WHEN THE WORLD IS ALIVE:
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND RADICAL LISTENING

KERRI EMBREY

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Abstract

What do we listen for as educators? Do we value the voices of children? Do we invite colleagues into our work? Are we attentive to materials and environment? If we value reciprocity with these elements, how do we get better at listening to them? The innovative early-childhood educators in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, choose to place listening at the heart of their pedagogy. Inspired by their work, I use the term *radical listening* as a metaphor for heightened receptivity to beings, places and materials. I investigate ways that aesthetic experience can effect radical listening. Interpreting pedagogical documentation produced with my colleagues and drawing from theory (Dewey, Buber, Vecchi, and Rinaldi) and personal experience, I explore three elements of radical listening: attentiveness, empathy and curiosity. I argue that because aesthetic experience is sensory and affective, vivid and reciprocal, it is enlivening, and creates conditions that heighten radical listening.

Dedication

For Gus and my children, Julian and Lucia, who keep it real.

Acknowledgements

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I wish to acknowledge the influence that educators from the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools of Reggio, Emilia, Italy have had on my thinking and practice. For over fifteen years I have encountered their ideas, stories and proposals through numerous publications, conferences, conversations and a Study Tour in 2011. I am especially grateful for the opportunity I had in 2008/09 to collaborate with and learn from Francesca Bianchi and Francesca Giorgioni (two incredible educators from the Patarei Collective in Reggio). These encounters with Reggio continue to transform the way I understand learning and children.

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Introduction

For many years I have worked with young children in collaborative teaching environments inspired by the Municipal Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of Reggio Emilia, Italy. A leading theorist from Reggio, Carlina Rinaldi, suggests that their responsive and democratic approach to teaching and learning is founded on a pedagogy of listening (2001a). Listening in Reggio schools has become a metaphor for a philosophical approach to education and a premise for a multitude of carefully considered processes (Rinaldi, 2006); Rinaldi describes listening as, in part,

> sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader integrated knowledge. (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 80)

Rinaldi alludes to a sense of the action and purpose of listening that I find galvanizing: we listen with humility to find meaning; we listen for connection beyond our individual interpretations.

Why does Rinaldi choose listening as the metaphor for sense-making in her description of a pedagogy of listening? Why not a pedagogy of seeing, tasting, touching (certainly all the senses play into Reggio's very embodied and creative realizations of learning process and cultural creation)? Perhaps it is the ephemeral nature of auditory perception that provokes her to emphasize the importance of listening. Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) describes listening as a process in which one must perceive and recognize a sound that is always invisible; sound is not a discernable object or point but a wave that expands over time and space. We

cannot contain that which we hear, yet it requires our heightened attention. Nancy distinguishes listening from hearing in this way: "To listen is *tendre l'oreille*—literally, to stretch the ear—an expression that evokes a singular mobility, among the sensory apparatuses...is an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety" (Nancy, 2007, p. 5). Rinaldi (2001a) also describes qualities of listening such as an expansive sense of time, emotion, surprise and reflection. She suggests that listening can have a destabilizing effect and as such requires a willingness to "overcome the sense of emptiness and precariousness that we experience whenever our certainties are questioned" (Rinaldi 2001a, p.81). If listening is indeed a stretch towards the unknown then it requires an effort of attention and sensitivity, rather than passive certainty.

The approach and philosophy of Reggio schools is guided by core principles, which are complex and difficult to summarize. These principles include giving presence and value to multiple languages of expression (such as dance, food, sound, light, sculpture, colour) and ways of thinking (such as kinesthetic, verbal, graphic, mathematical, ethical); an emphasis on shared participation by parents, educators and children; and a belief that learning (for children and adults) is a constructive process, both individual and social, that requires opportunities for theory building and research (Vecchi, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012; Morrow, 2010). In Reggio there is an emphasis on professional development that is fostered through reflective and collaborative practice, and an attention to environment as a powerful context for learning, which can encourage "interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity, and communication" (Morrow, 2010, p. 13).

Collegial reflection and collaboration happen in part through careful observation and documentation processes in which teachers seek to capture learning in development and to come to know children better (Turner & Wilson, 2010; Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). Teachers in Reggio plan in a way that is provisional and responsive to children and the environment, called "progettazione," which allows the ideas and questions of the children to influence the path of inquiry (Guidici et al., 2001). In considering these principles it becomes evident that such a pedagogy requires dialogue and openness, a willingness to be attentive and responsive to others. Reggio Children describes the role of listening in this way: "An active attitude of listening between adults, children, and the environment is the premise and context of every educational relationship (Morrow, 2010, p. 11).

As is suggested in the principles listed above, a pedagogy of listening also relates to matter and the environment, not just human communication. In my experience in Reggio-inspired environments, it is possible for educators to attend to, and thus value, multiple facets of experience with students including culture, environment, flora and fauna, materials and ambience. In Reggio schools listening (and valuing) involves thinking of these facets as agents—or, Rinaldi might say, *protagonists*—that influence us and also have a tendency to evolve and change through our encounters and relations with them (Taguchi, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). Thus listening in education can be about calling everyone's attention to multiple influences, heightening awareness and receptivity to one another and the environment in a way that involves affect and sensitivity.

Educators often struggle with a relentless pace, a relationship with time that forces an emphasis on purpose and getting things done. Young children, on the other hand, don't always listen to the school's (or society's) agenda of purpose and productivity. Yet I have observed children listening to the world around them with curiosity, acute sensitivity, wonder, a deeply felt awareness of beauty and a willingness to be surprised. Perhaps children's sensitive way of listening originates in part from a desire for relationship that fuels their growth and development. I have marveled at my own children, as babies, listening for how language works, imitating our intonation and rhythm of speech, because they want to join the conversation. But that desire for relationship extends beyond people. Children also seem to listen to and seek harmony with objects, plants and animals.

What values are revealed when we examine how, and if, we choose to listen to each other and our environment? Is the listening of teachers and students a stretch towards the other, open to uncertainty? Does a focus on how children meet certain norms and standards weaken the attentiveness of adults to other aspects of a child's being? Do we listen only to the most articulate children and the ones with the right answer or do we also pause to consider those less verbal, those who offer challenges and puzzles, or those who offer new or far-fetched ideas that might move thinking in a different direction? How well do we listen to the varied and multisensory forms of communication that young children embrace, such as gesture, musicality and imagery? Do we listen for emotion and desire? How is education receptive to the voices of parents, colleagues the environment? How do we interpret and give meaning to what we hear? What biases and priorities, cultural and historical, slant

our choices about what we attend to and how it is perceived? There are many questions that surround the nature of listening in school. In considering the possibilities of listening, what interests me most is how the quality and depth of listening in a classroom can be honed to become more inclusive and multidimensional. How can listening become *radical* so that adults and children are highly attentive to each other, tuned in to the unexpected, precipitous, affective and beautiful elements of experience?

Radical Listening

Here I use the term *radical listening* to define a particular notion of listening as a metaphor for teaching and learning. Radical listening is attentive, curious and focused on relationships and meaning. The meanings of the word radical: *relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough; characterized by departure from tradition; innovative or progressive; relating to the root of something* (*Oxford Dictionaries*, 2010), suggest for me that such listening has both a sensitive, probing quality (involving an effort to dig and get to the root of meaning), but also a disruptive effect. Radical listening involves openness to surprise; such listening may change things—perceptions, knowledge, ideas, and relationships. Listening with others can become radical if we allow *our certainties to be challenged* through the shared effort of making sense of what we hear. Radical listening then is also collective and continuous: rather than stopping with one individual it draws on multiple points of view and a sense of ongoing search. Radical

listening is intended to suggest a collective, continuous *action* of multisensory attention, of probing with particular sensitivity to meaning, and also an *effect* of change that comes about as multiple meanings and other perspectives are uncovered.

