development and provokes their interest like teachers, "Relationships" which emphasize physical and social relationships, "Project" through which integrated activities largely focused on arts and science are conducted and "Documentation" which is seen as a tool of evaluation and planning. In the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia-inspired teacher, it is necessary to act in accordance with all these technical and philosophical principles. In particular, it is necessary to have the child image that Reggio Emilia teachers have. To have a positive child image as Reggio Emilia teachers have, one must believe in the following characteristics: The child is curious and wonders about the world like a scientist, asks questions; learns actively, that is, constructs his/her knowledge by doing and experiencing; questions, does not take it as it is, explores underlying causes and likes to play with variables; expresses his/her feelings and thoughts using different means, such as visual arts, can cooperate and collaborate with others; is strong; is an individual having interests and needs; and is willing to learn (Cadwell, 2011; Dahlberg, 2000; Gandini, 2002; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006; Thornton & Brunton, 2010).

Teacher in the Reggio Emilia Approach

In Reggio Emilia schools, there are two partner teachers in the classrooms and these teachers work together (Malaguzzi, 1998). The training period for teachers is between 24 August and 13 July. Teachers working in crèches spend 31 hours a week with children and five hours in other activities (e.g., material preparation, professional development, management, planning and meetings with families). Teachers working in kindergartens spend 30 hours a week with children and six hours in other activities

(e.g., planning, management, professional development, material preparation and meetings with families) (Guidici et al., 2001)

Teachers work systematically. Class teachers work in collaboration with pedagogists (education experts) and atelieristas (studio teachers). Atelierista is an expert in arts. He/she helps children express themselves through different methods and techniques in workshops called Atelier at school. In the metaphor of "100 languages of the child" in the Reggio Emilia approach, children express what they learn with their own feelings and thoughts in various branches of art, such as painting, dance, drawing and clay. However, here, art studies should not be considered lessons (Edwards, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998; Vecchi, 1998)

The Pedagogista working at Reggio Emilia schools is a program coordinator who is an expert in pedagogy or psychology (Guidici et al., 2001). Pedagogistas share new theories in education and development with teachers, establish connections between their schools and other schools and the municipality, visit schools under their responsibility on some days of the week, and conduct interviews to initiate new projects or monitor ongoing projects. They are also closely involved in the development of children (Cadwell, 2011; Filippini, 1998).

Malaguzzi (1998) stated that great importance should be attached to in-service training. Teachers hold regular meetings with the pedagogista and atelierista. Teachers willingly attend these meetings. They exchange ideas on new, ongoing or finished projects. The person who made teachers adopt this way of working is Malaguzzi, the main founder of the approach (Cadwell, 2011).

In the literature, the differing roles of Reggio Emilia teachers are classified as follows: "Listener and observer", "Student", "Researcher", "Assistant and guide" and "Provocateur" (Hewett, 2001; Inan, 2012)

1- In the role of listener and observer, they observe and listen to children. Listening has a deep meaning for Reggio Emilia teachers and is an active action (Rinaldi, 2006). Listening refers to "watching children paying full attention and recording what has been watched. Then, the resulting documents are used as the basis in the decision-making process that proceeds with the participation of children and their families" (Edwards, 1998, p. 181).

2- In the role of student, teachers learn new knowledge together with children. Teachers come out of their role of an expert and constructor knowing everything and adopt the role of a person who researches and learns together with students (Inan, 2012).

3- In the role of the researcher, they use their documentation to explore children's interests and curiosity and plan possible projects. They work in partnership with other teachers and conduct research under the leadership of the pedagogista to help children discover what they want to learn (Hewett, 2001; New, 1993; Rinaldi, 1998).

4- In the role of assistant and guide, they listen to children and create environments where children can work in collaboration (Wexler, 2004). Teachers are friends who help and guide children in the construction of knowledge, not those who have knowledge (Fraser and Getswicki, 2002).

5- In the role of provocateur, they encourage children to explore learning paths suitable for them, solve problems and think in different ways (Hendrick, 2004).

When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that many researchers from different countries have been conducting research on the Reggio Emilia approach (Akar-Gencer & Gonen, 2015; Finegan, 2001; Imir, 2018; Inan & Kayir, 2015; Kim & Darling, 2009; Nelson, 2000; Ozturk, 2006; Stegelin, 2003; Strickler, 2012). In recent years, many preschool education institutions and their teachers in Turkey have been affected by the Reggio Emilia approach based on the democratic education system and have been working to implement this new philosophy in their institutions. While Akar-Gencer and Gonen (2015) examined the effects of Reggio Emilia-based studies on children's creativity skills, Imir (2018) examined the effects of Reggio Emilia-based documentation practices on children's thinking skills. While implementing this philosophy that has just begun to be understood in Turkey, preschool teachers are experiencing a serious process of change and development. Lack of information about the opinions of teachers about the practices of the Reggio Emilia approach in Turkey made it necessary to conduct the current study. Thus, the current study aims to reveal how teachers working in schools that implement the Reggio Emilia approach in Turkey make sense of being Reggio Emilia-inspired teacher and their experiences regarding this process.

Method

In the current study conducted in accordance with qualitative research methods and techniques, it was aimed to reveal the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher based on the perceptions of preschool teachers in a realistic and holistic manner. A qualitative research design was created in which the participants were seen as a data source, and in-depth data were collected through open and flexible semi-structured interviews (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). In such studies called phenomenological research, participants' experiences of a phenomenon are revealed through a holistic description of what and how participants have experienced (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014; Van Manen, 1990). In this connection, the phenomenon to be focused on in the research process was determined as the experiences of preschool teachers who conducted applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach. In addition, the focus of this study was to examine the opinions of the participants in depth and to reveal how they made sense of the approach through a holistic description because the phenomenological approach as an approach having philosophical foundations is built on individuals' making sense of their own experiences and focuses on the essence of the phenomenon in the individual's perception.

