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John Dewey and Reggio Emilia: Worlds apart - one vision

Gai M. Lindsay

University of Wollongong, glindsay@uow.edu.au

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JOHN DEWEY AND REGGIO EMILIA: WORLDS APART - ONE VISION

Full Name: Gai Lindsay

Institution: University of Wollongong

Address: 80 Osborne Street, Nowra, NSW, 2541

E-mail address: glindsay@uow.edu.au

Phone Number: 0421867882

BIO: Gai served as a preschool teacher/director for 22 years prior to undertaking current PhD research at the University of Wollongong. She lectures in the Early Years Degree at Wollongong University and provides consultancy services to the early childhood education and care sector. A passion for art-centred pedagogy has seen her participate in two international conferences in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Awards received include: CeeCees Advocacy Award (2007); ACE award for Outstanding Achievement in Education (2008); REAIE scholarship (2008); Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship (2011); IER NSW Best Applied Research Project (2014).

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Gai Lindsay

University of Wollongong

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The Reggio Emilia educational project is internationally renowned for an early childhood pedagogy that centralises visual arts as a graphic language within multi-disciplinary projects. Loris Malaguzzi, the first director of the Italian project, is credited for introducing ateliers (art studios), as well as an atelierista (visual arts specialist) within each preschool. This paper suggests that Malaguzzi's conception of the atelier as a place for art focused, hands-on collaborative research with children may have been inspired by John Dewey's (1900) discussions about art laboratories as a unifying force for democratic and transformative education. Contemporary educators are invited to reflect on their own visual arts practice in light of the shared vision of these two educational philosophers.

Introduction

The Reggio Emilia educational project is internationally renowned as an early childhood pedagogical approach that centralises visual arts as a graphic language within multi-disciplinary curricula. The first director of the Italian project, Loris Malaguzzi, is credited for placing ateliers (art studios), as well as an atelierista (visual arts specialist) within each preschool. Yet, at the turn of the century John Dewey, an esteemed American philosopher and pedagogue, proposed that art laboratories could be a unifying force for democratic and transformative education. Howard Gardner (2011, 2012) pairs Dewey and Malaguzzi as radical pedagogues for both centralising children's construction of knowledge and suggests that while Malaguzzi revered Dewey's philosophy, the project in Reggio Emilia has surpassed Dewey's laboratory school in its seamless connection between philosophy and practice. This view is justified. However a comparison of Dewey's discussion about art laboratories and his ideas about the roles of generalist and specialist teachers with Malaguzzi's subsequent conception of the 'atelier' and the 'atelierista' raises the possibility that Malaguzzi's acknowledged Deweyan inspiration (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) may have been

more particular than previously understood. The purpose of this paper is to contemplate the synergy between John Dewey's philosophies about democracy, education and art and the development of art-centred philosophy and practice in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Additionally, it considers the possibility that Malaguzzi was specifically inspired by Dewey's art and education philosophies to introduce the concept of the atelier and to place art at the centre of an active, child-focused pedagogy in Reggio Emilia.

The philosophy and educational practice implemented by pedagogues, artists and educators in the Italian Reggio Emilia educational project for more than half a century can significantly enlighten and inspire both praxis and pedagogical reflection for early childhood educators. Cutcher (2013) suggests that this educational approach also has the potential to inspire and guide visual arts pedagogy with older children. However, for many educators, a determination not to 'do Reggio' (McArdle, 2013), nor to jump onto the latest methodological trend (Lindsay, 2008) may limit the rich opportunity to learn from, and be challenged by both the Italian educational research project and the scholars who inspired it. Indeed, given that educators in Reggio Emilia do not promote their approach as a model to be imitated (Edwards, 1995; Gandini, 2011; Giamminuti, 2013), it is appropriate for educators seeking philosophical and pedagogical guidance to deeply examine the theories and philosophies that inspired developing practice in Reggio Emilia.