I propose that an emphasis on and attention to aesthetics and aesthetic experience (as I have found particularly in Reggio schools and Reggio-inspired environments) can make listening more acute and receptive. Vea Vecchi describes aesthetics as heightened sensitivity, but also "a way of thinking which requires care, grace, attention, subtlety and humour" (2010, p.10). If we place high value on aesthetic experience it might broaden what we listen for, evoking curiosity, but also returning our awareness to meaning *in* experience and to the senses as receptors of meaning. I have found that aesthetic experience gives priority to vivid sensations, the play of light and sound, colour and texture, taste and scent. In considering the aesthetic environment of a classroom, for example, I attend to its emotions, materials, ambience, tempo and organization of space. Aesthetic encounters are those in which we wake up to the world, feeling surprise, delight and wonder. In aesthetic sense our awareness is drawn to the uniqueness and detail in that which we perceive. Aesthetic experience can provoke a strong sense of relationship and affinity within those encounters.

I want to clarify that in speaking of aesthetics I am not only referring to visual art or other expressive domains such as poetry, design, drama or music, although I consider these processes significant agents and manifestations of aesthetic experience. Nor do I mean to suggest that aesthetics is only referring

to beauty as something rare and occasional. Rather I draw from John Dewey's (1934/2005) proposal that aesthetic experience is one that occurs in the substance and matter of everyday life and emerges out of our desire and ability to find order and unity, harmony and meaning in vivid sensations and emotions. Poetry can create vivid sensations, and one can also experience them in a thunderstorm or the smell of apples and cinnamon baking in the oven. Perhaps the desire for beauty in art, math and other disciplines grows from a desire to create/recreate aesthetic experience, to make *sense* out of the magical experience of *sensing* (especially that sensing which is most vivid and beautiful, which seems to hold a deeper meaning or pattern). Thus by aesthetics I mean to suggest experiences whose sensual vividness, beauty, and emotional qualities hold a deeper sense of meaning for an individual or group.

In this inquiry I examine aesthetic experience as an agent of radical listening, by focusing on three qualities of radical listening that I suggest aesthetic experience engenders: attentiveness, a sense of resonance/relationship, and curiosity/openness. Considering specific examples from my own teaching context, I reflect in Chapter One on the captivating and sensual quality of aesthetic experience, which can heighten attention by making us more receptive to the detail and uniqueness of others (animate or inanimate), provoking cognitive and emotional engagement. In Chapter Two I propose ways that aesthetic experience might provoke connections, making the world seem more alive and particular, but also drawing us into stronger relationships, helping to develop affinity and empathy with things (beings,

places, objects) that we encounter. In Chapter Three I explore possibilities for aesthetic experience to develop curiosity and openness to new perspectives in children and adults. In each chapter I reflect on the role documentation (itself an aesthetic process) can play in augmenting these aspects of radical listening that I discuss. A thread that runs throughout the inquiry is the proposal that viewing education as fueled by aesthetic encounters—a way of waking up to experiences and others so they become more vivid, more alive, more connected to us, more curious and worth exploring—has ethical implications. By ethics I mean how we take care of and feel responsibility for others, for everything beyond our self. In a hurried and distracted culture, in educational environments that prioritize individual interest, competition and outcomes, listening through aesthetic experience might bring us closer to and help us feel a greater sense of care and responsibility for *all* of those with whom we work, for the materials we use and to the *whole* of the world that we experience.

Narratives of Listening

While I have taught kindergarten for several years, I currently work as a Lead Teacher to facilitate research and inquiry with teaching teams from Junior and Senior Kindergarten and Grade One at an independent girls' school in a large urban centre. For over a decade our Junior School has undertaken an exploration of Reggio's pedagogical principles (as summarized above), interpreting them within our particular context and culture. We work collaboratively with a curriculum plan that

leaves room for children's ideas and questions to alter its path. My inquiry into the connection between listening and aesthetic engagement, springs from my experience teaching and researching in Reggio-inspired environments. I also write as a mother of two young children and with a background of study in the Fine Arts. My work as a Lead Teacher is a place of dynamic tension in which theory and practice, reflection and action continuously encounter and inform one another. It is my hope that this thesis unfolds in the same way. The form of this inquiry is scholarly but also interweaves elements of personal narrative, professional experience and poetic form.

I include pieces of pedagogical documentation as examples of *listening narratives* produced in collaboration with my colleagues. The documentation process is described below. These samples of collaborative listening are meant to make more vivid and real the questions I ask about listening and aesthetics. The documentation is inserted between paragraphs, as a pause in and amplification of the theoretical discussion. I have chosen pieces that I feel resonate with the writing and hopefully speak to the possibilities of radical listening through my points of focus. This is a strategy for me to breathe the experience, voices and questions of children and other teachers into my research. The documentation selected communicates primarily through visual language. I believe the form of some of these pieces explores ways that visual sensibilities and design concerns might relate to meaning. The documentation is thus a layer of my research into radical listening that is informed by aesthetics and visual sense.

Pedagogical documentation involves generating and reflecting on material that documents learning environments and events in process, such as, children's

conversations, encounters and creations. The recording tools include video, voice recorder, hand-written notes, photography and collections of graphic work and artifacts by children. Documentation is a way to inquire into the meaning and process of learning (Filippini, 2010). In our school we use documentation as a tool for planning and pedagogical research. We ask questions about what is happening with the children, what the work means and what we might do better or do next. Documentation can exist in various forms and states of formalization, for example, a teacher's rough notes written on a contact sheet of photos, a binder of printed pages that record daily events or, a series of panels designed and edited to narrate a significant event or project. In our teaching context documentation always aims to incorporate multiple points of view. The documentation included here has gone through multiple phases of analysis and synthesis with colleagues. In the interest of space, I have not always included the teacher interpretations and questions, selecting instead, narrative elements of the documentation that are relevant to my inquiry. In these cases I have tried to explain some of the context around those collegial discussions.

The pedagogical documentation that I include as narratives of listening is retrospective material; it was not produced for this thesis, but was created as part of a routine pedagogical practice at our school. I am citing and referencing this material as I do other secondary sources. I have obtained permission from the teachers involved in creating the documentation to take our previously-created work out of the context of our school and use it here as a reference. Teachers' names are thus cited and referenced as co-authors. In the case of the

children, I have replaced real names with pseudonyms. As well, I have obtained permission from parents whose children appear in the documentation. Please see Appendices A and B for samples of these letters of permission. This process of obtaining permission satisfies the Research Committee at our school. Because the material used in this research is retrospective, and consent to reproduce the material is already fully gathered, there were no human participants requiring an ethics review from a university panel.