Different ways can be adopted in phenomenological research as in other types of research. In the current study, epoche and phenomenological reduction were attempted to be made. In phenomenological studies, "Epoche" is defined as the researcher's self-blocking or suspending his/her own preconceptions/prejudices about the research, while "phenomenological reduction" can be defined as the researcher's focus on the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon being studied (Dowling, 2007). In the current study, the researcher blocked her own prejudices and judgements as much as possible and tried to neutralize herself to prevent the preliminary information she obtained from the literature review from affecting her research. Then, the researcher made a phenomenological reduction in this research process by trying to interpret the data obtained from the teachers through the lenses of an independent mind. Thus, she tried to understand the participating teachers' experiences in becoming Reggio Emilia-inspired teachers without involving her own judgements because, in phenomenological research, it is essential for the researcher to focus on the perceptions of the participants by leaving aside his/her own prejudices, beliefs and prior knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation and to explain the phenomenon that is examined from the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

In the selection of the participants, homogeneous sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used. Purposive sampling allows for in-depth investigation of specific situations in accessing rich data (Buyukozturk et al., 2010; Patton, 2014). In this context, "conducting applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach" as the common characteristic of the participants constitutes the homogeneity of the group.

Table 1.

Participant Information

Gender	Female	19
	Male	1
Age	18-24	6
	25-31	4
	32-38	5
	39-45	5
Education level	High school	3
	Associate's degree	4
	BA degree	13

In the provinces of Istanbul, Konya, Izmir, Eskisehir and Ankara, 28 private kindergartens which are affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and which stated that they conduct applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach were reached. A total of 20 teachers from seven different schools who accepted to participate in this study were included (see Table 1). Three of these schools are in Istanbul, three in Ankara and one in Izmir. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend

continuing to collect data until data saturation were reached. In this regard, the data collection process continued until the data saturation was reached toseek answers to the research questions.

In the current study, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, code names were used instead of their real names, and an informed consent form was obtained from the participants indicating that the participants would participate on a volunteer basis and the interviews would be tape-recorded.

Data Collection

In the phenomenological method, one of the qualitative research methods, the primary data collection tool is an interview (Merriam, 2009; Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). Semi-structured interview technique is preferred as it provides flexibility as well as a certain level of standard for the researcher (Turnuklu, 2000).

The semi-structured interview form used in the current study included questions to elicit personal information of the participants and interview questions to serve the purpose of this study. The participants answered the personal information questions before the interview. The semi-structured interview was grounded on the basic question, "If we consider Reggio Emilia teaching as a journey, how was the journey?". The principles regarding the creation process and implementation process of the interview form were explained in the credibility section. These interviews were recorded by recording with a device, which is one of the two basic methods followed in recording the interview data (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). The interviews were conducted as first and second interviews, each lasting for 12 to 60 minutes; nine hours 31 minutes and five seconds in total.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the data analysis process includes the coding of the data, the presentation of the categories that are formed as a result of combining the codes by taking similar features into account in figures, discussions or tables, and the explanation of the final results (Creswell, 2013); that is, the process of reporting of the data by making sense of it (Merriam, 2009). Especially in phenomenological studies, the aim is to predict the reasons behind a phenomenon by reaching the structural definition of the phenomenon experienced by the participants and to emphasize the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

In the current study, interview records were listened to and transcribed in order for the data collected during this research to be ready for analysis. An interview transcript was prepared for each of the 20 participants. The data set consisted of 134 pages was coded word by word, line by line, event by event according to İnvivo coding strategies (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The coding process was carried out systematically for each interview transcript. The categories were reached by

grouping the codes having similar features from among the codes extracted from the interview transcripts. During the analysis, where necessary, sound recordings were examined again and controls were made. Necessary changes were made according to the controls and agreements. During the formation of all the codes and categories, three different coders worked separately: one of them was the researcher, another one was a preschool education expert who had a course on the Reggio Emilia approach during his/her graduate studies and the other was an experienced measurement and evaluation specialist in the qualitative research process and then they presented their codes. Through discussion, an agreement was reached on different codes. For example, one of the codes proposed by the researcher as "Feeling incomplete" was coded as "Being aware of your deficiencies" by another coder. As a result of re-reading the data and discussions, the name "Noticing deficiencies" was given to this code. By reviewing the relationships between the categories, as a result of the data analysis, the theme of "Being a Reggio Emilia Teacher", which is an upper level, was reached. The appropriateness of the theme reached was discussed with three experts (one expert in preschool education, one expert experienced in qualitative research and one expert in measurement and evaluation).

Credibility

Various strategies were applied to ensure the credibility of the study: 1- Expert opinions were taken in the creation of the data collection tool, and the final version of the data collection tool was given in light of expert opinions. In the analysis of the data, a consensus was achieved in the coding process by working with three different encoders ("External control/External coder" and "Peer review" Creswell & Miller, 2000). 2- The pilot application was carried out and before the interview with the participants, the researcher noted their thoughts on the approach, avoiding any expressions that might direct the participants during the interviews ("Explanation of research prejudices", Creswell & Miller, 2000). 3- During the data collection, the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and all words, including pauses and exclamations of the participants, were transcribed ("Tape-recording," "Detailed document", Silverman, 2005; "Enhanced description", Creswell & Miller, 2000). 4- To establish a relationship between the researcher and the participant and to ensure long-term participation, the schools were visited before the interviews and time was spent with the participants, and social bonds were established by chatting about their daily experiences ("Long-term participation and continuous observation", Creswell & Miller, 2000). 5- The data were presented to the reader through direct quotations without comment and in accordance with the nature of the data ("Enhanced description", "Negative situation analysis" Creswell & Miller, 2000). As these processes were considered to be important in terms of strengthening credibility in qualitative research and strengthening the basis of the research, all of them were conducted with great precision. The raw data and the analyses having been conducted were kept by the researcher under appropriate conditions.