Consideration of Dewey's influence on the formation of the atelier and the role of the atelierista in Reggio Emilia affirms Richards' identification that Dewey "opened spaces for others to make personal connections between his philosophies and their own" (2012, p.41). This notion invites contemporary educators and researchers to do the same, applying Dewey's and Malaguzzi's shared ideas to develop a philosophically and historically grounded framework by which to examine their own pedagogical philosophy.

An art-centred project

The Reggio Emilia educational project is a network of preschools and infant-toddler centres located in Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. There are currently more than 30 early education services managed by the municipal council, however prior to 1963, services were established and managed by groups of parents and community members (Edwards, et al., 2012). In

partnership with educators, including the founding director of the Reggio Emilia preschools Loris Malaguzzi, parent groups sought to reform post-fascist Italy through the provision of democratic access to quality early childhood education. For more than fifty years, the educational project has maintained a philosophical view of children as active participants in their own learning, possessing both the human right and the potential to learn in relationship with others. They exercise a distinctive value for family participation and collaborative partnerships between children, educators and the community. A focus on the importance of aesthetic educational environments and the conception of the 'hundred languages of children' has been of particular inspiration to educators around the world (Cooper, 2012; Faini Saab & Stack, 2013). Malaguzzi's 'hundred languages' ideal advocates for the human right to make and express meaning in multiple ways using encounters with "many types of materials, many expressive languages, many points of view, working actively with hands, minds, and emotions, in a context that values the expressiveness and creativity of each child in the group" (Reggio Children, 2014, np). In Reggio Emilia the multiple processes of working with art materials and methods are not defined as art in the traditional discipline-based sense (Vecchi, 2010; Cooper, 2012; Faini Saab & Stack, 2013). Instead, art-making is positioned as a visual, poetic and symbolic language by which both children and adults collaboratively engage in playful experiences to construct knowledge, support learning and to render children's learning visible. Vecchi (2010, p.114) explains that "by placing the children within similar processes to those of the artist" they engage with "attitudes of culture and mind" to support processes of communication, research and making meaning. To support such processes, each preschool and infant toddler centre in Reggio Emilia features a central 'atelier' (a well-equipped studio), as well as 'mini-ateliers' in each classroom (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005). Each preschool employs a trained artist known as atelierista. The atelierista works closely alongside children, families and teachers to support engagement in learning projects that centralise the use of visual art materials and methods (Vecchi, 2010).

Exploring Dewey's influence

Dewey is acknowledged as a source of philosophic influence by educators in Reggio Emilia (Edwards, et al., 2012) with Gandini (2011) stating that of all the theorists who inspired their work, Dewey was the most influential. Additionally, scholars have noted Dewey's broad

influence in Reggio Emilia in terms of democracy (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Moss, 2014), ethics (Hoyuelos, 2013), the image of a capable child (Ewing, 2010), aesthetics (Cooper, 2012; Faini Saab, et al., 2013) and a focus on constructivist and active learning approaches (Rankin, 2004; Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). However few studies have deeply explored nor articulated the complex synergy between Dewey's philosophy and praxis in Reggio Emilia, particularly in the area of visual arts, or 'poetic' and 'graphic' languages as they are called in the educational project. Indeed, few have considered how Malaguzzi enacted Dewey's (1934) call to embed art, not exclusively in museum and gallery, but within everyday life experience. Faini Saab and Stack (2013) drew parallels by presenting an analysis of several points of similarity between Dewey's ideas and the Reggio Emilia project in the areas of aesthetics and communication, imagination, community, inquiry and democracy. However their broad analysis refrained from suggesting direct Deweyan influence upon the formation of philosophy and practice in Reggio Emilia. While they identified several aspects of common theory and practice, the Deweyan sources selected to illustrate their analysis, largely drawn from Dewey's 1934 work "Art as Experience" do not effectively exemplify the points they pursue. "Art as Experience" written by Dewey in 1934 was not directed specifically toward children's education. Rather it presents a broad philosophical discussion about how connecting art processes, art products, culture, politics and everyday life may constitute a transformative aesthetic experience for both individuals and communities. While it does present a compelling rationale for arts-based curricula (Hefner, 2008), it does not articulate Dewey's rich guidance about art education located in his earlier works. Richards (2012) drew predominantly from "Art as Experience" to state that while Dewey provides a relevant framework to understand the nature of young children's art experiences he did not specifically outline visual art methods and educational strategies. However, an examination of additional Deweyan sources, particularly 'The School and Society' (Dewey, 1900), 'The Child and the Curriculum' (Dewey, 1902), 'Democracy and Education' (Dewey, 1916), and 'Experience and Education' (Dewey, 1939) challenges this proposition and extends upon the analyses presented by Faini Saab and Stack (2013) and Richards (2012) to outline Dewey's educational ideas about visual art methods and strategies. Indeed these Deweyan publications, which were prolifically translated and reprinted in post World War II Italy (Boydston, 1969) contain specific points of