CHATPER ONE

Attention and Aesthetic Experience

How carefully we attend to others is, I believe, a significant factor in radical listening. Attention to another calls on the quality of present-ness. Neuroscientist Seth S. Horowitz (2012) suggests that there are different levels of attention. The most basic kinds of attention involve quick, simple neural responses to stimuli (loud noises or hearing one's name). Paying attention (or active listening) requires a more concerted effort and is mediated by the dorsal cortex of the brain—an area responsible for complex processes such as computation (Horowitz, 2012). That deeper level of attention also means that one is able to filter out other stimuli in order to focus. In media-saturated, chaotic or rushed environments I find it especially difficult to sustain attention because competing stimuli or a feeling of pressure to "move on" pulls my focus in multiple directions. Unhurried and serene environments breathe space into consciousness, allowing better conditions for attention to develop. But it is interesting to note the effect of aesthetic experience on attention: consider the way a particularly beautiful violin performance pierces the bustle of a subway station, transfixing passersby. In this chapter I explore connections between aesthetic experience and attention. I begin with the particular sensitivity with which children encounter aesthetic aspects of their environment, including their tendency to interact with matter as if it is alive. Drawing on John Dewey's (1934/2005) ideas about aesthetic experience as primarily sensory, I

propose that vivid encounters and highly aesthetic experiences arouse present-ness and heighten attention *because* the senses are engaged in making meaning. Part of this process is attending to the dynamic or seemingly "alive" qualities of a material; occasionally I will refer to materials a having living qualities to maintain this aesthetic value of children's experience. As well I consider how aesthetic experience draws on sensory and cognitive processes simultaneously, and thus further sustains attention. I look at Dewey's (1910/1991) notion of concentration as a sustained form of attention. I also explore pedagogical documentation as an aesthetic process that increases attentiveness of adults towards children, promoting radical listening.

Aesthetic Encounters

Education begins with encounters. I have a memory of my daughter at nine months, on a warm day in June standing on our porch before the water table the first time I filled it up. Water in the bath was familiar to her, but here was water considered as an element separate from her body, contained in a blue basin, outside where the sunlight could play on its surface and through its form. She put her hands in and brought them out with surprise and delight. Then she repeated this action, slowing it down, holding her hands up to eye level, watching the water drain away and fall from her skin in bright sparkles. She tried it again, twisting her hands up and down this time, perhaps to change the path of the water as it ran, perhaps to consider how the water had its own will to return to the pool. She continued to place

her hands in and pull them out of the water, sometimes cupping one palm a little to capture some and giggling as it escaped. This intangible, enchanting "companion" was twinkling and mischievous.

It was a moment of acuity when my own perception slowed and focused in response to the magic of a new encounter. Water: seemingly lacking in substance and yet able to form into drops as it falls, able to hold light, to take on and change colour, to conform to any shape. Playing at a water table on a sunny day was only one way to know a material manifold in potential and properties, histories and metaphor. In this meeting my daughter found water as a substance with its own emerging personality. They played a game through their interactions, their dialogue, but also with the breeze, which brought a fresh green smell and made a play of light on the leaves of the trees overhead and thus on the water too. When her skin was wet it felt cooler in the spring air. The aesthetics of the experience were dynamic, relational, affected by and affecting multiple senses.

Rinaldi writes that children "possess the time of listening, which is not only time *for* listening but a time that is rarefied, curious, suspended, generous" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 66). Perhaps a child's way of listening originates in part from the thousand encounters of a new world. For a very young child, each day is like being a traveller in a strange land. The world is unfamiliar and rich with potential relationships and sources of meaning. I think about how awake I feel when I am travelling, how expansive a day seems because of the sense of possibility an unfamiliar place offers. For this reason, I realize I have something to learn from children about how to listen more acutely and with all my senses. Rinaldi (2006) suggests that, "children

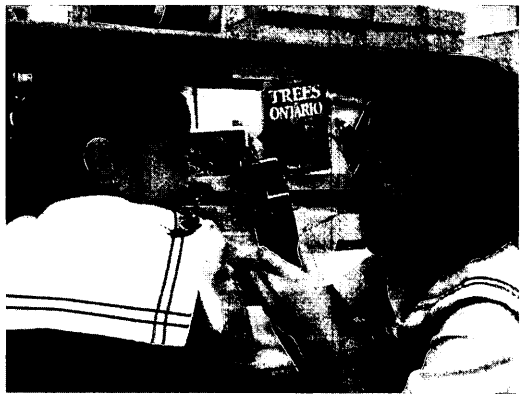
demonstrate an innate and extremely high level of perceptual sensitivity and competence which is polysemous and holistic" (p. 82). Children's way of listening is multisensory and thus highly alert and attentive, because all the senses are awake. Perhaps children's inclination to find multiple meanings and make connections in experience comes in part from their sensitivity to aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience provides a rich medium for such associations and interpretations. Where an adult might overlook a snail crawling on a leaf, a child is more likely to pick it up, let it crawl on her arm and marvel at the sensation.

The Encounter Senior Kindergarten, 2010

I think he likes my whole body. I think he's my BFF the way he's sticking to me.

I've never seen a snail as sticky as this.

This snail is not running out of energy.



He's so fat!

(Embrey, Evelyn & Murray, 2010)

John Dewey influenced the thinking of Loris Malaguzzi and other theorists in Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). In *Art as Experience,* Dewey (1934/2005) argues the significance of an experience that is aesthetic. For Dewey, "sense, as meaning so directly embodied in experience as to be its own illuminated meaning, is the only signification that expresses the function of the sense organs when they are carried to full realization" (p.22). Finding meaning or sense in sensation is the highest realization of sensory experience, Dewey proposes. What gives experience an aesthetic quality is that meaning arises through affect and sensation within that experience. Thus for Dewey aesthetic sense does not belong exclusively to the realm of artistic production; instead it is something innate to human experience and deeply embedded in the complexity of sensory and cognitive processes. This is the most direct kind of knowing as the "varied wonder and splendor of this world are made actual" in the "qualities" a person "experiences" (Dewey, p. 22). A non-aesthetic experience is purely "mechanical" and involves: "submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure" (Dewey, p. 43). I interpret aesthetic sense as bringing vitality and meaning to experience.

I find useful Dewey's ideas about how experience can be aesthetic. I have chosen the phrase aesthetic experience to describe experience in which meaning arises through affective and sensory process. This kind of experience exists in the substance and matter of everyday life and emerges, Dewey suggests (1934/2005), out of a desire for order and unity. Dewey proposes this is because all of life occurs

within a natural "rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union"; the recurring cycle of disorder and order is so fundamental to experience it becomes part of our consciousness and the "material out of which [one] forms purposes" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p.14). Aesthetic experience, according to Dewey (1934/2005), is not just sensation or encounter or emotion but a desire to look for harmony through the meaning found in vivid sensation and emotion. Aesthetics connects sensation and emotion with matter. In considering moments of acute perception I think about the greenness of the grass after a rain. In this case it is true that I perceive the qualities of an object in relation to the object itself; I am not just perceiving greenness or recognizing grass as object but am engaged in forming meaningful and emotional/aesthetic connections that relate to my memories of weather, seasons, grass, colour and its vibrancy under certain conditions, along with personal experience and emotion associated with those sensations. None of these elements can be separated in that moment of being struck by sensation. These subjective meanings are, Dewey proposes, "coordinated into a whole of vitality" (p.131). This sense of vitality is one of heightened attention.

Dewey's (1934/2005) view that aesthetic experience is located in vivid sensations suggests that sensory experience can be rich with meaning. To return to the example of my daughter at the water table, she was clearly enchanted, perhaps in part, because she needed to reconcile her new experience with her previous experience and memory of this substance, water. A moment in which one is fully alive and awake to experience brings a feeling of immediacy and also a sense, or meaning, to sensation. Being present and

attuned to sensory meaning connects past experiences (memories of grass that form part of its meaning to me, for example), as well as future projections, with the present moment. Dewey writes that animals live perpetually in this state: "The dog is never pedantic or academic; for these things arise only when the past is severed in consciousness from the present and is set up as a model to copy" (p. 18). Aesthetics brings continuity to experience and art in particular "celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what is now" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 17). Dewey goes on to say art creates a temporal union through its "vitality" and "active and alert commerce with the world." This union is a "stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing" (p. 17).