Findings

The changes that teachers underwent during becoming Reggio Emilia teacher emerged in a 5-stage period. These are; Hearing of the approach for the first time, Affective reaction, Internalization, Comparing and Placement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

The Process of Becoming a Reggio Emilia Teacher
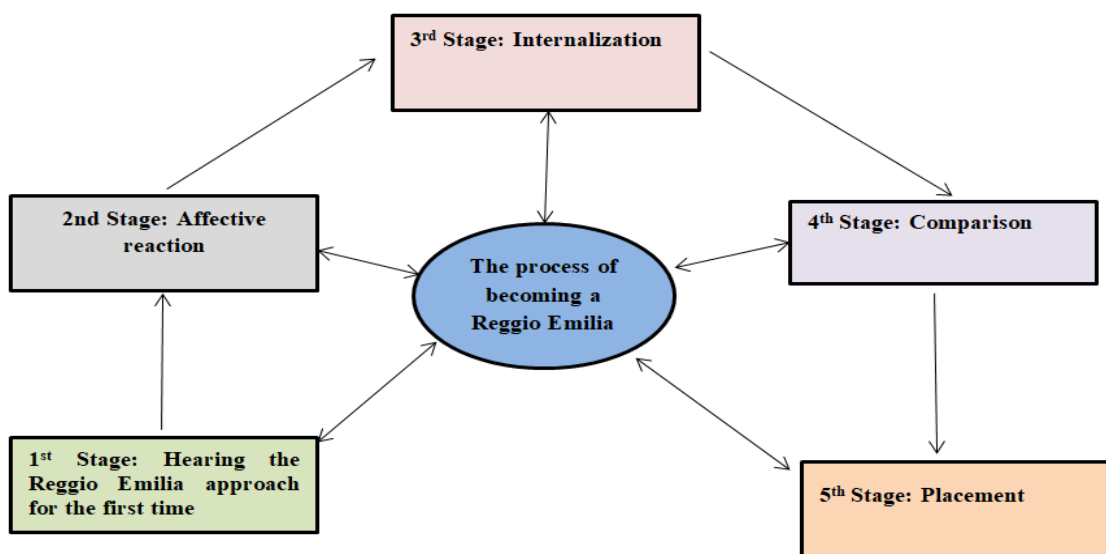
1ˢᵗ Stage: Hearing the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time

The category of hearing of the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time explains where and how the participants heard of the approach for the first time. The process of being a Reggio Emilia teacher started for the participants with their first encounter with the approach. The codes of this category are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

The Participants' Opinions about their First Hearing of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Category	Codes
1. Hearing of the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time	In the pre-service education period In the institution where they are still working with their own research

It was determined that the participants who encountered the Reggio Emilia approach during the pre-service education period learned about the approach in their lessons

during their undergraduate education. On the other hand, the majority of the participants seem to have never heard of the approach until during job interviews or after starting work. In addition, some stated that their principals at the school where they were still working gave information about the approach. Excerpts from participants regarding this finding are given below:

> I've heard about this approach before, but frankly, I didn't know anything about it; I worked in America for years. I heard of it during my education in America. I studied child development there. While learning different approaches there, we learned this like Montessori (Lale).

> At the university… while studying, this school was always given as an example to us, we were always said, "you should see the Reggio Emilia practices at the school, go and experience it (Melike).

> Ummm I heard about Reggio Emilia at this school first (Neriman).

> I first encountered it here. Here I learned from our school principal (Canan).

Esma, Guzin and Ediz, who did not graduate from the department of pre-school education, stated that they heard about the approach at the school where they were currently working. Esma, a graduate of the department of English language literature, stated that she had not heard of the approach before and learned the approach by experiencing it when she came to the school where she was still working. Guzin, a graduate of the Department of Psychology, stated that she had not heard of the approach before and that she heard about this approach when she came to the job interview at the school where she was still working. Another participant, Ediz, who did not graduate from the department of pre-school education, stated that she did not know anything about preschool teaching and Reggio Emilia approach when he first started work. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

> When I started working at this school, I learned together with children here (Esma).

> I did not know about the schools of education. I heard of Reggio at the job interview before I started working here for the first time (Guzin).

> After graduating from university, I also got my formation education.… Then I encountered with this school … I didn't know anything about Reggio I didn't know anything about kindergarten teaching … (Ediz).

While Aslıhan, one of the participants, stated that she heard about the Reggio Emilia approach through her own research and in her readings, another participant, Deniz stated that she heard of the approach in the internet. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

> Actually, I was reading from books, I was curious, I was reading Piaget and all of them. I also read about Reggio Emilia (Aslıhan).

> This Reggio Emilia approach was actually very interesting to me at first, one day, I saw the work done by children in Reggio Emilia on the internet and I started by researching at first (Deniz).

2nd Stage: Affective reaction

In the second category, which was determined as the second stage of the process, the emotions felt by all the participants after hearing of the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time were examined. The examined emotions were included in the category of affective reaction. The affective reaction category describes the characteristics of the participants' reactions after hearing of the Reggio Emilia approach (see Table 3).

Table 3.

The Participants' Opinions about the Stage of Affective Reaction

Category	Codes
2. Affective reaction	Hopelessness
	Interest and curiosity
	Admiration
	Haste
	Anxiety
	Fear
	Surprise

When the teachers Sinem and Aylin first heard about the Reggio Emilia approach, they felt hopeless for different reasons. Reggio Emilia thought that the teacher should have a lot of imagination. They associated being a vocational high school graduate with the lack of sufficient qualification for becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher. That is, according to the participants, the Reggio Emilia teacher was a teacher with a strong imagination and good education. In this context, the participants might develop a sense of hopelessness because they thought they were not qualified enough. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

> I thought I couldn't do it because it would require a lot of imagination. I thought I wasn't such a practical person (Aylin).

> When I first came, I thought I couldn't do it because I was a graduate of a vocational high school (Sinem).

Participants (Melike, Cigdem, Neslihan, Deniz and Ediz) wondered about the Reggio Emilia approach because they did not know about it. While expressing their interest in the Reggio Emilia approach, the participants emphasized that the approach was different and fun. In addition, the use of natural materials during applications was stated to be a crucial factor arousing interest in the approach. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

> I became interested in Reggio when I first heard about it in college because I believed that it would be really effective (Melike).