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probable Deweyan inspiration for Malaguzzi's establishment of the atelier in Reggio Emilia. During the period when Malaguzzi was establishing the foundational values upon which the Reggio Emilia educational project is built a network of progressive Italian educators in the Emilia Romagna region, including Malaguzzi, encountered and debated Dewey's progressive and democratic educational vision (Gandini, 2012b; Lindsay, 2015).

On examination, many of Dewey's ideas about democracy, children, education, environments, aesthetics and art find parallel synergy with the key tenets of praxis in Reggio Emilia. These parallels extend to the socio-political and historical contexts in which they formed their educational philosophies. Scrutiny of Dewey's context and ideas, followed by discussion of Malaguzzi's educational philosophy suggests threads of connection between their aligned beliefs in support of pedagogical reflection by contemporary educators.

Context: America Early 20th Century

Dewey's educational philosophy evolved in response to the changing social and political climate in America prior to World War I (Hall, Horgan, Ridgway, Murphy, Cunneen, & Cunningham, 2010). Weiss and DeFalco (2005) explain that between 1870 and 1910 immigrants entered the United States to escape conditions in Europe and to secure work in the expanding industrialised workforce. The rapidly expanding school system maintained traditional and rigid methods of passive recitation. Attempts to "assimilate large numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse children" in "overcrowded, anonymous classrooms" made no concession to children's individual needs, interests or contexts (Weiss, et al., p.4). In contrast, Dewey (1929) proposed that instead of treating children as passive recipients of adult knowledge, the only way to prepare children for an unknown future was to empower them to reach their individual potential by developing their capacity to apply skills and judgments in new situations. In order to facilitate this Dewey believed that schools should be "connected with life so that the experience gained by the child in a familiar, commonplace way is carried over and made use of there, and what the child learns in the school is carried back and applied in everyday life, making the school an organic whole, instead of a composite of isolated parts" (Dewey, 1900, p.91).

Democratic transformation

Dewey sought to reform society by transforming the way schools viewed children and learning contexts (Hansen, 2006). Emerging ideas about manual training, nature study and art informed his democratic retort to traditional methods of teaching (Waks, 2009). He proposed that for education “to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation,” with schools becoming “an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the way of life of the larger society, and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history and science” (Dewey, 1900, p.28,29). He rejected traditional methods that sought to instruct passive children en masse to preference methods that focus on the immediate interests and activity of the child, proposing that school should be a context where the child is the “centre of gravity” and where “the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve” (Dewey, 1900, p.34).

A new image of childhood

Demonstrating his respect for children, Dewey emphasised the freedom, self-activity and self-education of each child, viewing them as capable, active and autonomous learners (Dewey, 1929; Smith, 2005). He centralised children’s existing powers, skills development and potential for learning. Cuffaro (1995) explains that instead of negatively judging the child’s current abilities against future goals and ambitions, Dewey valued children’s immaturity as a precondition for growth. Therefore his value for the “potentialities of the present” saw him conceptualise education not only as preparation for life, but as life in process (Dewey, 1939, p.51). To this end, he emphasised active, play-based, multi-disciplinary curricula where learning would result from children’s natural curiosity and play-based exploration (Dewey, 1939; Kliebard, 2006).

