5-15-2013

An alphabet of the arts

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Research supports the importance of inclusion of art in teaching. However, studies also show that teachers with a weak self-efficacy in the arts are less likely to integrate methods into their teaching. While most teachers are trained in teaching reading and writing, few are confident in their ability to include the arts their curriculum. Fortunately, the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, provide a model for integrating artistic materials and “languages” into the Pre-K to 5th grade classroom. The purpose of this project is to create an arts resource book, inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, for classroom teachers. This project includes an annotated Table of Contents, three sample chapters of the proposed volume, and a contextualizing introduction.
My passion for the arts was destroyed at an early age. I had begun joyfully dancing at the age of five and, in the years following, went on to perform in front of school groups, community members, family, and friends. I felt proud and accomplished. At the age of eleven, when I joined the Cuyahoga Valley Youth Ballet, under the direction of Ms. Nan Klinger, an acclaimed ballet dancer, my love for creative expression changed drastically. As many would imagine a formal ballet instructor, Nan was one of strict regime and it showed in her dancers—they were strong yet graceful, any young dancer’s dream. From the beginning, Nan challenged me. When I expressed my interest in auditioning for her company and others, I would always be met with the stabbing words that I was not good enough and that I would never be accepted. Although I would be accepted into these companies, even Nan’s, the conviction that I was not good enough would have a huge impact on my life and would be something that I would carry with me into adulthood.

After I quit the company, I found myself taking up more individual activities, like skiing and rock-climbing, where I would not be subject to judgment. Yet, I always judged myself and never felt I was good enough. I see clearly now that, like a tiny mouse under a heavy winter quilt, I would always be weighted by Ms. Nan Klinger’s words — I never would be good enough.

In reflection, I see clearly that moments of joy and freedom from this confining belief about myself were always embedded in some kind of artistic endeavor. Whether it was my third grade teacher who would play the acoustic guitar at the end of the day, art
classes in high school, dancing at live concerts in college, or painting natural landscapes with young children, I found joy and freedom in these moments of creative expression.

Under this heavy winter quilt, my stifled passion in the arts laid quietly. It took years in my professional work to lift off that quilt. As the co-director and lead teacher of a Reggio-inspired Pre-Kindergarten program, I had the opportunity to take on the coordination of our studio art program. Like the adolescent in the realist stage of drawing, I began timidly, afraid of doing something wrong or being judged harshly on the work I did. Through the years in the field, I have seen first-hand the power of the arts to open doors—between children and adults equally. The beauty of creative expression is that it is not right or wrong, good or bad… art is the artist’s own rendition of his or her experiences, thoughts, ideas, emotions, and more.

The arts provide languages to make meaning of our world. The arts open doors for people to connect to experiences and communicate them with others. Art is a way of bringing people together, of sparking conversations, encouraging critical-thinking, reflection, and healing. Through first hand experiences, I learned that using the arts as a form of language is essential, not only in the classroom, but in life. The arts are tools we cannot afford to go without.
Introduction

The arts are continuously highlighted in research that shows growth in student achievement (Catterall, 2002; Ruppert, 2006), student and teacher motivation (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006) as well as student and teacher engagement (Williamson & Zimmerman, 2009; PCAH, 2011). Research shows that the arts in schools promote higher levels of social competency and responsibility (Fiske, 1999), cultural responsiveness (Purnell, et. al., 2007; Reif & Grant, 2010), and higher order thinking skills including cognition (Jensen, 1998; Gazzaniga, 2008). The list goes on. Unfortunately, school policy-makers are neglecting the numerous research findings on the countless positive influences that the arts have on students. The most recent re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), puts nearly exclusive emphasis on standardized test scores as criteria for federal funding. NCLB has resulted in a massive destruction of the arts in our schools because of the narrowing focus on certain subject areas. “In the United States, more than 70 percent of school districts have cut back or eliminated arts programs because of No Child Left Behind” (Robinson, 2009).

As a result, it is crucial that teachers themselves gain the skills to integrate the arts in their curriculum. We cannot expect teachers to bring the arts into their classrooms if they have not been introduced to how and why to do so. Teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities fall short of educating teachers across multiple disciplines including the arts. While most teachers are trained in how to teach reading and writing, few are confident in their ability to integrate the arts into their classroom and curriculum. “The discomfort of having to teach what one does not know leads to timidity, avoidance,
and ultimately ineptitude” (Fowler, 1996). This lack of exposure to the arts limits a teacher’s ability as well as the student’s outcome. In their research, Garvis and Penergast state:

“The self-efficacy beliefs teachers hold about their ability to teach subjects shapes their competence in teaching. Teacher self-efficacy is defined as teacher beliefs in their ability to perform a teaching task. If teachers have strong teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of arts education, they are more likely to incorporate arts in the classroom. Alternatively, if teachers have weak teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of arts education they are less likely to include aspects of the arts in their curriculum.” (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010)

Even in the early childhood classroom where the arts make-up the majority of the curriculum,

“...it becomes the duty of the early childhood educators to assume this role [of the art teacher]. This is difficult because many early childhood educators are not artists and often do not feel comfortable teaching meaningful art experiences in their classroom. Therefore, early childhood educators must be provided with appropriate artmaking experiences to be more competent in the use of these “languages” in their classrooms.” (Danko-McGhee, K., 2003)

One method of teaching that has successfully met the challenge of embedding the arts into the school curriculum is the Reggio Emilia approach. These schools rightfully view art as languages, as ways of communicating, and give children access to these languages every day. Once teachers be given access to the the “alphabet” of these artistic languages, so they may begin to weave them into their curriculum. In an effort to support them, I have devoted my IMP to creating The Alphabet of the Arts, a book designed to serve as a resource for Pre-K to 5th grade teachers by describing materials of the creative languages and introducing basic techniques that educators can use in the classroom. An expanded Table of Contents and three sample chapters follow.
The Alphabet of the Arts:

An Arts Resource Book for Early Childhood and Elementary Classroom Teachers

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach

Extended Table of Contents:

Introduction

1. History of the Arts in American Early Childhood and Elementary Schools
   Understanding the history and traditions of where we have come from is important in understanding how to move forward. This chapter gives a history of the arts in American early childhood and elementary schools.