> First, I researched it; it was very interesting to see what it was like; it was really fun for me (Neslihan).

…I was very interested in bringing natural materials and nature inside. ... It was something unknown to me at first, something I was very curious about (Ediz).

…I was very interested at first, one day I saw the work done by children in Reggio Emilia on the internet and thus I started researching…. Even the environment where the children were intertwined with nature had a great effect on me (Deniz).

When the participants (Canan, Aslıhan and Kadriye) first heard about the Reggio Emilia approach, they showed admiration for the physical and emotional environment, the children's freedom, and taking the children's interests into account. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

…when I came to the job interview, it was the Reggio system that impressed me the most (Canan).

When I saw and read about it in the book first, I thought it was a good approach. The children's freedom, especially impressed me (Aslıhan).

I think pre-school education should be designed considering what every child can do and their interests. Frankly, I was impressed when I heard that Reggio Emilia also thinks like this. I loved it when I saw the children's work (Kadriye).

Esin and Leman stated that they were worried because they were moving from the traditional system to a different system. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

When I first heard, I felt really worried because I wasn't used to it... (Esin).

At first, we felt worried, of course, because we didn't know how we could do it, what would happen because we got used to the classical system and we had been using it for years (Leman).

When the participants (Cigdem, Meryem, and Guzin) first heard about this approach, they felt anxious for different reasons. It was observed that these participants reacted anxiously as they had not received training on the approach before and as they would be involved in a different system. On the other hand, the participants (Canan, Ozlem, and Esma) responded with fear when they first heard about the approach due to the lack of experience and not knowing the Reggio Emilia approach. Participants (Feride, Nurcan, and Neriman) stated that they reacted with surprise because they had not heard of the approach before and thought it was not common. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

It was obviously a cause of anxiety for me to be in a very different system like any individual. You know, it really creates anxiety (Cigdem).

Since I had no previous education, I thought for a moment if I could do it when I first heard about it, I was worried (Guzin).

When I first came, it seemed very complicated to me (Meryem).

Iıı at first I was afraid (Canan).

I came here by taking a radical decision. I was already a foreigner to the field and when I heard a name called Reggio Emilia, I was afraid of how to do it (Esma).

Although I came here with a university degree, I felt some fear; I think it is also true for all teachers (Ozlem).

When I first heard about it, I was a little surprised as the name was foreign, but I couldn't refuse because I wanted to work here anyway, I accepted (Feride).

At first, I was surprised because I came here to apply to an ordinary kindergarten (Neriman).

I was highly surprised at first. I heard about Montessori before but the name Reggio Emilia was completely new to me (Nurcan).

3rd Stage: Internalization

In this category, which was determined as the third stage of the system, the participants' processes of understanding the characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach were examined. This stage began as a process with the participants making applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach. The codes of this category are given in Table 4.

Table 4.

The Participants' Opinions about the Stage of Internalization

Category	Codes
3. Internalization	One's recognizing his/her deficiencies
	Conducting research
	Receiving in-service training
	Discovering
	Having difficulty
	Enjoying
	One's developing the belief that he/she can do
	Feeling relaxed
	Increasing experience

The participants (Neriman, Aylin and Guzin) recognized their deficiencies in various subjects when they started to make applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach. When the situations that the participants noticed were examined, it was seen that they used too many imperative speeches with the children, they remained inadequate in classroom management, and the children were given too much guidance during their studies. During the internalization stage, the participants also stated that they did research to improve themselves professionally. Excerpts from the participants regarding this finding are given below:

When you are inexperienced, you don't know what to do; thus, you let children free and you can't provide adequate guidance (Neriman).

I noticed that I was not good enough in classroom management (Guzin).

I used to use too many imperative modes… I had great difficulty in giving it up … And I also recognized that I used the expression "well done" very often … (Aylin).

I started by researching and of course I would like to have gone to Italy. This year, I am researching more intensely and I am also looking for the projects (Deniz).

I am doing my job with great pleasure and although I like it and I do a lot of research, I frequently question whether I am doing right and I wonder if this is the best if different methods could be better or could it add more to the child (Ozlem).

I wonder what I can do more. What did they do? I watched videos and researched about it. Those investigations are still not over. I am constantly searching to see if there is anything new in every new topic, new theme, even with numbers (Melike).

Participants stated that they improved themselves by taking in-service training in their applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach. It was observed that the Nurcan teacher, one of the participants, cared more about children's being able to choose the materials they wanted and using more materials during the activities after receiving in-service training. On the other hand, it was seen that the teacher Esin received in-service training by reading the articles brought by the school principal and by other teachers' preparing presentations within the framework of the determined subjects and sharing them with other teachers. In addition, they stated that they benefited from these training in the process of understanding the approach as follows:

As we started to get training gradually, we increased the number of materials, and we asked children which materials they would like to use (Nurcan).

Here, the in-service training is given by Ms. Ceylin, our school principal, she reads articles, we prepare presentations and present them to all teachers, in turn, we learn something; as soon as I got the job first, I prepared the first Reggio Emilia presentation (Esin).

Stating that working in a kindergarten as a branch teacher made them feel uneasy, the teachers Deniz and Ediz emphasized that they learned the approach through experience and in-service training. When the demographic information of the participants who stated that they received in-service training is examined, it is seen that they work in the same school. The participants' opinions about this finding are as follows:

…You do not know how to behave with kindergarten children, you have received your education, we are receiving additional training about child development, but you still feel a little anxious because we are branch teachers. But over time, both by living and learning, children learn and we learn (Deniz).

We had an intense Reggio seminar; think of it like an apprenticeship by seeing and applying it in class. Now, Ediz, here we will do this, we will do that, we will make a nature trip, we will talk to children like this, etc (Ediz).