Aesthetic languages

Dewey urged the need to respect the aesthetic impulse present in every ‘live creature’ to cultivate a sense of wonder and to enhance both individual and community life (Dewey, 1939). He positioned communication through art as the “incomparable organ of instruction”, elevating teaching and learning through art as a “revolt” against “education that proceeds by methods so literal as to exclude the imagination” and “the desires and emotions of men” (Dewey, 1934, p.361). He proposed that a child’s innate impulse to make and communicate

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meaning using aesthetic materials and to reproduce ideas graphically would integrate play, aesthetic awareness, communication and cognition (Dewey, 1900). Dewey located art objects as languages, stating “they are many languages...each medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue” (1939, p.110). He also believed that aesthetic inquiry and expression is fostered through the appreciation of beauty and aesthetic qualities in everyday experiences (Hildebrand, 2008).

Dewey’s Laboratory School

The Chicago Laboratory School (1896-1904) exemplified Dewey’s belief that philosophy and theory are only useful if they inform practice (Dewey, 1910; Tanner, 1991). As a place of action research his school explored which conditions most effectively support children’s learning, development, and engagement, including their “capacity to express” themselves “in a variety of artistic forms” (Dewey, 1905, p.118). Hildebrand (2008) explains that Dewey’s belief in the centrality of aesthetic experience to philosophic inquiry saw him centralise exploration, hands on activity and communication using artistic materials and processes within his ideal school. His constructivist educational focus positioned children as active learners deserving of an aesthetic and democratic curriculum (Dykhuizen, 1973; Tanner, 1991; Weiss, et al., 2005). By connecting theoretical inquiry with social and practical activities Dewey aimed to support children in their “need of action, of expression, of desire to do something, to be constructive and creative, instead of simply passive and conforming” (1900, p.80).

Art as a unifying force

Dewey believed that the art impulse is intrinsic to children’s play and experience (1934, 1939). He believed the natural resources to be employed in the service of children’s active growth included their interests in “communication; in inquiry, or finding out things; in making things, or construction; and in artistic expression” (1900, p.47). When individuals make art, Dewey suggested, they transform themselves as they actively adapt to external materials and conditions (Dewey, 1934). In his book “The School and Society” Dewey particularly described how children’s learning and engagement could be supported when hands-on art methods, or ‘occupations’ served as a unifying force within a multi-disciplinary, child-centred and active

learning environments. He stated that a “spirit of union” between experiences of inquiry would give “vitality to the art”, and give “depth and richness to the other work” (1900, p.89).

Art-centred collaborative research: environments and educators

Dewey identified that children’s learning occurs through interaction with materials, people and the environment (1939). He positioned art-making as a context for research in which children would engage in an active cycle of experimentation, knowledge and skill development, akin to the scientific research undertaken in laboratories (Dewey, 1939). Dewey conceptually designated areas of the floor plan as “studios for art work, both the graphic and auditory arts (1900, p.85, see Diagram 1), emphasising that “the graphic and auditory arts, represent the culmination, the idealization, the highest point of refinement of all the work carried on” (1900, p.86). In addition to laboratories for art and music, Dewey described a central room as “the place where the children bring the experiences, the problems, the questions, the particular facts which they have found and discuss them, so that new light may be thrown upon them, particularly new light from the experience of others” (1900, p.85). He suggested that artwork has the potential to unify the expression of children’s ideas and to support children’s cognition, perception and communication in an aesthetic and motivational fusion (Dewey, 1900).