2. The Schools of Reggio Emilia as an Inspiration
   The schools of Reggio Emilia have offered inspiration in their approach to education. This chapter is an overview of what I will refer to as the Reggio Emilia approach throughout the book.

3. The Arts as Languages
   The concept of the Reggio Emilia approach that is highlighted in this book is that the arts are “languages.” After introducing this concept, a brief summary of physical, emotional, and artistic development follows. Materials (or “the alphabet”) of the following artistic languages are then introduced:

   Visual Arts:
      a. Drawing
      b. Painting
      c. Collage
      d. Clay
      e. Sculpture
   Musical and Kinesthetic Arts:
      f. Music
      g. Movement and Dance
      h. Performing Arts
   Language Arts
      i. Creative Writing

4. Environment and Display
   The classroom environment is a key to the workings in the Reggio Emilia approach, often noted as a third teacher. This chapter focuses on the general
set-up of the classroom space and how to make avenues for creative expression more accessible.

5. **Documentation**
Documenting the children’s work and projects can be an influential force in the learning of children, parents, teachers, and community members. This chapter discusses how to document these works and display them.

6. **Responding to Children's Artistic Works**
This chapter addresses the practices observation and documentation to respond to children’s works.
CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF THE ARTS IN THE AMERICAN PRE-KINDERGARTEN AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

It is clear that the arts, including visual, musical, and kinesthetic arts, are strongly rooted in our global history. From the most primitive drawings in caves, to the musical traditions of the Native Americans, the arts date back to our earliest history as a means of expressing ideas, experiences, plans, and emotions. Today, the arts fill our everyday lives through television, music, movies, video games, cell phones, computers, and more.

Since the Industrial Revolution, our schools have systematically prepared students for the industrial needs of the time. As we move further into the technological age, we can surmise how important it will be to include “21st century skills”—creativity, innovation, collaboration, communication, critical-thinking, and problem-solving—in the school curriculum. Not only are these the skills necessary for children who will enter the global workforce, these are also the skills that are important for initiating and sustaining children’s interest in becoming beneficial members of society during this technological age. These skills help tremendously with higher level problem solving as children advance to maturity. Including the arts in the classroom is one of the best ways we know to accomplish these tasks. This chapter gives a historical overview of the arts in American schools and the shifts that have occurred over time, specifically at the early childhood and elementary levels.

During colonial times, education was a way to support the church and family and prepare students to become clergy or political leaders. Teachers supported the family with lessons on morals and religious views. The predominantly agricultural society of the time required children to stay close to home to help with chores on the farm, and
therefore school ran for just a few months out of the year. At the time, the church was the main influence on school curriculum. Given the importance of reading music and singing in church settings, music was the first of the arts to be introduced into the American school curriculum; music’s entry was noted in the 1830’s.

The next of the arts to be introduced in the school system was drawing. The Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870 mandated that drawing become part of the common school curriculum. Because the U.S. had fallen behind its competitors in industry markets, drawing was thought to provide future workers with the skills necessary to improve product representations that would increase product quality and, in turn, increase American companies share of the global market. Teaching drawing in order to increase the quality of industrial products had been successfully implemented in England, and the Industrial Drawing Act followed shortly thereafter in Massachusetts.

The first public Kindergartens in the United States also began in 1870. Before receiving public recognition in the school system, the first Kindergartens in the U.S. were founded by German speaking immigrants who had been exposed to the work of Friedrich Froebel before settling in the United States. Influenced by the ideas of the Swiss educator Johann Pestalozzi, who strongly believed that students learn through senses and physical activity, Froebel’s Kindergarten (literally, “Garden of Children”) was based on play as an essential medium for young children to grow and learn. Under the belief that “children grow and become educated through their own activities,” Froebel created play objects, which he referred to as “gifts and occupations,” for focused activity in the Kindergarten (Efland, 1990). These “gifts and occupations” consisted of woolen balls, hardwood objects of varying shapes and forms, sticks, peas, and slate drawing boards. Thus, we
have Froebel to thank as a primary inspiration for using a variety of media in the school environment.

In a few short decades after the Industrial Drawing Act was set in place and Kindergartens introduced, the focus of the arts in schools shifted from the development of industrial skills to the history, appreciation, and composition of fine arts. This shift was due to a number of factors including, but not limited to, the Progressive Education Movement, the introduction of new materials from educational product makers, and the Picture Study Movement.

John Dewey is one of the leading names of the Progressive Education Movement that began during the late 19th century. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey describes an approach to progressive education that emphasizes the need for meaningful experiences. In his view, traditional education was disconnected from the learner and the ways in which people learn best. In order to have people invested in their education, they need to be connected to the experience on a personal level. In part, due to the Progressive Education Movement, art education began to see a major shift during the early 1900’s. Unlike the curriculum in the 19th century which was “established by adults with little understanding of children or of the learning process, educational leaders believed that natural interests of children and creative activity would produce a better curriculum” (Logan, 1955). Therefore, creativity and play began to be viewed as developmental tools (Dobbs, 1992).