Participants made sense of the approach by exploring it from various aspects. These explorations were personal and also symbolize the characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach. The participants' opinions about this finding are as follows:

In the first meeting, the teacher Melik said something to me; he asked, "What kind of an approach do you offer to children as education?" Of course, I directly said through trial and error. Actually, Reggio Emilia is already based on trial and error, but I didn't know it had a name (Esin).

> It is a bit like a riddle, it gives you more pleasure, and then I realized that the children learn more, they get involved more like a cook, so they are more involved (Kadriye).

Esin, one of the participants, thought that in the Reggio Emilia approach, children learn by trial and error. The teacher Kadriye, on the other hand, mentioned that she discovered that the approach is child-centred and that she enjoyed seeing children experience more effective learning. Different from these views, it was seen that the teacher Canan noticed that teachers who did their job well had already done similar practices. According to the teacher Deniz, in schools that give their education based on the Reggio Emilia approach, teachers do not do the work instead of children and children are not intervened not to prevent their creativity. The participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> For example, the teacher is doing something, but he/she doesn't know that it is Reggio … In my high school, my teacher taught me a lot of things; now I have realized that everything I do is from Reggio, yes I was already doing it before and I have only learned that it is Reggio (Canan).

> If the child cannot do, let the teacher do it for them; this understanding is dominant in many ordinary kindergartens. There is no such thing in schools that adopt approaches like Reggio Emilia. You do not interfere with the painting that the child makes because it limits creativity (Deniz).

> I noticed that Reggio's not being a very structured system facilitates the participation of people out of the field … It seemed easier to adapt as the curiosity of the children determines what to do in Reggio (Guzin).

The teacher Guzin noticed that the unstructured program is a characteristic of the Reggio Emilia approach. In addition, she thought that the process that progresses based on children's curiosity in this program facilitated the participation of teachers who are not familiar with the program. It was seen that the teacher Lale realized how important it was to question the Reggio Emilia approach.

> Inquiry comes to the fore, I can say. That is, I have understood the importance of inquiry… That is, there are no certain rules, so students can ask questions, for example, "Why is it so? "Why should it be like this?" The teacher does not impose anything on children. They can question everything (Lale).

> I really grew up, according to Reggio, because I was in the water, in the mud, in the trees, in the leaves, and I wanted to learn about everything I saw. You know something was coming out. Here, too, when something comes up from our students, I remember my childhood while doing research with them, and this means extra excitement and peace (Cigdem).

The teacher Cigdem associated the active use of nature in education by the Reggio Emilia approach with her own childhood. In addition, emphasizing the curiosity to learn in the natural environment, she stated that she felt excited and peaceful when children conducted research with curiosity. Similar to the teacher Cigdem, Meryem, who emphasized nature, expressed that children's being distant from nature as a wrong approach.

> It is wrong for me for children to move away from naturalness and engage in something artificial. Playing with natural things like mud, sand and playing in the garden because that's how it was in my childhood (Meryem).

Differing from the above opinions, the teacher Neriman realized that children should not be guided. She also stated that children learn better by conducting research. Her opinions about this finding are as follows:

> *When I was inexperienced ... I was somehow directing them. For example, I used to say "draw a square", but then I started to understand the importance of what children thought, what shape they thought, what shape they wanted…. I noticed that there is a lot of difference between what they researched themselves and what we taught. Just as we understand better when we do it ourselves, children feel that they can do it when they research, and it really stays in their mind (Neriman).*

During the process of being a Reggio Emilia teacher, Neslihan, Aylin, Guzin, Canan and Esin stated that when they started the application process, they had difficulties in creating a project process according to children's interests, making preliminary preparation as they were inexperienced and did not understand the fundamentals of the approach. Participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> Of course, when I first started, I was a little bit like shaken, but then I found it simple, very fun and enjoyable (Neslihan).

> It's difficult to be a teacher. But I'm never too tired, I'm just at the very beginning, and I think I have a lot to learn. I always say that it is a very difficult but very enjoyable job. First, your preliminary preparation should be very good (Aylin).

While the teacher Neslihan experienced difficulties in the beginning, she then started to find it an enjoyable, easy-to-apply and entertaining approach. Aylin stated that she had difficulties due to her lack of experience and the need to make preparations in the mornings. She also stated that it is difficult to be a Reggio Emilia teacher due to the different jobs they do, such as sticking images on the classroom doors according to the subject of the day, preparing brainstorming questions and preparing an art workshop to arouse curiosity in children.

> What is difficult is that you will actually adopt Reggio first. When you don't adopt it, you may ask yourself, what does this child understand from wood? Or playing with mud, you may tell what disgusting thing this kid is doing (Canan).

> Our new teachers here feel stunned when they come first, but I think that there is an education system (Reggio Emilia) that opens up as you experience it… I had a little hard time when I first came, of course, due to lack of experience (Esin).

> Since I am not doing my own profession, I cannot say that my motivation is very high and that I enjoy it very much. Frankly, I have difficulties … Difficult, as the wishes and ideas of each child must be valued individually and projects must be planned according to their interests (Guzin).

According to the teacher Canan, it was seen that adopting the Reggio Emilia approach was important in making sense of children's behaviours and functions of materials. The teacher Esin also emphasized that similar to the opinion of Aylin, the lack of experience can be a cause of the difficulty. In addition, listening to children and

planning projects according to the interests of children in the Reggio Emilia approach were other issues where she had some difficulties.

The participants stated that they started to enjoy the activities over time. They also stated that they developed a positive perspective towards the profession and that they were more creative. Excerpts from the participants about this finding are given below:

> …then it came out to be a very simple, fun and enjoyable approach … It is really funny and enjoyable. You are not tired at least. Doing something with natural things gives people pleasure (Neslihan).

> you love the profession more. Instead of always telling children, "stop and sit down", "why did you do it?" etc., you are funnier; you are enjoying the process more, you are more creative; you also feel excited about the possible outcomes of what has been done. You feel excited (Kadriye).