Dewey (1902, p.31) believed that environmental provisions and art methods alone would not be transformative unless a knowledgeable teacher collaborated with children to both “determine the environment” and influence the direction their learning could take. Rejecting the undemocratic methods of traditional education, he positioned the teacher as a collaborator, researcher and co-learner in partnership with children (Dewey, 1910; Glassman & Whaley, 2000; Rankin, 2004; Schechter, 2011b). The teacher was positioned as a “leader of group activities” who, being “intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction” facilitated child-initiated co-operative projects (Dewey, 1939, p.66, 85).

Dewey described the vital responsibilities of the teacher to utilise their pedagogical insight and subject knowledge to interpret the child’s activity, design learning environments and facilitate planned and spontaneous experiences in support of children’s learning, engagement

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and growth (Dewey, 1902, 1910, 1939; Hildebrand, 2008; Schecter, 2011a). He valued children's interests as a representation of their "growing power" and "dawning capacities", particularly valuing the skills of careful observation and reflective practice as vital to the teacher's capacity to plan for children's learning and development (Dewey, 1929, p.14). When a teacher appreciates and gives direction to a child's "interest in conversation or communication; in inquiry, or finding out things; in making things, or construction; and in artistic expression" (1900, p.47) Dewey said they "keep alive the sacred spark of wonder" and "protect the spirit of inquiry" (1910, p.30). Indeed, he likened the teacher's selection of appropriate materials, methods and social relationships to foster the "attitude of the artist" in children as the 'art' of teaching (Dewey, 1910, p. 204).

Teachers with specialised subject knowledge

In the laboratory school, Dewey's initial decision to employ generalist teachers was based on a belief that it was not "necessary for the teacher to have specialized knowledge in the concepts, principles, and methods that comprise the various fields" or subjects (Tanner, 1991, p.106). He believed that if the teacher planned "constructive activities which were intellectually valuable" the growth of organised subject knowledge would evolve (Tanner, 1991, p.106). However, he later identified this assumption to be false, distinguishing that it is impossible for one person to be competent in all subjects and warning that in such cases "superficial work is bound to be done in some direction" (Dewey 1897, cited by Tanner, 1991, p.106).

By the end of the first year of the laboratory school Dewey drew upon his own principles about learning from experience and developed a school curriculum where specialist teachers were also employed (Tanner, 1991). Reinforcing his belief in the agency of young children, Dewey identified that instruction by specialists should begin in the first years of school and be valued for the capacity to inspire learning and inform subject knowledge and skills (Tanner, 1991). Mayhew and Edwards (1936, p.266) elaborate that in the laboratory school " children willingly enter into the sort of activity that occupies the adults of their world, for they recognize that they are genuine and worthy of effort. Such activities are capable of the utmost

simplification to suit the powers of any age; they can also be amplified and extended to meet increasing interests and growing powers.”

Context: Reggio Emilia Italy mid 20th century

The educational project in Reggio Emilia evolved in response to the search for democracy and social justice following World War II and the liberation from decades of fascist oppression (Hendrick, 1997; Edwards, et al., 2012; Lazzari, 2012). Emulating Dewey’s vision for transformation, hopeful parents in partnership with progressive educators contested traditional education methods to envisage an educational system that would experiment with “new pedagogical approaches inspired by the principles of democracy, civic participation, solidarity and social justice” (Lazzari & Balduzzi, 2013, p.151). Recalling the post-war liberation, Malaguzzi referenced Dewey’s term, “foundations of the mind”, to state that “the first philosophy learned ... in the wake of such a war, was to give human, dignified, *civil* meaning to existence; to be able to make choices with clarity of mind and purpose; and to yearn for the future of mankind” (Malaguzzi, interview in Gandini, 2012b, p.36). Malaguzzi also aspired to provide equal access to education for “all children for the promotion of their social and cultural development as citizens” (Balduzzi 2006, in Lazzari, 2012, p.558). It is interesting to note that while reflecting on his own value for childhood, Malaguzzi referenced Dewey’s choice to combine “pragmatic philosophy, new psychological knowledge, and - on the teaching side - mastery of content with inquiring, creative experiences for children” (cited by Gandini, 2012b, p.53). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dewey suggested that those seeking to develop a “new social order” through transformative movements in education, should evaluate the actual needs, problems and goals of their own context, rather than be controlled or limited by educational ‘isms’ (1939, p. vi). Given the emphasis on contextual pedagogy in the Reggio Emilia schools (Catarsi, 2011), one may consider that Malaguzzi perhaps followed Dewey’s advice by focusing on the values they sought to promote for children as citizens, rather than focusing upon the socio-political conditions they were seeking to reform.