What the artist does, Dewey (1934/2005) posits, is select and organize sensory experience into an object that is not simply a replica of experience, but a reliving of experience that brings new meaning to it. He thus proposes that aesthetic pleasure in art is not artifice or superficiality but a move towards significance and a re-awakening that is intrinsically connected to reality. Artists search for relationship by selecting what is potent in experience, what has significance and value, editing out elements of experience that "confuse, distract and deaden" (Dewey, p. 192). If this is the case then the act of choosing may be a way to make the work seem more alive. Beauty is not, Dewey proposes, "some transcendent essence," but a "unique transcript of the energy of the things of the world" (p.192). This is similar in thought to what the poet, Victor Shklovsky, wrote: "Art exists in order to recover the sense of life, in order to feel objects, to make the stone *stoney*" (1996 p. 17-18). In exploring

possibilities for the ways that aesthetic experience can have a significant presence in schools and learning environments, I turn to Dewey's (1910/1991) writing on concentration, considering experiences and tasks that might heighten and sustain attention, revitalizing listening processes as a result.

Cultivating Attentiveness

> Concentration does not mean fixity, nor a cramped arrest or paralysis of the flow of suggestion. It means variety and change of ideas combined into a single steady trend toward a unified conclusion. Thoughts are concentrated not by being kept still and quiescent, but by being kept moving toward an object...Holding the mind to a subject is like holding a ship to its course; it implies constant change of place combined with unity of direction. (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 40)

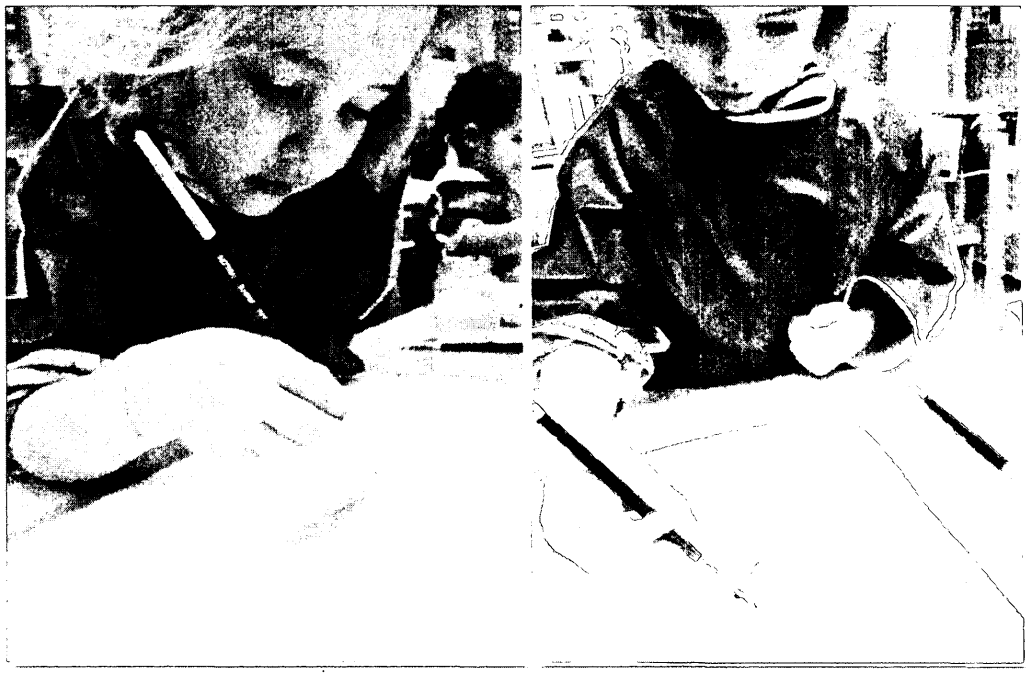
In *How We Think* (1910/1991), Dewey proposes that concentration develops not through "a direct appeal to thinking power" but through a meaningful calling or occupation that "furnishes the continuous axis about which [one's] knowledge...beliefs, and...habits of reaching and testing conclusions are organized" (p. 41). Dewey further argues that we hone our ability to execute "efficient performance" of such "callings" (p. 41) because the occupations themselves present us with a need for ongoing precision, attention and improvement. I interpret concentration in Dewey's sense as a form of sustained attention. One thing that I have found to sustain attention in children is purpose. Dewey offers that educators must find contexts or occupations that have "their own sufficient justification" for children and thus "present reflex influence upon the formation of habits of thought"

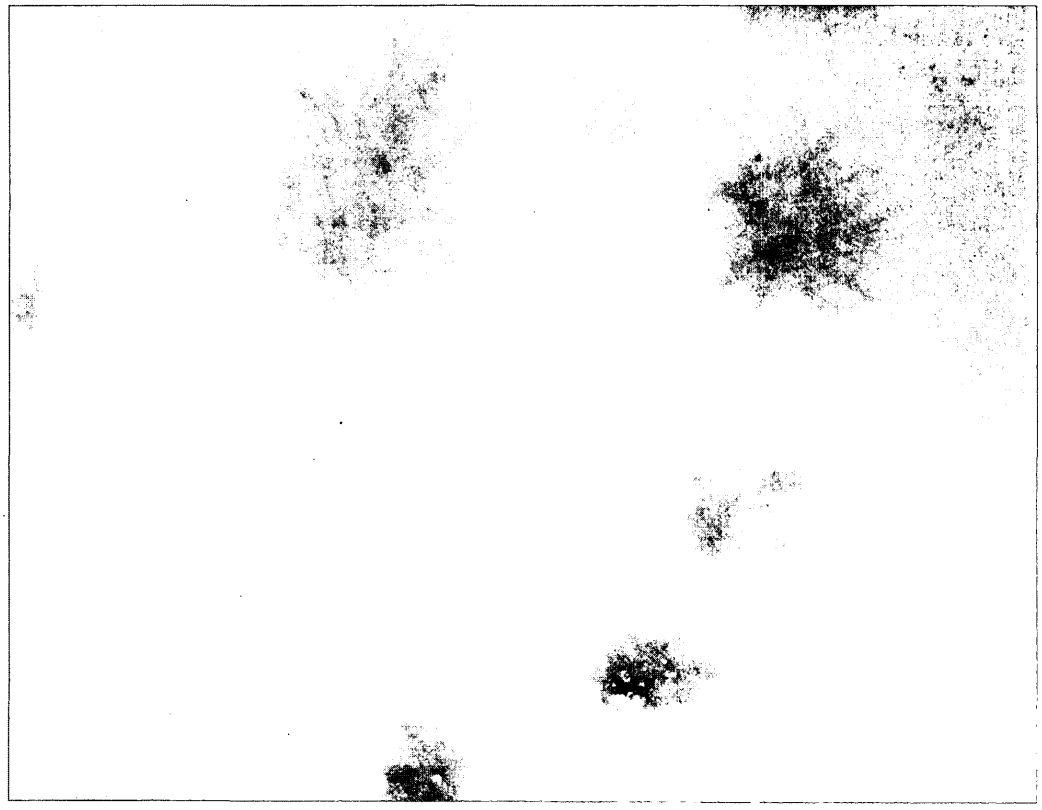
(1910/1991, p. 43). Where are such occupations to be found? In thinking about those activities that are highly motivating for many children and which engage them in forming "habits of thought" such as a desire for precision, efficiency and keen attention, I find there is almost always an aesthetic component to the task. Engaging with the natural world (such as studying animals, decaying matter or water, for example) can provide vivid sensory stimulation and generate a sense of wonder (a need to make sense of sensation) in children and adults. I have often seen children seek an aesthetic component to a task that was lacking one (such as creating a colour scheme with math manipulatives, doing a writing assignment with decorative letters, or humming as they work). This is perhaps a way children help themselves pay attention to a job that they don't find a "calling" in the way Dewey suggests. Allowing for an aesthetic component to assignments may be a way for children to attend with greater focus to their work because it summons fuller sensory engagement, as well as a sense of occupation.