Froebel’s Kindergarten Movement in the 1870’s was the first to introduce objects for play into the classroom. Companies, including Milton Bradley and the L. Prang Company, marketed and sold materials as educational products based on Froebel’s ideas.
While Milton Bradley focused more on board games, Prang printed teachers’ manuals on subjects including, but not limited to, drawing, form study, and color. Shortly after, new technology allowed for easier reproduction of materials, and printing companies also hopped on board with printing educational materials. One of these companies was the Perry Pictures Company in Massachusetts.

In the late 1800’s, a move referred to as the Picture Study Movement became prominent in American classrooms. In an effort to increase artistic culture and appreciation in school children, art reproductions began to be used in the schools. The Perry Picture Series was a compilation of reproductions of a variety of artworks mostly from the Renaissance era and used to provoke moral discussions in the classroom (Efland, 1990).

The Picture Study Movement briefly preceded a time when decorating the classroom for aesthetic purposes gained recognition. “Art in Daily Living” sought to beautify common places such as the home, school, and community in order to develop civilized adults with good taste, a thought mainly pulled from Ruskin’s theory on the importance of one’s surroundings. These ideas in art education were replaced by experiential learning around the end of the 1920’s. “By the 1920s and 30s, the influence of the Progressive Movement was manifest in art education by an increasing emphasis on creativity and play as developmental tools” (Dobbs, 1992). Art practices in the school took the form of hands-on studio work.

The National Art Education Association (NAEA) was founded in 1947 when leaders of four regional art associations in the United States gathered to form the national organization. With a mission to “advance visual arts education to fulfill human potential
and promote global understanding” (www.arteducators.com), the NAEA has held conferences yearly since the late 1960’s. New studies focusing on visual perception as well as art and psychology began to emerge thereby influencing art education yet again. “In the 1960s a new era dawned for art education with increasing consideration by art education theorist and practitioners alike of a more comprehensive, inclusive approach to instruction and learning in art” (Dobbs, 1992).

In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the primary goal of providing equal access to education for all students. Allocated funding to public schools provided money for professional development and educational resources to close the achievement gaps and sustain the “War on Poverty.” However, “With the passage of the ESEA Act in 1965, federal funding began to shift towards programs having a strong social agenda…” (Efland, 1990). This act initiated the major focus on assessment and, although ESEA included art as a core subject area, math, science, and reading became more prominent in the curriculum. The ESEA has been reauthorized every five years since its inception; it is best known today as the No Child Left Behind Act, which is addressed later in this chapter.

With the political turmoil created by the Vietnam War and the rise of social activism, skepticism of the educational system was notorious during the 1960’s and 1970’s. During this time, art was viewed more as an experience rather than a discipline in the schools. At the time, the “Arts-In-Education Movement” encouraged art teachers to focus on both witnessing the performing arts and participating in the process of art-making (Efland, 1990). The inception of home television combined with broadcasting by the National Endowment for the Arts also influenced art education during this time.
Schools began to include more than the visual arts; music, theatre, and dance became more popular in classrooms.

In the late 19th century, the Child Study Movement was introduced in the United States and focused on understanding children’s mental and emotional development. These new studies brought insight into education and initiated educational reform in teaching. Inspired by Child Study, many researchers chose to study children’s drawings; one notable such study was Howard Gardner, whose *Artful Scribbles* was published in 1978. Gardner, who grew up playing the piano, has been an advocate for the arts from the very beginning of his career, but it was his theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) that captured the attention of our nation. In the 1980’s Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind*; many books on MI followed. Gardner’s theory states that, “Students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways” (Gardner, 1995). Seven initial intelligences were born from his work and later an eighth intelligence was added:

1. Logical-Mathematical
2. Linguistic
3. Bodily-Kinesthetic
4. Musical
5. Spatial
6. Interpersonal
7. Intrapersonal
8. Naturalist
Gardner’s theory has redefined our understanding of intelligence. In an educational system that is based on the assumption that everyone learns in the same manner and can be tested in a universal way, Gardner’s MI describes why American schools are failing to reach and support all children. American school systems continue to struggle on how to equally support all of these intelligences.

The 1980’s saw an increased focus on art curriculum in the schools. The many different approaches that grew from this period inspired some of the current approaches to art education in the American school systems today. Efland, however, noted that, “the conflict in art education has been between those intent upon teaching the content of art and those seeing it as self-expression” (1990). Arts in education continue to be taught in a variety of ways depending on the teacher and the school. Some of the most commonly used practices include Discipline Based Arts Education, Choice Based Arts Education, and Visual Culture.

Rooted in the 1960’s but becoming more widely used in the early 1980’s, the ideas commonly known as Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) were created by one of the wealthiest art institutions, the J. Paul Getty Trust. It can be argued that DBAE was a movement that allowed the arts to gain a status of their own in American schools. Moving away from studio work that emerged in the 1960’s, the DBAE educational program provided a curriculum focused on four distinct disciplines: art production, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. “DBAE is an approach to the teaching and learning of art that builds upon exposure to a wide variety of art forms, that encourages the development of multiple perspectives from which to view art, and that emphasizes active multifaceted involvements of students and teachers alike” (Dobbs, 1992).
Choice Based Arts Education, also referred to as Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), is based on the idea that children are innate artists that enjoy creating on their own. Teachers in the Choice Based classroom act as a guide by demonstrating techniques and tools and then providing children with authentic learning experiences. Children are free to choose the medium in which they would like to work with from a variety of “centers” in the art room.

Not only did the 90’s involve the National Art Education Association’s proposal for National Visual Arts Standards in Schools, it also saw a significant rise in technology. With children immersed in visual technology, educators recommended using popular imagery in art education.

“Never before in human history has imagery been so central to the creation of identity or the gathering and distribution of knowledge (Chaplin, 1994). Never before has the aesthetic styling of products been so intense (Lash & Urry, 1994), image production and distribution so obvious, and image technology so easily manipulable (Rochlin, 1997) or so immersive (Doheny-Farina, 1996)” (Duncum, 2001).