The image of the child in Reggio Emilia

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A central value of the Reggio Emilia project is their 'image of the child' as "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and other children"(Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10). Lazzari (2012, p.558) explains that the process of democratic emancipation in the early childhood education system following World War II led to a new understanding of children that positioned them as active protagonists in their own learning and as citizens in their communities. Affirming this and acknowledging the influence of several theorists including Dewey, Malaguzzi stated "we do indeed have a solid core in our approach in Reggio Emilia that comes directly from the theories and experiences of active education and finds realization in particular images of the child, teacher, school, family and community. Together these produce a culture and society that connect, actively and creatively, both individual and social growth" (Edwards, et al., 2012, p.60). Dewey's (1900) desire that educators should make the child's interests rather than subject matter the focus and departure point in designing the learning curriculum, is reflected in Malaguzzi's statement that "things about children and for children are only learned from children" (cited in Gandini, 2012b, p.31).

Aesthetics and beauty

Vecchi (2010, p.5) claims that one of the "most original features" of pedagogy in the Reggio Emilia project "is an acceptance of aesthetics as one of the important dimensions in the life of our species and, therefore, also in education and in learning." Indeed both Cooper (2012) and Faini Saab and Stack (2013) confirm that Dewey and Malaguzzi both integrated aesthetics as an element of experience rather than treating it as a separate entity. Vecchi explains that their choice to focus on beauty and aesthetic inquiry with children was built on the desire to "illustrate the extraordinary, beautiful and intelligent things children knew how to do" and to eliminate work where children were marginalised, where "teacher's minds and hands were central" and where stereotyped products proliferated (2010, p.132). Reflecting Dewey's (1934) discussion about the primary human impulse to create and make, evidenced in the production of decorative and cultural artifacts across millennia, Reggio Emilia's educators also reference the simple everyday objects throughout all eras and cultures as proof of the human desire to celebrate beauty and aesthetics (Vecchi). The aesthetic focus in Reggio

Emilia is described as a “slim thread or aspiration to quality” where “an attitude of care and attention” and “a desire for meaning” is applied across disciplinary areas (Vecchi, 2010, p.5).

The atelier in Reggio Emilia as a unifying force

Similar to Dewey’s progressive response to restrictive traditional pedagogical approaches Malaguzzi conceptualised the atelier as a “retort to the marginal and subsidiary role commonly assigned to expressive education” (Interview with Malaguzzi 1998, in Gandini, et al., 2005, p.7). Cooper (2012, p.303) explains that Malaguzzi’s choice to develop the atelier attests to the value he attributed to “imagination, creativity, expressiveness, and aesthetics” within the educational processes of “development and knowledge building.” Within the atelier the work of atelieristi (visual art specialists) supports collaboration and connection through shared educational projects between children, educators and the wider community (Vecchi, 2010). Such interest-based project-work unites Dewey’s (1900) belief, that art and play are central to processes of making and communicating meanings, with the belief in Reggio Emilia that children’s play and inquiry are enriched through art and design (Vecchi, 2010, p.5) and through engagement with a wide range of materials and many expressive techniques (interview with Vecchi in Gandini, 2012a).