As the participants increased their knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach and started to implement it, they developed the belief that they could do it. The participants developed the self-confidence that they could apply this approach by feeling themselves competent and expressed their relief. Excerpts from participants about this finding are given below:

> The teacher Banu said, "let's start and try". We started in this way; it was a summer school here. After that, when I got into it and saw that it was such an enjoyable job, that it was very different from normal kindergarten teaching, I believed in myself and agreed to stay here (Aylin).

> The story of Reggio is also very impressive. When you listen to it, you want to say what people have done and want to do more (Melike).

> …In fact, when I realized that Reggio is something coming from our inner worlds, I became more open to learning with this ease and comfort (Cigdem).

> I was relieved both by this school and with this approach, that is, I think it is flexible and that is very ideal for children in this age group with that flexibility and comfort in planning and I think learning occurs that way (Lale).

When the opinions of the participants (Cigdem and Lale) were examined, it was seen that the anxieties they initially felt turned into relief when they saw that the approach is suitable and useful for them. The participants (Aslıhan, Sinem, Neslihan and Nurcan) stated that their experience increased over time and this increase of experience contributed to them. Excerpts from participants about this finding are given below:

> Over time, of course, I became more experienced. I have understood better (Aslıhan).

> Then I got used to the name, got used to the approach. I'm in now; I'm learning I'm still learning; it is so enjoyable (Neslihan).

> Well, I am very happy, believe me, this place has contributed so much to me; we have learned so much that I am very happy to be here (Nurcan).

4th Stage: Comparison

The category of comparison explained the comparison made between this new system and old systems or different approaches concerning the program, teacher and student after the participants absorbed the approach (see Table 5).

Table 5.

The Participants' Opinions about the Stage of Comparison

Category	Codes
4. Comparison	Flexible plans
	Planning according to the developmental characteristics of children
	Planning according to the individual differences of children
	Planning according to the interests of children
	Giving more importance to transitions between activities
	More enjoyable education and instruction
	Making more observations
	Working more in smaller groups
	The teacher's getting to know the child more closely
	The teacher's acting together with the child
	Higher workload
	The progress of the process according to the curiosity of children
	Opportunities provided to be exposed to information in different ways
	The most adopted and efficient approach
	More first-hand experience
	More suitable for Turkish culture
	More creative, social and active children

The teachers Melike and Cigdem stated that they had stress about developing a plan in the school where they worked before, that they progressed step by step by following the plan, and that children being a participant in their decision-making process was not considered important. On the other hand, they mentioned that the plans in their current schools were flexible, the process was directed according to children's interest (children participating) and in this way the education process became more enjoyable for the child and the teacher, and teachers' anxiety about keeping up with the given plans was eliminated. The participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> Every child had books to finish in the school where I worked before. This creates stress and pressure on the teacher after a while (Melike).

> Previously, it was as follows; I should cover the subject in the curriculum; let's do another activity here… rather than giving something through activities, now it becomes more enjoyable to teach based on the things children feel curious about (Cigdem).

During the planning process, the participants stated that they used to prepare the plans in their previous schools in a uniform, detailed manner and without considering individual differences, and even they used a ready-made program, whereas they

prepared plans in their current schools by paying attention to development levels of children, transition between activities and individual characteristics. Participants' opinions about this finding are as follows:

> We were making plans beforehand; there were conceptual conversations, we were talking about something and then forgot about it … Here we go into a little more detail now while making our plans (Nurcan).

> We don't use ready-made plans because the development process of each child is not considered separately in ready plans. I am not showing how to draw the number 1 to children anymore; rather, a child is highly interested in body movements; thus, I let him/her lie down and another child lies next to him/her and then they make the number 1 with their bodies (Esin).

Participants stated that their workload was higher than before due to reasons, such as planning and documentation. The comparisons made by the participants (Melike, Nurcan, and Deniz) in terms of taking individual differences into consideration, working in smaller groups and making more observations are as follows:

> There are also people who have passed to reading and writing with sound studies. But there are also children who cannot hold a pencil yet. I can't use the same activity with all of them … (Melike).

> As all the education is given to these children by the pre-school teacher, including eating and toilet, he/she has to follow and observe them closely … He/she should know, for example, the content and objective of a game. He/she listens to them while they are playing; they are communicating with their friends. While these are important for the kindergarten teacher here, they are not important for teachers working in ordinary kindergartens. They do not know what children are doing why they are playing; they are playing and that is all (Deniz).

> …more intense because we go into a lot of details, we write the plan every day, but the National Education teachers usually have ready-made plans (Aslıhan).

> We have an intense program … There are forms we need to fill in; we are constantly observing the children. We need to fill in the observation form in the room we call BDC. About their chosen corners, attitude, friends, etc. (Melike).

> In my other school, I was spending more time on activities, such as cut and paste. We used to be busy with such activities there and here we are busy with observations and reports (Cigdem).

It was seen that the participants made comparisons regarding the education process. The teacher Aslıhan stated that the education process at the school she worked in before was much more focused on academic skills, and stated that in her current school, it was progressing in a way that allows children to question what they were curious about and gain versatile knowledge and skills. Participants' opinions about this finding are as follows:

> In a normal program, the digestive system is taught, but here it naturally emerges as you and children wonder about something and this is more natural and better (Cigdem).

> The place where I worked before was more focused on education (Aslıhan).

> Before, I was giving paper for handcraft activities to everyone; to cut and paste, for example… The products we previously posted on the board seemed to come out of a single source. But here,

children use the materials they want to create different...; same activity but differently designed products (Nurcan).

The teacher Nurcan made a comparison with her old school and stated that she had all children in the classroom do the same activities with the same materials before, but in the activities in this school, children are free to choose materials and they are allowed to create different products. Different from these views, the teacher Ediz compared the Reggio Emilia approach with other approaches. He stated that the approach he found the most efficient is the Reggio Emilia approach as follows:

> There is High Scope that we learned before, when I know this, I know all of them. Think Pyp as a roof, there are all approaches in it, but the approach that I found the most efficient is Reggio (Ediz).