From the focus on the importance of “images” in our modern society, art education that focused on visual culture was born. While still difficult to define, visual culture utilizes visual images from current and historical society to combine art, art history, culture, and critical thinking skills.

A newer idea in the world of art education is arts integration. Arts integration involves simultaneously teaching skills and content in art and a non-art subject. Models of arts integration vary, but commonly there is a requirement that teachers have a
background in the arts to provide expertise on technique and media. The A+ Schools of North Carolina and Oklahoma view “the arts as fundamental to teaching and learning in all subjects” (http://aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov/). With the arts woven into the curriculum, “A+ schools show marked improvement on standardized tests and often exceed the test scores of schools with similar demographics…” (Robinson, 2009). It is not clear whether or not all A+ Schools have teachers who have expertise in the arts. However, the more recent idea of arts integration with curriculum, is showing noteworthy results, especially during a time when the arts in schools have been widely disregarded and underfunded.

The most recent re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was passed in 2001. NCLB puts nearly exclusive emphasis on standardized test scores as a criteria for federal funding. NCLB has resulted in a massive destruction of the arts in our schools because of the narrowing focus on certain subject areas. “In the United States, more than 70 percent of school districts have cut back or eliminated arts programs because of No Child Left Behind” (Robinson, 2009). The effects of NCLB are detrimental to the lives of our children. School policy-makers are not only ignoring the ideas put forth by Dewey and Gardner but also neglecting the numerous research findings on the countless positive influences that the arts have on students.

Ken Robinson, author of The Element, has outlined the problem facing education today:

_The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn’t need to be reformed—it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions_ (2009).
One school system that has successfully merged Dewey’s and Gardner’s theories is the approach inspired by the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. In his book *Multiple Intelligences*, Gardner supplies, “For almost twenty-five years, I have been an enthusiastic supporter of the remarkable preschools of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy.” He goes on to mention the importance and uniqueness of the Reggio system. “While we share many of the same educational goals and enthusiasm, it is important to note that Reggio had developed most of its ideas and practices before becoming familiar with MI ideas” (2006). Reggio Emilia first made headlines in the United States in the early 90’s when Newsweek claimed it as, “one of the top ten schools in the world.” The first of many books to be printed on the schools of Reggio was, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, initially published and distributed in the U.S. in 1993.

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education and unpack my belief of how we can be inspired by these schools to support and integrate more of Gardner’s multiple intelligences in the American classroom.
CHAPTER 2: THE SCHOOLS OF REGGIO EMILIA AS AN INSPIRATION

As discussed in the previous chapter, the history of education in the United States has been entwined with economic forces combined with the social and political changes of the times. It is not uncommon for educational goals to be influenced by such factors. However, adjustments and improvements to the status quo rules and traditions require action to direct positive change. One small town in Italy has shown us an example of initiating change to the school system.

Like the United States, Italy has faced historic challenges that have influenced their educational systems including, but not limited to, the reign of the Church, the rise of Fascism, the effects of two World Wars, and the social change of women entering the workforce. It is this last influence that instigated a significant and much needed reform that added quality education for children ages birth-to-six years old to the Italian public schools. The addendum to Italian education began in one small town when workers, educators, and especially women pulled together as effective advocates for the needs of young children. Their collaborative work initiated the establishment of public preschools in 1968 and infant/toddler centers in 1971, a change that eventually caught on across all Italy (Gandini, et. al, 2008).

The Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy consists of an economy largely based on agriculture and automobile production. The region’s capital, Bologna, houses one of the first universities in the world. In this Northern portion of Italy, the people of the small town of Reggio Emilia initiated a change that has spread to the national
The educational system of Italy. Not only is the town’s story an example of how educational change is possible, it also provides a model for integrating creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills back into schools.

The beginning of the Reggio Emilia schools dates back to the 1940’s when World War II devastated the town. Concerned parents and townspeople began constructing the physical spaces that would eventually form the birthplace of the Reggio Emilia approach to education. As the walls were beginning to be built, Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher at the time, showed up on his bicycle with the intention of helping this community effort; he also brought with him his motivation, dreams, beliefs, and ideas. Malaguzzi was declared by Howard Gardner as “the guiding genius of Reggio” (Edwards et. al., 1993), and his team of educators, parents, and community members were inspired by pertinent research and theorists to steer their ideas into the creation of the Reggio Emilia infant and toddler centers. In the 1990’s, Reggio Emilia became a well-known name in the field of education partly as a result of being featured in Newsweek as “one of the best schools in the world” (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991).

The approach that I refer to throughout this book as the “Reggio approach” has been most influenced by the work and theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and Howard Gardner. Six main components shape the approach: the image of the child, the importance of collaborative relationships, emergent curriculum, the role of the arts as essential languages, the environment, and documentation.
In the following chapters, we will dive deeper into the arts as languages, the environment, and documentation; however, it is important to understand that each component is integral in making Reggio-inspired schools successful as a whole. What follows is a description of each of these six main components.

**Image of the Child**

“All people—and I mean scholars, researchers, and teachers, who in a place have set themselves to study children seriously—have ended up by discovering not so much the limits and weaknesses of children but rather their surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities linked with an inexhaustible need for expression and realization.”

-Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards, et.al, 1993)

The image of the child is the foundation on which the Reggio approach is built.