The multiple ways that children are supported to make and express meaning are known as the ‘hundred languages of children’. Rinaldi explains that “the hundred languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children” and their multiple “knowledge-building and creative processes” (2013, p.20). The particular emphasis on visual languages in the atelier does not position art as a stand-alone subject, focussed on traditional methods. Instead, Gandini (2012b, p.310) explains that they “have focussed on the visual language as a means of inquiry and investigation of the world, to build bridges and relationships with one another, in constant dialogue with a pedagogical approach that seeks to work on the connection rather than the separation of various fields of knowledge.” This choice to integrate art processes within multi-disciplinary projects was driven by the esteem that Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia educators held for children’s inherent creative potential and their right to “make meaning out of life within a context of rich relationships, in many ways, and using many materials” (Gandini, et al., 2005, p.1). Indeed, Malaguzzi described the atelier as

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“instrumental in the recovery of the image” of an “interactionist and constructivist” child who was “richer in resources and interests” than previously understood (interview in Gandini, et al., 2005, p.7).

Art-centred collaborative research: environments and educators

In Reggio Emilia the work of the ateliers expands “out into the classes and school through enriched proposals in the classroom” with learning environments credited as the ‘third teacher’ (Vecchi, 2010, p.127). Rinaldi describes this collaborative inquiry “a way of working in “laboratories”, with the school conceptualized as one big laboratory or “workshop of learning and knowledge” (1998, p.115). As it evolved, the atelier was increasingly positioned as a context for inquiry, where educators are positioned as co-learners and researchers who partner with children and their families to guide and sustain children’s learning (Rankin, 2004). Malaguzzi explains that the use of visual art materials and processes in the atelier supports educators to research the “motivations and theories of children from scribbles on up” as well as explore “variations on tools, techniques, and materials with which to work” (interview in Gandini, 2005, p.7). Such views recall Dewey’s ideas about intentionally planning for children’s social and cognitive learning within a metaphorical floor plan where hands-on arts and occupations fused children’s interests with content knowledge. It is also interesting to consider the parallels between Dewey’s description of a central recitation room as a context for collaborative encounter and the inclusion of the central Piazza (foyer) as a space for community encounter and shared inquiry in the Reggio Emilia project.

The atelierista as specialist teacher

An exploration of Dewey’s influence upon the establishment of the atelier in Reggio Emilia is further informed when considering Malaguzzi’s “radical and courageous choice” (Vecchi, 2010, p.36) to compliment the inclusion of the atelier with the role of the atelierista. Aligned with the value of the atelier as a place of research, the atelierista supports a focus on the ‘aesthetic dimension’ or ‘poetic languages’ (Dalberg and Moss (eds.) in Vecchi, , p.xviii) in order to stimulate “interest in visual languages of both children and adults” and to “extend the term ‘language’ beyond the verbal” (Millikan, 2010, p.15). Malaguzzi believed that an expert in the methods, materials and ‘languages’ of visual arts, would enhance children’s aesthetic

engagement and be “an important activator for learning “ (Dahlberg and Moss (eds.) in Vecchi, 2010, p.xix).

Atelieristi collaborate with children and teachers to develop the work of long-term projects (Millikan, 2010; Vecchi, 2010). They expand the repertoire of materials available and teach techniques to enhance children’s use of artistic media to communicate and express ideas (New, 2007; Vecchi, 2010; Faini Saab, et al., 2013). As qualified artists, atelieristi inform and provoke children’s capacity to “communicate their understandings through various media” (New, 2007, p.7). They bring new perspectives to the pedagogical work (Hall, et al., 2010, p.46), enhance the research processes of pedagogical observation and documentation and partner with teachers to give “value and visibility to work with the children” (Vecchi, 2010, p.109).