The participants (Nurcan, Leman and Esin) compared the Reggio Emilia approach with the different features of the Montessori approach. It was stated that the Montessori approach is known more and the teacher's classroom role and the place of individual activities in these two different approaches were compared. The participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> Montessori is known a little more (Nurcan).

> Reggio Emilia is not heard much in Turkey, there is always Montessori … In Montessori, the teacher is passive; the child is doing and the teacher is monitoring but in Reggio Emilia, the teacher learns with the child in every learning process. Here, while the child is surprised by something, the teacher is also surprised, because the teacher always feels the same as the child, he/she can get to know the child better (Esin).

> In the Montessori method, children play individually with something in front of them … But this approach suits me better because children can become more sociable and creative (Leman).

After they started to conduct Reggio Emilia approach-based applications, the participants stated that they used more natural materials, and continued education in such a way as to cater to the interest of children, made children more active and thus they gained more first-hand experience. Participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> Really, this system is better because the child sees, learns by touching ... they are more active… I think it is a nice system because children learn by experiencing (Aslıhan).

> Everything is natural, the child learns metal, learns wood, that is, he/she learns everything that is a natural material. Even the bark of the tree, they explore it by touching and examining the texture; there is no such opportunity in other schools (Deniz).

The teacher Cigdem compared the Reggio Emilia approach to childhood experiences in Turkish culture. She stated that children in Turkey play games together in nature. She likened the streets of Turkey to the piazza area in the Reggio Emilia approach and stated that the approach is suitable for Turkish culture. The participant's opinion on this finding is given below:

> Since our childhood was spent outside, I do not think it is a program unsuitable for Turks, especially since the piazza area in Reggio is such an environment (Cigdem).

5th Stage: Placement

The 5th stage of the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher, the placement category explained the characteristics of the changes that occured in participants' perspectives and practices, as well as their incorporating the approach into their lives (see Table 6).

Table 6.

The Participants' Opinions about the Stage of Placement

Category	Codes
5. Placement	Incorporating the approach into the daily life
	Adopting the approach as a philosophical approach
	Ownership
	Placing into the work environment
	Learning to listen
	Making use of the environment and nature
	Believing that learning occurs in nature and with natural materials
	Accepting each child as an individual
	Evaluating each child as a unique being
	Considering oneself as a learner
	Understanding the importance of asking question

The teacher Cigdem stated that she placed the Reggio Emilia approach in her daily life and collected materials for projects carried out outside the school. While asking questions to children in the past, now, she has experienced changes, such as listening to questions from children and using the environment and nature more so that they can find answers to their questions. The teacher Esma, on the other hand, stated that she experienced many changes during the implementation phase, looking from a more general perspective. The teacher Deniz, on the other hand, emphasized the significance of the environment in the Reggio Emilia approach and stated that she owned the art workshop opened in her school this year and she was happy there. The participants' opinions about this finding are given below:

> For example, we went on vacation with my husband at the weekend; there was a project that we were conducting. From there, I collected a lot of different pieces of branches, stones, leaves that I thought would be useful (Cigdem).

> Many things have really changed; the perspective has changed; the materials I use have changed, in that sense, of course, many things have changed (Esma).

> Also, you should have a place to work; I did not have a workshop last year, there was a small piazzana area, it was my workshop, which could not be called a workshop anyway. You know, the workshop system in Reggio is very important, very valuable. They provided such an opportunity this year, now it is a great place (Deniz).

The teacher Ediz stated that she had adopted natural life as a teacher who had been working for ten years in the school, which used Reggio Emilia approach. In Melike teacher's perspective, changes occurred in subjects, such as accepting each child as a separate individual, evaluating according to individual differences, and seeing herself as a student. These participants stated that they were happy in this school as follows:

> I think it is a philosophical thing, humanity already belongs to nature, since we belong to nature, learning also takes place in nature, it takes place through nature (Ediz).

> You are very happy when you feel the difference in children. Moreover, you do not compare the children with each other (Melike).

> To answer everything with a question. We do the same to students here. When children ask something to us, we ask them "what do you think?" This is one of the biggest differences. That is, not to try to mould children … I feel happy while coming here (Neriman).

Discussion and Results

As emphasized by Paulo Freire (1968) in his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," it is expected that democratic pedagogies that support respect and participation in education will increase and that teachers will change in this direction. However, this respect and participation should not be a gift offered by teachers but should result from the mutual agreement in communities. While in traditional kindergartens, result evaluation and ready-made programs direct education, in Reggio Emilia schools, humane education, self-expression and communication as an indicator of freedom, educational research, participation, personal development and pedagogical documentation are accepted as values and direct education (Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). All teachers who are in the process of becoming Reggio Emilia-inspired teachers are expected to internalize these values and experience change in this direction. Although education is shaped by our worldview, values and beliefs, the change process and professional development in teachers seriously shape education. In this connection, in the current study, the process of becoming Reggio Emilia teachers of 20 participants working in Reggio Emilia-inspired schools in Turkey was investigated and it was revealed that these teachers underwent a 5-stage change process. These stages are; "Hearing of the approach for the first time", "Affective reaction", "Internalization", "Comparing" and "Placement".

This change process begins with the first encounter of the participants with the approach. When the opinions of the participants have been examined, it has been seen that 12 participants heard about the approach during job interviews or after starting to work. This might be because their field of graduation was not pre-school education and they hold a high school degree or an associate's degree; thus, they might not have taken any course on different approaches used in pre-school education. On the other hand, two participants stated that they had never heard of the approach before although they hold a Bachelor's degree in pre-school teaching. This might be because they did not have any training on the Reggio Emilia approach or

even if they had, the lessons were not very effective. In the study conducted by İnan and Kayir (2015), their findings showed that the teachers learned about Reggio Emilia approach during their undergraduate education, but they saw its application for the first time during the study. Parallel to this finding, some participants stated that although they knew what the Reggio Emilia approach is, they, for the first time, experienced its application in the current study.