“The cornerstone of our experience, based on practice, theory, and research, is the image of the children as rich, strong, and powerful” (Edwards, et. al., 1993). Children are thought of as having “rights” as opposed to “needs”, are “strong” as opposed to “fragile”, and are “competent” as opposed to “needing protection.” Each and every action is
motivated by these beliefs in the Reggio-inspired school. As Malaguzzi states, a child is, “born with many resources and extraordinary potentials that never fail to surprise us; a child [is] with autonomous capacities to construct thoughts, ideas, question, and attempts to give answers” (Gandini, et al., 2008). The Reggio Emilia approach embodies this idea by teaching classroom leaders that acting toward children in this manner is the path to effective teaching and student learning. From the emergent curriculum in which teachers follow the children’s interests and ideas, to the well-thought out environment, the value and image of the child are evident. Even the glassware served with meals in Reggio inspired schools reflects the thought that children are competent, capable and valued.

This theory of learning is also derived from the teachings of the Swiss biologist, Jean Piaget, and his work on the mental development of young children. According to Gardner (1990), “Piaget took seriously the Rousseauian proposition that children are not merely “stupid” or less well-informed adults. Rather, from early in life, human beings exhibit their own particular forms of making sense of their surroundings, their own conceptions of the world.”

It cannot be emphasized enough that this vision of the child is the driving force behind each and every action in a Reggio Emilia school. As you will see in the following descriptions, the child who is seen as rich, strong, and powerful is the foundation in which all other components of the approach is built.

**Importance of Collaborative Relationships**

The image of the child propels the relationships between children, teachers, parents, and community members. In order for a well-functioning society to be successful
and achieve their collective goals, people of all ages within that society need to work collaboratively and support one another.

“A true community is a place where collaboration, caring and conflict go hand in hand. The sense of community becomes the envelope around the important interactions that occur within each classroom and school. The assumption is that children from the very beginning are active contributors to the life of the community. The child’s self-identity is constructed out of a relationship formed with people, things, and the environment, without the group the child could not find or develop an identity.” – Malaguzzi

From birth, parents are the most crucial contributors to a child’s life. When a child starts school, a new player, the teacher(s), joins the child’s educational team. However, the parents do not exit when this new team member joins; parents and teachers join together to work toward empowering the child and cultivating a life-long love for learning. In *Working in the Reggio Way*, Julianne Wurm cites research that, “demonstrated that children whose parents are involved are more likely than others to have positive educational outcomes, such as improved academic performance, better school attendance, higher aspirations, reduced dropout rates, and increased graduation rates” (2005).

In the classroom, teachers and children act as partners in learning. Rather than filling children with facts and information, the role of the teacher is to learn alongside the children. Acting as researchers themselves, teachers study children’s ideas, theories, thought processes, and more in order to better understand children. Physically working next to the children, teachers guide, support, and listen in order to promote meaningful learning. Working collaboratively with one another, teachers contribute their own understanding of children’s development. Teachers also work together to discuss their
classroom observations in order to scaffold projects, curriculum, and children’s ideas, interests, and questions.

Again, parents are involved in the learning experiences at school. Parents are invited for “working nights” in which they make gifts for their children and/or the school. “Celebrations” take place throughout the year as a way to honor the work of the children. These family events not only provide parents with insight into what their children are learning, but also foster joy in the educational space and support relationships between families and teachers. Family and community members are also sought after as resources for learning.

Children, parents, teachers, and community members help one another learn. The role of the adult is to guide children to ask good questions and discover their own answers. Without the collaborations between parent, child, teacher, and community, a vital aspect of the Reggio approach would be missing.

**Emergent Curriculum**

“Like Piaget, we agree that the aim of teaching is to provide conditions for learning.”

-Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards, et.al., 1993)

With their inherent curiosity of the world, children instinctively have the desire to learn. What sets the Reggio curriculum apart from the American public school curriculum is that it is not assumed that teachers know what the children should know or should be learning; rather, teachers wait to see what is of interest to the children and create the curriculum around the group’s interests. These interests are turned into projects
of varying kinds. Some projects require only a few days of study while others may last throughout the year. Work is done in small groups and is collaborative in nature. Through projects, learning happens as a spiral rather than as a linear process. Children are constantly asked to reflect on and review ideas, thoughts, and work in order to keep the projects alive. The role of the teacher is to guide the curriculum to meet developmentally appropriate milestones for each individual child through creative and thoughtful connections.

The Arts as Essential Languages

In her book, Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia, Vea Vecchi claims, “It is important to society that schools and we as teachers are clearly aware of how much space we leave children for original thinking, without rushing to restrict it with predetermined schemes that define what is correct according to a school culture. How much do we support children to have ideas different from those of other people[?]” (2010).

All classroom areas in Reggio schools support children in their original thinking and their ability to make decisions; however, great emphasis in this regard is placed on the “atelier.” The atelier, or artist’s studio, is a familiar word to Reggio-inspired teachers. By definition, the atelier is, “an artist’s workspace typically used by an artist in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century” (Gandini, et.al., 2005). Loris Malaguzzi chose to use this word to distinguish Reggio’s creative workspaces from the typical elementary school art room and, indeed, these two spaces are very different and deserve different names. “The studio space [atelier] is not an
isolated place where artistic things happen. It is a laboratory for thinking” (Topal & Gandini, 1999). In this space, children are encouraged to express their ideas and theories by bringing them to life through the materials and methods of their choosing.

In the Reggio approach, children have access to several different modes of expression, or “languages.” These languages are taught using an abundance of materials that are introduced to the children and made accessible at all times. The children are encouraged to explore materials and to, “express themselves through all of their natural “languages,” or modes of expression, including words, movement, drawing painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music” (Gandini, et.al, 1993). These languages in the classroom and curriculum are not an afterthought, rather they are integrated as an essential necessity of expression.