The atelierista is positioned as "a thoughtful, skilful researcher of children’s and adults' ways of knowing who, at the same time, remains a playful, nurturing companion in ongoing experiences with children, families, and colleagues" (Cooper, 2012, p.297). Indeed, rather than limiting the position of the atelierista to a mere support role or specialist teacher of art techniques restricted to weekly lessons, Malaguzzi positioned the atelier and the role of the atelierista as an context where the child’s relation with things and people in the environment are best activated through aesthetic processes (Vecchi, 2010; Faini Saab, et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Gardner’s suggestion that Malaguzzi’s sustained connection of philosophy and practice in the Reggio Emilia project surpassed the progressive work of John Dewey’s laboratory school has merit (2012). It is important to both identify and consider the alignment between Dewey’s philosophy and concepts in Reggio Emilia such as ‘the image of the child’, ‘the hundred languages of children’, ‘multi-disciplinary project work’, ‘interest-based projects’, ‘the environment as third teacher’, the ‘atelier’ and ‘atelierista’ and the role of the educator as co-creator and co-researcher with children. Such ideas may have had their genesis in Dewey’s ideas about the place of art and aesthetics in educational settings, his respect for children as active learners, the laboratory as a context for multidisciplinary research and his ideas about the role of the teacher and of subject specialists.

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This consideration of Dewey's influence on the Italian educational project does not aim to undermine nor devalue the evolution of inspirational praxis in Reggio Emilia. Instead, it celebrates the processes of collaboration and 'borrowing and sharing' of ideas that the Reggio Emilia educators urge students of their approach to adopt as they interpret and adapt the values that underpin their practice for interpretation and adaptation in their own contexts (Edwards, et al., 2012). Malaguzzi's decision to place an atelier and a visual artist into every local government preschool and infant-toddler centre in Reggio Emilia (Gandini, et al., 2005, p.7) was revolutionary (Vecchi, 2010), perceptive and courageous (Cooper, 2012). It unified artistic methods and techniques with processes of learning and reformed pedagogy in a manner that Dewey aspired to (New, 2007). Like Dewey before him, Malaguzzi pursued a "living connection between theory and practice" where "theory served to improve practice and practice was oriented to improve theory" (Rankin, 2004, p.81). Malaguzzi's respect for the application of theory in practice and his reverence for Dewey's philosophy may have created the context for the development of his revolutionary extension of Dewey's ideas.

Dewey held that children's learning and growth develop through experience and interaction with the world and that "the past absorbed into the present carries on; it presses forward" (1934, p.18). One could say that Dewey's aesthetic vision, and his discussion of art laboratories in schools, supported by specialist art educators, was absorbed into the foundation of the Reggio Emilia schools. Further, Malaguzzi's courageous and determined introduction and defence of ateliers and atelieristi (Dahlberg and Moss (eds.) in Vecchi, 2010, p.xv) within the revolutionary Reggio Emilia educational project has the potential to press educators forward into enhanced aesthetic experiences with young children. Indeed, Dewey's philosophies of aesthetics, education and democracy as exemplified in the Reggio Emilia educational project continue to offer rich guidance and inspiration for those considering the place and implementation of art methods in their own education contexts.

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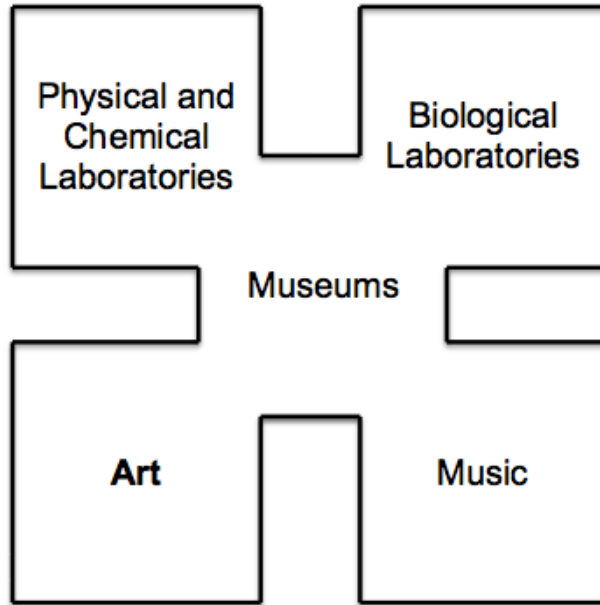


Diagram 1: Chart IV – The School and Society (Dewey, 1900, p.87).