The atelier in Reggio schools is a studio and laboratory for research and collaboration, a place of knowing through doing, which allows children many ways to represent, think about, and experiment with ideas through the senses (Vecchi, 2010). An atelier might have tools such as a microscope or computer, light and sound features, various tables, floor space for working, easels and multiple kinds of expressive materials for multisensory exploration (Vecchi, 2010). An atelierista approaches pedagogy from the perspective of art practice and process, not necessarily training in education (Vecchi, 2010). Vea Vecchi, an atelierista for many years in Reggio Emilia, describes aesthetics as "like a slim thread or aspiration to

quality that makes us choose one word over another, the same for a colour or shade, a certain piece of music, a mathematical formula or the taste of a food" (2010, p. 5). Choices can be made with greater care and attention when children come to know the qualities of materials and their expressive potential. In addition to honing their skills in using these materials (fine-motor control with a paintbrush for example), children gain formal knowledge of the material (how a fine soft brush articulates a thin, tremulous line or how a rough brush makes a bold, roughly expressive stroke).

There is a careful selection and use of expressive materials in Reggio and Reggio-inspired contexts (Vecchi, 2010). I have found that teaching children to use graphic materials, such as sketching pencils, fine-tipped pens, ink, charcoal, watercolour and clay, light and sculptural elements with care and intentionality allows them varied opportunities for expression and representation of ideas. There is also a strong aesthetic sensory component to these materials, both because of the marks and forms they make as well as the physical experience of using them. Watercolour applied to wet paper blazes across the page, seeping into to the fibres in billowing shapes, colliding with other colours to create new hues. The colour running across the water trails seems to have a will of its own, a personality. Children's desire to interact with moving paint heightens their attention to the experience and to the qualities of the material. Because the colour is not fixed but mutable—it changes with its interactions—it has a living quality. This is an aesthetic experience that is vibrant and relational.





(Embrey & Grzybowski, 2010)

Much has been written about how difficult it is to draw what we see, not just because of lack of technical skill but because we aren't really looking. Often when adults and children draw we fall back on echoes, images we hold in our mind of what something "should" look like. Matthew B. Crawford (2009) describes this experience as something that requires "you short-circuit your normal mode of perception, which is less data-driven than concept-driven. We have an idea of a thing that, in a sense, pre-constitutes the thing for us, prior to sensual experience" (p. 91). In a form of "empiricist shock therapy" (p.92), his drawing instructor turned a skeleton he was drawing on its end so he was forced to look at it anew. The process of representing the lines and forms in perspective was challenging for him because of the decoding required. While observational drawing is one way to see things with new eyes, much of art has the potential to help us sense a subject through experience, not only as a concept in our minds.

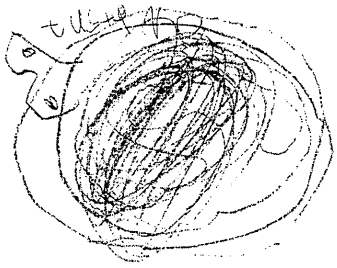
Matthew B. Crawford, a motorcycle mechanic, writes about knowing through doing from the perspective of fixing things. For Crawford (2009) handwork is an often over-looked form of research and thinking that develops through physical experience (what Dewey proposes is the basis for knowledge in *Art as Experience*, 1934/2005). At a time when the objects in our world require less and less manual intelligence or sensory know-how because there is a digital interface that seemingly does the sensing and thinking for us, it seems important that education cultivate opportunities for sensory knowledge, which has the potential to sharpen attentiveness (a function of listening). Consumerism, Crawford (2009) argues, "creates an ontology of narcissism:" that is, objects and devices should "answer to

our shifting psychic needs" (p. 65). Crawford (2009) suggests that agency, not autonomy, is the factor influencing how successfully one learns to fix, build or tend to things. Further, he asserts, learning a discipline such as mechanics, music, mathematics or a foreign language requires humility and a kind of obedience, an ability to accept and work with a reality that is external to the self. This acceptance is part of what I would call radical listening. Crawford gives the example of the musician who must submit to intractable facts that "do not arise from the human will...there is no altering them" (2009, p. 64). Attentiveness develops through a relationship with a system or reality that has its own codes and internal logical that we cannot change, or with something that has a living, mutable quality. There is, thus, a selflessness involved in perceiving and experiencing the reality with which we interact.

Certain intuitions and sensitivities to patterns can build up in the practitioner through experience, through the humility of work that Crawford describes. One can get better at attending to the concepts, discipline or material with which one works. This could apply to teachers working with children and also to children and adults working with a material, discipline or idea. Knowing through repeated experience with a particular kind of task creates a bank of knowledge that can become intuition and translate into clarity of perception, something that cannot be quantified in a book or mass-produced (Crawford, 2009). Crawford gives the example of system failures in motorcycles, whose source even sophisticated computer technology cannot accurately detect, while an experienced and careful mechanic often can. This developed intuition allows a mechanic, teacher, artist or any practitioner to act as a

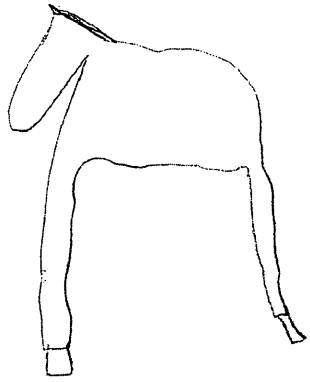
responsive researcher who is "not just passively receptive to data, but actively seeks it out" (Crawford, p.90). Because of his knowledge of "patterns of wear," Crawford's much more experienced mentor in this instance was able to see evidence of a problem that he "without the pertinent framework of meaning" (p.91) could not, though he was looking right at the symptom.

The evolution of a horse



version 1

Julie in JK quickly draws a horse with a red crayon. The teacher has noticed that her drawings are often rushed and challenges Julie to consider whether this is her best work. She hasn't been asked this before and she pauses to think...



version 2

The teacher invites Julie to find a picture of a real horse on the Internet. She likes this idea and tries drawing again using a photograph as a reference.

version 3

Inspired by her success, Julie decides she can improve her work even more in a third draft. Here she has added details such as a braided mane, saddle and two colours on the legs.

Junior Kindergarten, Oct 2011

(Embrey, Evelyn, & Murray, 2011)

The accumulation of sensitivity to matter is also an element of craftsmanship. Craftsmanship as an ethic and aesthetic of making things well (as opposed to a completely mechanized process) comes from a desire for perfection that can never quite be achieved by the human hand. As described in the story of drawing a horse above, this desire for perfection in drawing is certainly present, or can be cultivated, in children. Crawford (2009) quotes a colleague, Tom Hull who compared the way a craftsman might "advance his art" to the "self-correcting oscillations" (p. 13) of the Fibonacci sequence. It is human nature to want to get better and better through trial and error but never quite attain perfection. Crawford argues that learning to do something well "chastens the easy fantasy of mastery that permeates modern culture" (p. 17). While a craftsman-like attention to work may be expected of children in education, I have found concentration and the sense of meaningful occupation Dewey describes is rarely given a context or time to develop.