Environment

The value placed on the child influences every aspect of the classroom environment. Reggio Emilia schools are known for being so aesthetically pleasing that visitors to the schools are often led to tears. What a notion -- that a school’s physical environment can—and should—be beautiful! In the classroom, thought is put into every corner and every detail—from the flooring to the lighting and everything in between. Classroom areas are set up in order to teach, excite, provoke thought, and foster interactions.

In the Reggio approach, one of the main tenets is that the environment is a teacher, often referred to as “the third teacher.” Teachers think of spaces in great detail in order to promote learning and interactions between both children and materials and
children and other children. Additionally, the materials within an area are always changing in order to keep the learning alive. The space is representative and adaptable to the children’s shifting interests and projects. For instance, one area of the classroom in which I taught changed from a kitchen, to a beauty salon, to a campsite in the course of a year and a half. In *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Lella Gandini states, “In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge” (Edward, et. al., 1993).

Walking into a Reggio-inspired school, one can get a feel for the people who inhabit the space even when no one is present. In a way, the space “speaks” and tells stories of the “ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of the people who live within it” (Edwards, et.al., 1993). It is often noted that a Reggio school cannot be duplicated because the spaces of each Reggio school are unique and personal to their inhabitants and their community; this means that no two schools are alike. Just as the makeup of the class is full of people with diverse backgrounds and experiences, so are the classrooms. The current and past history of the place, community, and people who have journeyed through the school are documented on the walls and throughout the physical learning environment.

**Documentation**

Documentation refers to written transcripts, photographs, voice recordings, videos, evidence, and artifacts that are collected by the teachers and compiled to
demonstrate the process of a project and/or a learning experience. Documentation first served as “a democratic possibility to inform the public of the contents of the schools” (Edwards, et.al, 1993). However, over the years in Reggio Emilia, it has grown into a much greater resource to support the learning of children, teachers, parents, and visitors to the school.

An example of documentation is the stories of student projects that are displayed on the walls from both the past and the present. Another example of documentation includes the snapshots of learning that occur during the day and are posted (or emailed) daily to parents. These typically include photographs and remarks from children on exciting occurrences in the day. Individual documentation is another way to share the story of a learning moment or an important piece of work; these are often included in the child’s portfolio. Documentation, especially the bigger panels, is a collaborative process that is discussed with children and teachers before or during the time of display.

**Conclusion**

As a Pre-Kindergarten teacher influenced by the schools of Reggio Emilia, I have learned about the expressive languages as well as many useful practices for integrating the arts into curriculum. I believe that these practices can extend well beyond the earliest years in education and serve as a model for integrating the arts and 21st century skills into other early childhood and elementary classrooms. It is my hope that the “alphabets” of expressive languages presented in this book will inspire teachers to offer more expressive languages in their classrooms and employ ways of thinking creatively about curriculum while regarding children’s interests. Ultimately, my hope is to bring back the joy,
excitement, and curiosity into learning through a curriculum that is directed by children’s interests and allows for more expressive languages. Using aspects of the Reggio approach that fit best with our American culture can begin to set us up for this dream.
CHAPTER 3: ARTS AS LANGUAGES

Drawing

“To learn a language we need to speak it often, and the language of drawing needs to be ‘frequented’ in the same way.” – Vea Vecchi (2010)

Importance of Drawing

It is interesting to refer back to Chapter One and remember that drawing was the first of the arts to be included in the school curriculum because it was important for product representation in the industrial market. As our culture becomes ever more “visual,” drawing remains a critical skill, even as digital tools become available. Visual literacy is greatly enhanced when children “learn to see” by drawing; it is a process that connects physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development all in one!

From the moment young children are able to grasp objects, they desire to make marks. While these marks may seem nominal to the normal eye, they are significant expressions of development and show the beginnings of written language. Drawing is specifically noted in many research studies because it is commonly the first and most natural way for many children to convey their ideas. In Art Experiences for Young Children, Naomi Pile defines drawing as a universal language and “a form of communication in which the child who draws speaks to himself, for himself, and to the external world.” While written or spoken language is still being developed, drawing can be a universal means of communication.

“Children draw pictures and write to organize ideas and construct meaning from their experiences. They read their pictures and writing in order to understand their experiences.” (Powell & Davidson, 2005) They use pictures to describe how they’re
feeling and to tell stories just as the ancients did on the cave walls of Lascaux. Based on my personal experience, it seems that it also helps children develop their imaginations and interpret their worlds in a personalized manner.

A number of studies have determined that there are relationships between drawing and literacy, in both writing and reading. Simple mark-making is the basis for all writing—scribbles eventually transform into letters. As early as three years old, children begin including letters as symbols in their drawings. These letters eventually turn into words and labels and later can be seen as sentences integrated into their work. Sylvester and Steffani’s study on drawing and literacy skills development in Kindergarten children concludes that “drawing in the early grade can lead to the support of literacy development standards and there is a growing body of evidence showing that there is a relationship between drawing and writing in children spanning the ages of 4 through 12” (p. 23)
Providing children access to drawing tools in the classroom and allowing them to form a relationship with a variety of these tools provides essential support for their development in the language arts.

**Developmental Aspects of Drawing**

According to Viktor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittian, authors of *Creative and Mental Growth*, children move through six different stages in their drawing; from Pre-K to elementary school, children may move through 4 of the six stages:

1) Scribbling
Often the beginning explorations of self-expression are noted with scribbling during the ages of 2-4. After studying over 300 works of art from young children around the globe, Rhonda Kellogg suggests that there are 20 different scribble marks in this initial stage of development. Scribbling, in itself, moves through a variety of substages: from disordered and random (whole arm movements) to controlled and named scribbling (wrist movements and names the marks).