The participants who encountered the Reggio Emilia approach for the first time stated that they gave different affective reactions, such as interest and curiosity, anxiety, concern, fear, astonishment, despair and admiration in the next stage. When the opinions of the participants are examined in general, it can be said that the basic features of the approach, such as the freedom of children, planning the process according to their interests, and using nature and natural materials, are the most attractive features of the approach for the participants. In addition, these basic characteristics caused affective reactions, such as admiration and interest-curiosity in the participants. According to the participants, the beliefs that the Reggio Emilia teacher should have a lot of imagination and should receive a good education and lack of training and experience about the approach and its being different from ordinary systems caused affective reactions, such as despair, haste, anxiety and confusion in the participants. It was observed that the participants who gave negative reactions, such as anxiety, hopelessness, fear and haste, did not receive training about the approach in their pre-service education or did not graduate from any of the departments related to pre-school education. It is observed that the lack of education and being unfamiliar with the field negatively affected the feelings and thoughts of the participants about the approach. On the other hand, it can be thought that the positive reactions of the participants, such as admiration, interest and curiosity, are because of their being experienced in their fields or their having graduated from the department of pre-school teaching. To our knowledge, no similar research has been found on this subject in pre-school education; however, in the study conducted by Bastug (2015) regarding the emotions and changes experienced by primary school teachers in the primary reading and writing teaching process in primary education, the teachers' first experiences of teaching reading and writing were staged as decline and rise. In this process, teachers had experienced, such as fear, stress and anxiety at first, and then these experiences transformed into happiness, socialization and self-confidence as they gained experience. Concerning transformation, it can be said that the findings of this study coincide with the findings of the current study.

In the internalization category, which is the third stage of the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher, it was observed that the participants started to make applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach. In this process, learning and structuring of the approach occurred. It was concluded that they made sense of the approach by experiencing it, recognizing their shortcomings, exploring, doing research, experiencing difficulties, receiving in-service training, enjoying, relaxing, developing the belief that one can do it, and increasing their experience. The most important factor in the change of the participants who started to explore the different

features of the approach was their having in-service training because the participants made sense of the approach more easily by getting information about the approach through in-service training. In-service training makes it easy for teachers to closely follow the developments in their field, to acquire new knowledge-skills and to integrate the knowledge-skills they have acquired into the education and training process (Kayabas, 2008). In addition, in the Reggio Emilia approach, it is seen that the professional development of teachers is very important and especially time is devoted to teachers to achieve this development (Malaguzzi, 1998).

The participants compared the approach with other approaches and their own previous teaching experiences after the assimilation stage in the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher. When the characteristics that were compared were examined in general, it was seen that the child image, the role of the teacher, the environment, cooperation, project and documentation process were compared. In fact, this stage may be an indication that the participants have understood the principles of the approach. It can also be said to be important in seeing the change individually. While making comparisons, the teacher, program and student dimensions were considered. In the teacher dimension, it was concluded that the workloads of the participants were higher than the previous ones due to reasons, such as paying more attention to students during the adaptation process, planning, documentation, parent meetings and school meetings. In the program dimension, it was concluded that the participants paid more attention to the developmental levels and individual characteristics of the children by giving more importance to pre-preparation and transitions between activities while preparing their plans, they were more flexible in practice, they made more small group works and more observations. In addition, the participants stated that the Reggio Emilia approach is less known in Turkey compared to the Montessori program and that in the Reggio Emilia approach, the teacher acts with the child instead of observing the child and gets to know the children more closely, while the children are more active, creative and more social. Sahin-Sak (2014), in their study investigating pre-service pre-school teachers' views on the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches, stated that the Reggio Emilia approach supported creativity, but such support was not observed in the Montessori approach.

In the final stage of the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher in the current study, the participants adopted the environment in which they worked and made many features of the approach their own principles. However, only six of the 20 participants who participated in the study reached the stage of placement. The other participants remained in the comparison stage and are still continuing their process of becoming a Reggio teacher. It was observed that the participants who could not reach this stage were just at the beginning of the transition in their school or did not receive training from experts. This lack of training may indicate that they have not fully understood the principles of the approach. The participants who were able to reach to the stage of placement are seen to have received training and gained experience on the Reggio Emilia approach. In addition, when the common characteristics of these participants are examined, it is seen that all of them are in the same school. In relation to the

organizational culture, it can be said that getting education from experts and institutions in the field helps teachers to change their perspective in the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher, to adopt the approach and to see the change in themselves clearly in terms of understanding and applying the approach.

When the stages through which the participants underwent in the process of becoming Reggio Emilia teachers are examined in a holistic manner, it is seen that the participants gained experiences that would enrich the education and training process and their emotions showed a trend from negative to positive. In this context, it can be suggested that experts and institutions should provide training for teachers in schools that make applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach and that teachers should be given detailed training on project studies due to the differences in the implementation process of projects based on the Reggio Emilia approach. In the current study, a system consisting of five stages regarding the changes teachers experienced during the process of becoming a Reggio Emilia teacher was reached. It can be investigated whether other teachers who make applications based on the Reggio Emilia approach go through the same processes. To our knowledge, no research has been found in the literature showing that pre-school teachers experience a gradual process of change in their process of becoming Reggio Emilia teachers. In this context, the current study is thought to contribute to the field.

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Authors

Tugba Aydemir Ozalp is a research assistant at Dumlupinar University. Her research interests include preschool education programs, Reggio Emilia approach, decision making and problem-solving skills.

Hatice Zeynep Inan works as an associate professor at Uludag University. Her research interests include pre-school education, Reggio Emilia approach, quality education environments, science education.

Contact

Tugba Aydemir Ozalp, Dumlupinar University, Kutahya/Turkey

E-posta*: tugbaaydemir08@gmail.com*

Hatice Zeynep Inan, Uludag University, Bursa/Turkey

E-posta: zeynepinan@uludag.edu.tr