Attention to Meaning

In my teaching experience, observational drawing is a way of doing meaningful research with children by inviting them to slow down and pay closer attention to an aspect of their reality. Whether they are sketching their faces in the mirror or flowers in a vase children begin to see details they hadn't noticed at first. I have found flowers to be a highly motivating subject for girls and boys to draw. Often children want to smell and touch them, to bring them closer to their faces and marvel at the intricacy of design and variation in texture, shape and colour. When

encouraged to represent these details, the shape of a petal, the way a streak of colour runs along its middle, how one petal (because it curls away) seems smaller than the others, very young children will often persevere for long periods of time to capture this marvelous object in a graphic way. Their observations are sensory but also involve cognitive process such as spatial reasoning, awareness of pattern, symmetry, shape, tonality and proportion. Children are driven by the aesthetic elements of this work, delighted by rendering the details they observe. Perhaps things like pattern and symmetry in the natural world hint at a larger pattern of design and meaning in the world and this is also motivating and garners more careful attention.

Encountering a version of one's self in the mirror similarly provides an inspiring context to find the unity of direction to which Dewey refers. A face (especially one's own) is delightfully changing, expressive and captivating and yet it is also a mysterious representation of the self. The relationship between the highly aesthetic qualities of faces and the meanings they suggest make the act of looking more interesting. Being invited to capture this mutable object on paper can be an appealing purpose for concentration. Graphic representation can encourage slowing down and heightening of attention, especially when we have to grapple with the meaning of the thing we draw. If paying attention is in fact a highly cognitive process (as Horowitz suggests), then aesthetic experience can engage our awareness and attention in the complexity and meaning of experience.

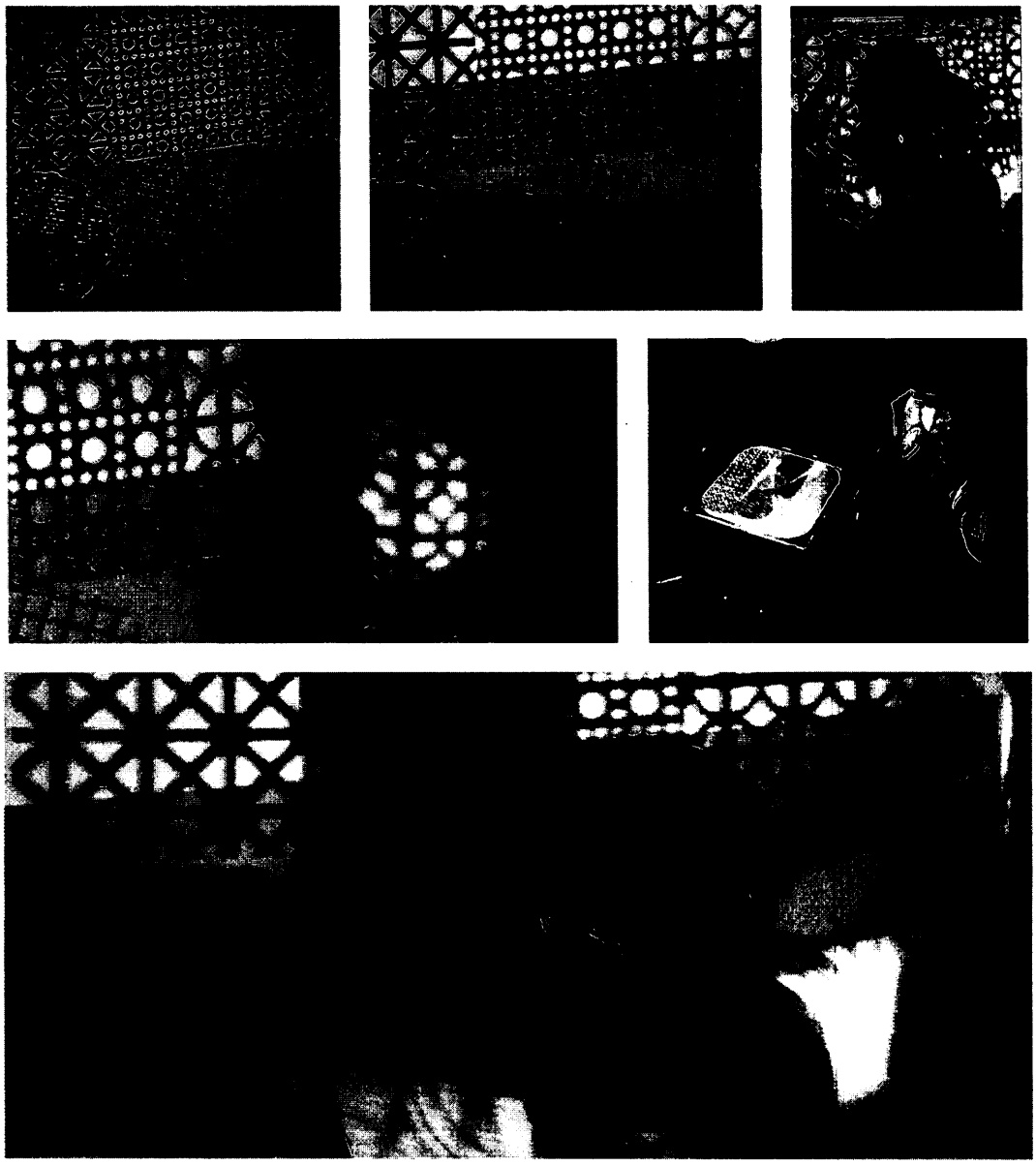
(Embrey, Grzybowski, Evelyn, & Murray, 2011)

Rinaldi (2006) suggests that listening is "sensitivity to the patterns that connect" (p.65). Gregory Bateson (1979, 1972) was an interdisciplinary thinker whose theories about epistemology and pattern influenced both Rinaldi (2006) and Vecchi (2010). Bateson (1979) sought and described the "pattern that connects" living things to each other. He asked, "What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you?" (Bateson, 1979, p. 7). Rather than separating living things into categories, Bateson (1979) was interested in finding patterns among living things to better understand them and their relationship within interconnected systems of life. Bateson (1972) suggested that art operates on the level of primary process and thus aids our ability to see the connections within a system. "What the unaided consciousness (unaided by art, dreams, and the like) can never appreciate is the *systemic* [sic] nature of mind" (Bateson, p. 145). Perhaps aesthetic expression is a way to encounter the

complexity of systems because it involves direct experience that arouses affect, sensation and also provokes cognition and grappling for meaning.