2) Preschematic
The scribbling stage is followed by increased control, mostly noticed in the quality and control of line. Around ages 4-7, children begin moving into the preschematic stages that begin incorporating enclosed forms and recognizable shapes (think circles and squares). First attempts at representation are tried and explored.

3) Schematic
The schematic stage usually occurs around 7-9 years of age. Drawings begin to reflect a child’s concept or idea and more details begin to occur. Children begin to take space, representation, and reality into consideration more.

4) Dawning Realism
When children are between the ages of 9 and 12, their drawings become smaller and more detailed, and students become more self-conscious about the lack of accuracy in their own artwork. If self-criticism is not met with technical assistance and direct instruction, many young artists will abandon the arts convinced that they “cannot draw.”
To summarize, at a young age, children’s marks will move from scribbles to more controlled shapes. Following shape-making, children often will discover combining shapes that may turn into objects of representation. With this new knowledge, children begin to refine these representation forms, often drawing them repeatedly. As children’s fine motor skills grow, their drawing may become smaller and more defined. At 12-14, children will become very critical of their own drawings and strive to make their creations more realistic. Depth and proportion begin to appear. The stage of “Artistic Decision,” at ages 14-17, is typically for those who decide to continue to draw, if only for personally reasons. Many adults may become stuck in the former “Realistic Drawing” stage and never move beyond that without instruction.

**Tools and Materials for General Drawing**

**Drawing Paper**

Recently, I took a trip to a paper store and was nearly overwhelmed by the number of options. Although it is important to know about the qualities and uses of different kinds of paper, simply having paper to work on is key. Ingredients, sizes, weights, and textures distinguish one kind of paper from another. Most commonly, paper is made from wood pulp but it can also consist of grass, cloth (cotton or linen), or other fibers. Paper is measured by weight; the higher the weight, the thicker the paper. Texture varies between smooth and rough. Thinking about what materials the paper is going to be paired with and also the stage of the work (rough draft or final draft) will help decide which paper to use.
Newsprint Paper- A great all-purpose sketch paper that can be combined with pencil, charcoal, felt-tip pens, pastels, crayons, and markers.

Copy Paper- With the greater use of printers these days, copy paper can be in abundance and is an affordable option for sketching; however, it may not hold charcoal and pastels as well as newsprint.

Drawing Paper- Paper labeled “drawing paper” is typically of a heavier weight and is meant for finished products.

Charcoal Paper- Charcoal paper has greater texture to “grab” the charcoal and keep it on the paper. This type of paper can also be used with pencils, pastels, or any other medium requiring more texture.

Cardstock Paper- Cardstock is a thicker and more durable type of paper that can be used with a variety of materials and/or for final works.

As students develop their own ideas, it is important to provide different kinds of drawing paper in order to support the different stages of their work from rough drafts to final pieces. For rough drafts and sketching in pencil, newsprint paper or affordable copy paper works great. If using charcoal, it is important to get paper with rough texture because it helps grab the charcoal and hold it on the paper. When children are ready for final drafts, paper of higher quality should be available. By providing high quality paper for final works, children will sense the value that the teacher places on them and their art, which refers back to the view of the child in the Reggio-inspired classroom.

Charcoal
Charcoal is one of the oldest drawing materials, formed from carbon and ash. Drawings from charcoal were presumably first drawn from the leftovers of a fire. Nowadays, charcoal is sold in art supply stores in four forms: powdered, compressed, vine or willow, and pencil. Charcoal in powdered form is most commonly used for shading large areas and may not be of much use in the classroom. Compressed charcoal comes in round or square sticks and has added gum or wax binder in order to make it more durable; the more binder added, the harder the charcoal. Vine or willow charcoal is much softer than compressed and can easily break. Charcoal pencils can allow for more detail for the young artist desiring to work in this medium.

Three types of charcoal for drawing pencil (left), compressed (middle), and vine form (right).

Charcoal smears easily and may require the use of spray fixative after works are completed in order to make the drawing permanent. Fixative comes in an aerosol spray
can and can be found at most art supply stores. Because it can be very harmful to inhale, fixative should always be sprayed outside. Directions for use are typically listed on the can.

Graphite Pencils

Graphite pencils are basic tools for line drawings, rough draft sketches, and experimentation. If possible, pencils provided in the studio area should be specific to drawing. These pencils come in a variety of hardness as noted by the letters and numbers imprinted on the wood casing. Drawing pencils are rated on a HB and number scale that defines the hardness/softness of the graphite. “H” stands for hard while “B” stands for black; the numbers typically range from 9H (hard) to 9B (soft). The harder the lead, the lighter the lines; these pencils are better for more technical drawings. The common #2 pencil is a 2B pencil, in the middle of the scale. Softer pencils, such as 6-8B, work well with younger children as the transfer of graphite to the page does not require as much pressure. This can be useful when children are still trying to learn to control the intensity of their marks.

Pencils specific to drawing rarely have erasers. This provides opportunities for students to work with their “mistakes” and think creatively in order to “fix” their drawings. What may seem like a mistake in the beginning may turn into part of a design or a fantastic antler on an animal. Encouraging a child to work with his or her “mistakes”
allows for creative thinking and an understanding that things do not always have to be right or exact.

It is nice to have pencils sharpened and ready to use before the children get to them. One way to keep your pencils organized is to offer a jar or basket for pencils that need sharpening. Children can put unsharpened pencils in this basket and these can be sharpened all at once then refilled to the sharpened jar. This is an excellent classroom job.

Felt-tip Pens

Encouraging children to use black fine-tip pens for their final works produce pieces that require forethought and planning as well as emphasize line and shape.