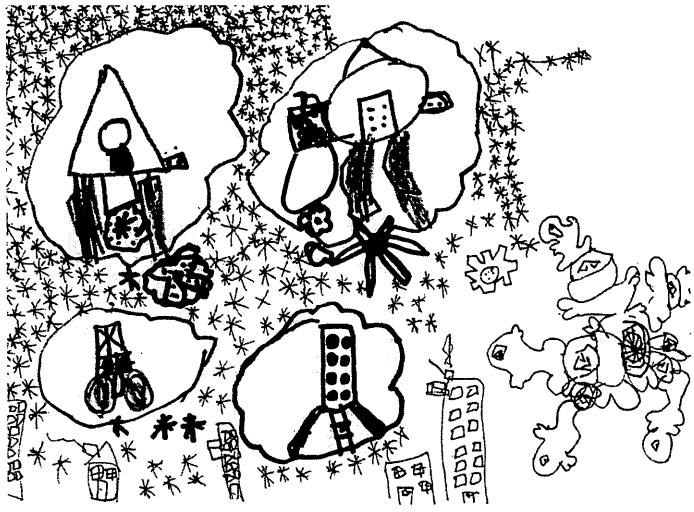
Bateson (1972) suggests that an artistic expression such as dance allows us to access messages that "would be falsified if communicated in words" (p. 138). Words used in creative ways also have their own potentiality. I argue that artist process is a way of tapping into aesthetic experience that can allow us to come to understand and also communicate our perceptions, invoking affect, sense and understanding. For this reason, I argue that aesthetic experience creates keen attentiveness. In fact, aesthetic experience may be essential to thinking. Dewey writes, "It cannot be asserted too strongly that what is not immediate is not aesthetic...We cannot grasp any idea, any organ of mediation, we cannot process it in its full force, until we have felt and sensed it, as much so as if it were an odor or a colour" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p.124). Children often have a sense of or intuition about things they experience, such as fog or the leaves changing colour, that hasn't been made conscious or explicit. They may seek an understanding of this sense when they "bump into" it. Environmental considerations by teachers can facilitate such collisions. For example a light room in which children explore the effect and interactions of light and shadow, such as scale, perspective, and translucency, offers children an opportunity to play with properties and effects of light that they may have only experienced in a fleeting way, or in a way they didn't allow for experimentation and focus. Manipulating light and shadow is a sensory, aesthetic opportunity to understand light better, to make better sense of it. As well, light and shadow are elements that

hold a mystery and meaning that garner attention through a sensory desire for understanding.

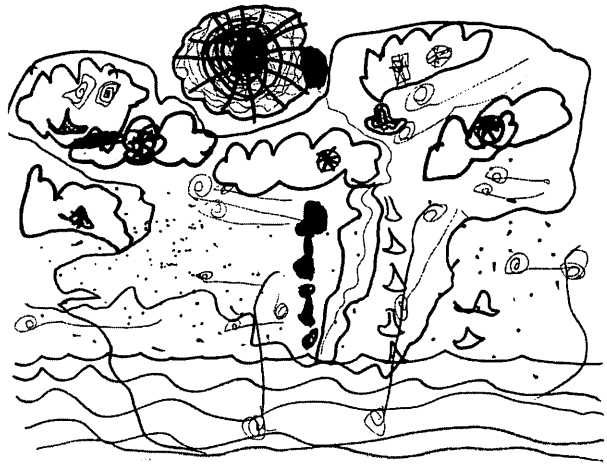


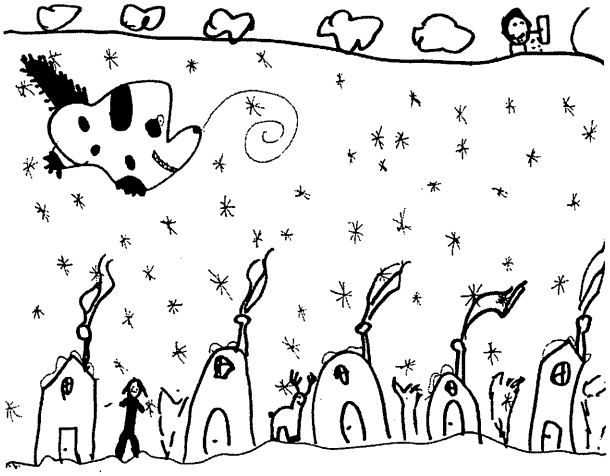
(Embrey & Grzybowski, 2012)

Vea Vecchi (2010) also suggests that aesthetic experience is an activator of both emotional and cognitive/intellectual process. Vecchi quotes philosopher Mauro Ceruti, who warns that art must not be sequestered in museums for it has enormous potential for creation of knowledge. He goes on to make the bold suggestion that "epistemology and aesthetics are synonymous" (Vecchi, p. 14). Vecchi (2010) argues that aesthetics does not exist solely within the domain of expressive and poetic disciplines such as visual arts or literature, but is a fundamental quality of human thought. Any attempt to take this quality away from a discipline such as science or mathematics, Vecchi (2010) suggests, strips that discipline of its full meaning and potential. Can an inquiry gain in value (not just enjoyment but in depth of understanding) when we encourage children to think about an idea through an aesthetic process? I am reminded of a project investigating the nature of structure in Grade One. Many avenues were researched by the children including roller coasters, pyramids, musical compositions, and crowds. One group of children was particularly captivated by the beauty and mystery of snowflakes. They wondered how snowflakes are born? How does their structure change from delicate and ornate to icy and compact (such as in a snowball)? As part of their research they "caught" snowflakes to observe in a microscope. Delighted by an individual snowflake's "rules" of symmetry and pattern but also its uniqueness, the children created wire-and-glass-bead models to represent them. They were given an opportunity to hypothesize through graphic models and with verbal explanations about the process of snowflake formation. I believe the detailed and complex drawings they produced reveal the children's ability to build sophisticated theories *through* aesthetic experience.



Snowflakes are made from snow and water. They are made in the clouds. There's a lake and water goes up to the clouds by the wind. The water sits in the clouds and when it snows, the snow goes on top of the water and makes a snowflake. It looks like a ball but when it falls it goes into a line and then an x and lines on the back. The cold makes the pattern. Snowflakes are all different, maybe because the clouds are all different shapes. Different shaped clouds have different shaped snowflakes.





As teachers we are curious about how the qualities of snow and snowflakes may have influenced the style of the children's drawings. Their drawings reveal a sense of calm and order. Both of these drawings, made at separate times by different children have patterns in the layout of the houses. The also both delineate the sky where the clouds are as a separate place from the rest of the landscape, perhaps suggesting a horizon or also possibly an idea that up in the clouds it is a different zone or region with different conditions.

Snow comes from the clouds, its little pieces of them. Its kind of icy water because they melt easily, not as cold and hard as ice but softer and warmer. In the summer the clouds change into cotton balls which melt into rain. When the snow falls the snowflakes are made into a shape by cloud. When you lie down you see pictures in the sky, in the clouds and snow falls like the picture. If a cloud looks like a dog the snowflake has a fur pattern. If a cloud is shaped like an animal the snowflake might have lots of tails on it.

(Embrey & Hislop, 2010)

Paying Attention to Children

> The significance and use of this observational approach and photographic documentation cannot be fully understood if viewed only in terms of pedagogical tradition; they should also be seen in relation to the artistic processes, where communication is often constructed using language that is metaphorical and poetic. (Vecchi, 2001, pp. 159-160)

I feel that the skill of paying attention and its relationship to aesthetic experience also has implications for how we imagine the role of the teacher in the context of radical listening. Amelia Gambetti, who worked as a teacher in Reggio preschools for several decades from their inception, once remarked: "You need to capture your attention and the attention of the children" (conference presentation, 2009). I find this a provocative idea. Yes we seek to capture the attention of the children, but how do teachers capture their own attention? Teaching young children can at times feel like one has fallen into a turbulent river in which it is difficult to keep one's head above water, let alone analyze the source and pathway of each eddy and current.