“Black fine-tip markers make a distinct line and don’t bleed into the paper, unlike other kinds (of) markers. Their clarity of line and simple color call attention to shape, outline, and detail. These markers demand a commitment. They ask children to take risks and to make strong statements.” (Pelo, A. pg. 85)

Drawings made with felt-tip pens provide sharp and smooth lines that can later be colored if the child so desires. Felt-tip pens can be purchased at any office supply store. Note that the ink in these pens is water-soluble and therefore should not later be paired with watercolor.

Coloring Tools
Drawing is the process of using lines and shapes. “I want children to think about drawing as lines, not as filled-in shapes” (Beal, 2001). Keeping drawing as a focus on line and shape can help emphasize ideas and the process of filling-in can come afterwards. Lines and shapes can be made with the general drawing tools and can then followed by the act of filling-in with coloring tools.

Chalk Pastels

Chalk pastels are similar to charcoal but with the addition of color. They offer an easy transfer of color and can prove to be great fun for the young child especially.

Crayons and/or Oil Pastels

Wax crayons are an affordable way to provide color to a drawing. Most children are familiar with wax crayons and their usage. Another option is oil pastels, sometimes referred to as the brand name Craypas. While more expensive than wax crayons, oil pastels permit a more rich and easy transfer of color to the paper because of their softness.
Colored Pencils

Colored pencils offer another way to add color to drawings. These pencils vary in selection and price, from student-grade to artists-grade. On the lower end is the student-grade, which are your basic colored pencils. The upper end of the selection appeals to those who prefer a pencil with higher-qualities and allow for greater blending and transfer of color.

Markers
Like colored pencils, markers vary in quality from student-grade to artists-grade. Most school-aged children are familiar with markers and their usage. When selecting markers, keep in mind that there are markers that will mark on just about anything: windows, fabrics, permanents, etc. Water-based markers are generally non-toxic and a good choice for the classroom.

Using Drawing in the Classroom

There are two prominent uses for drawing that I see most commonly (and naturally) used by children: observational and conceptual drawing. While observational drawing focuses on the act of using an aid to draw from the senses, conceptual drawing utilizes the memory and/or imagination. Each approach offers children opportunities to discuss their own perceptions of the world.

Observational drawing, of life drawing, is the process of drawing from a visual aid. This method of drawing can support children’s perception and observational skills by “learning to see.” To begin, set an object up in the middle of the table with no more than four or five chairs. Spend some time with the child or children before beginning to draw
on the paper. Ask them what they notice. Question them further to break the object down into different shapes: What shapes do you see? Are the lines curved or straight? These questions help provide children the opportunity to study an object closely while at the same time communicating their thoughts and ideas.

Drawing is an excellent way to allow children to show their ideas and concepts about the world and how it works. This focus on drawing can be particularly useful in science theory and observation, math visualization, and map-making. For instance, having children think more deeply about what makes the leaves change color could be drawn with a fascinating visual representation. One of my colleagues recently assigned her students the task of showing what makes a mammal a mammal; the results were stimulating and exemplified the student’s understanding of the characteristics of a mammal.

**Tools to Support Observational and Conceptual Drawing**

**Light**

Light can be an important tool when studying an object closely. Fluorescent lighting can diffuse natural light and shadows and should be avoided if at all possible. Direct lighting on an object can be extremely helpful to see particular details.

**Magnifying Glasses**

Providing magnifying glasses can allow children to see subjects in more detail. Magnifying glasses are especially fun and useful when studying natural materials; for example, to study leaf structure in science class.
Wire

Another idea is to use wire to outline the shapes of an object. Black wire is especially interesting against the backdrop of a white paper. Wire can be especially helpful at Gardner’s stage of “literalism” when children are more self-conscious of their drawing. The wire structure can then be used as a tool for drawing.

Projector

Old light projectors can find new uses in the classroom. Laying objects on them and casting shadows on a wall can help emphasize the shape. This tool can also be helpful when focusing on composition and spatial understanding.
Cameras

Photographs can help document the process as well as the final product. To document the process, the teacher can take a step-by-step sequence and later, with the photographs, discuss with the child how or why he/she did something.
Videotape and/or Tape-recorder

Videotapes and tape-recorders can be useful tools to understand a child’s drawing and the theory behind it. Using this tool either during or after the child’s process can help explain their work. Asking clarifying questions can allow the child to go deeper into their theory.

Copy Machine/Printer

Copy Machines and/or printers help duplicate work so that children can build off their own ideas. For instance, if studying the layout of a town, students can draw the streets. This can be copied so that numerous children can then add ideas on where different stores and parks should be located. Afterwards, they can describe their reasoning.

Conclusion

If we consider the development of young children in their mark-making journey, it becomes clear that drawing is as natural (if not more so) than writing. As one of the earliest forms of artistic expression, drawing is an excellent language for children to
make meaning of their world and their ideas. This universal language deserves a place in children’s lives and in the classroom.
References:


National Art Education Association website: http://www.arteducators.org


Appendix A: Personal Communication

Written by Mayra Bloom,
July 13, 2013

An Alphabet of the Arts
by Jessica Barksdale

In our schools, and in our increasingly virtual lives, communication is assumed to consist primarily of “language,” i.e., speaking, reading, and then writing. While these are obviously essential, children learn many languages before they become verbal, and we all rely on these modes of expression for the rest of our lives. These languages include imagery, movement, physical expressions, gestures, imitation, play; music, mathematics, poetry, games, and interactions with the natural, physical, cultural, social, and family worlds. These are the Languages of Art, and we cannot live as human beings without them.

Schools -- and teachers -- that encourage the lifelong development of these capacities and encourage students to choose the most effective language for their purpose mode will enable young people to survive and even flourish in an environment that increasingly requires rapid adaptation and entails constant stress.

In An Alphabet of the Arts, Jessica Barksdale provides everything a teacher needs in order to make room for the languages of art in the classroom.