Documentation is one strategy for taking the time to pause and pay attention to what we do as teachers, as well as to come to know better the children with whom we work. There is an aesthetic element to documentation that other forms of assessment are often lacking. Documentation can be done through video, voice recordings or photography, which I find automatically draw multiple senses into our interpretations. We are looking for different things when we document, than we are when we are doing a literacy assessment such as a running record. Documentation

is an opportunity to pay attention to how children feel, to ideas they bring to an experience, to questions they have. It is a way to attend to their competencies and strategies for learning. As well when we choose to interpret with teachers whose background and training is artistic, they often perceive aesthetic elements and record things in aesthetically sensitive ways. I have found this when I work with our art teacher, Kathleen Grzybowski. She favours visual language to deconstruct and reconstruct an event. Her sensitive photographs communicate emotion, movement and joy. She also brings an awareness of graphic design as a language to communicate meaning. Vecchi writes, graphic designers remind us "visual language must be a blend of metaphorical synthesis and knowledge of the elements of perception and technical competency" (2010, p. 159).

Documentation can be a way to give value to the whole child because it is about assessing the meaning of her experience, in that particular moment being observed, not only in relation to the curriculum (Rinaldi, 2006). Rather than measuring a child solely against certain standards and outcomes, documentation offers a way to be attentive to other important aspects such as a child's relationships, imagination, desire, humour, and empathy. I argue one of the reasons documentation holds this possibility for meaning is because it is itself an aesthetic process. Attending to children through photography, looking carefully at their drawings, or listening to all their words (not just their answers to our questions) is an aesthetic process and a way of attending to and valuing aesthetic experience. To listen in this way is, I argue, radical listening.

(Grzybowski, Evelyn, & Murray, 2012)

Through the years of meetings in which teachers at our school have shared these various forms of documentation I have found people increasingly inclined to record and thus value sensory and emotional experiences of children and the aesthetic aspects of their classroom. Rinaldi suggests that paying attention to these aspects of vitality is important: "As teachers we must listen to and try to capture the musicality of the classroom" (conference presentation, 2008). The use of design strategies and poetic expression in documentation is a way of enhancing communicative properties and meaning, but it is also a way to pay attention to the

children's sensibilities. In the Reggio Children book *The Languages of Food* (Cavallini & Tedeschi, 2008), the authors describe the process of children collaborating with gardening experts to create a community garden. The book reveals tremendous sensitivity by the adults, conveyed in the choices of typography and layout, and inclusion of children's thoughts and drawings. Photographs honour the process and sensations of the children as they explore gardening and various vegetables. There are photographs, for example, of children pulling apart, smelling, and arranging pieces of a cabbage on a light table. The relationship between the children and garden is described in this way:

> Thanks to their instinctive empathy with the natural world, the children imagined the garden as a living space that requires care and attention, and experiences emotion and sensations, a place of possible relationships between children and nature and among the natural elements themselves, which seem to reveal secret and intriguing communicative abilities based on a delicate language of colours and smells. (p.29)

The advantage of allowing aesthetic experience to have value in education (both for children and adults) is that we are able to create "kinds of knowledge not based uniquely on information" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 6). Vecchi argues that there is a "border zone of tension and vicinity...between rational and imaginative, between cognitive and expressive" ways of knowing (2010, p. 6). She proposes that allowing these kinds of thinking to coexist creates a productive tension that can "bring a greater degree of completeness to thinking" (p. 6). The risk of documentation lies in making interpretations or inferences that may be false (and who is to know if they

are false?). Working as a reflective practitioner in this way requires engaging in a great deal of complexity. How can a teacher really be sure about what is meant by a particular child in his or her words or drawings? As Dahlberg and Moss write, "This kind of listening must go beyond the need to explain or define an Other, beyond the indignity of speaking for the Other, and it must admit polyphonic interpretations of what is taking place" (2009, p. xxv).

In stretching ourselves to interpret children's experience through documentation we are also able to be more attentive to them, hopefully coming closer to their point of view, feeling empathy and respect for their struggles and their competencies but also acknowledging and coming closer to their aesthetic experience. Instead of teachers following a script of contrived behaviors, on the lookout for preconceived expectations, theirs can be a metacognitive process that requires the ethical virtue of listening: being attentive to each child in each encounter, for every experience in which human beings and materials are in relationship, has factors and consequences that are unpredictable, unknowable and changing. As Crawford (2009) suggests, "if the occasions for the exercise of judgment are diminished, the moral-cognitive virtue of attentiveness will atrophy" (p. 101). Perhaps one of the most powerful ways to re-examine what is known and assumed about listening is to pay attention to and make visible the heightened and multisensory ways that children listen. Along with artists, they may offer adults a culture of listening that awakens new possibilities for how we all listen.

CHAPTER TWO

Affinity, Relationship and Aesthetic Encounter

> In a flower there is the meaning of life, and in the relationship with a flower there is the search for the meaning of life.
> (Carlina Rinaldi, 2006, p. 118)

I find that children's keen, multisensory way of listening is predicated on a strong emotional and aesthetic engagement with the material world; they are often listening with love, with an elevated yearning for connection. Rinaldi (2006) offers the insight that children seek relationships as a way of finding meaning and understanding because "they are biologically predisposed to communicate, to exist in relation" (p. 66). I find children's desire for relationship transcends the boundaries and dualities that adults might perceive, such as animate/inanimate. Children will not only seek relationship with animals, but will also give life to non-living things (I think of my son at three longing to hold the moon and saying good night to his rock collection before bed). In this chapter, building on the idea of attentiveness or a sense of immediacy in aesthetic engagement, I further examine the potential of aesthetic experience to bring us into relationship with our environment, considering ways that aesthetic experience infuses listening with empathy and care. I draw connections between Martin Buber's (1923/1970) ideas about highly attentive listening relationships, which he describes as I-Thou (I-You) relationships, and aesthetic experience. Might aesthetic engagement and artistic process help us to become better acquainted with the matter, ideas and beings that we encounter by

provoking a more immediate, reciprocal and caring relationship with them? What is the possible effect and process of intensifying relationships in this way? How do reciprocity and affinity play out in education in terms of material and environmental considerations? As I pursue the emotional register and relational aspects of aesthetic engagement I also consider Vea Vecchi's (2010) notion that finding empathy in learning allows a "beat of life" (p. 8) to thread connections and generate ideas, wondering if in fact the beat of life is what we seek in radical listening?

Listening with Love

> I remember Good Night Moon (Brown, 1947/1991) at bedtime. The cozy room in the pictures, a fireplace and socks drying. The comforting repetition of words. *Good night room, goodnight moon.* I remember my love of objects, the stuffed animals on my bed, the simple pleasure of knowing their names, a natural inclination towards animism. *Good night lights and the red balloon.* Sometimes I made paper hats for each one of my dolls and animals and gave them tea. The creatures I beheld each night before I entered my dreams. *Good night stars, good night air.* There are rituals of love that sew us into the fabric of home, of time. *Good night noises everywhere.*

The psychoanalyst, D. W. Winnicott (1971/2005) describes play as a creative act common to adults and babies alike, found in both the simple gestures a baby might make to explore her mother's face or an object, and an adult's way of enjoying beauty and artistic production (p.143). For Winnicott play leads to cultural experience; "the place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment"

(1971/2005, p. 135). He writes that the act of playing with a toy or appreciating a work of beauty is about encountering that object in a subjective way that gives even something familiar a feeling of newness: "Every detail of the baby's life is an example of creative living. Every object is a 'found' object" (1971/2005, p. 136). Winnicott writes, "Everything physical is imaginatively elaborated, is invested with a first-time-ever quality" (1971/2005, p. 136).

I find resonance with Winnicott's description of creativity (as a way of "finding" objects) and the idea I have proposed of aesthetic experience. I interpret Winnicott's (1971/2005) "potential space" that exists between an individual and an object/other as a potential for acuity of feeling and a sense of care that is realized through aesthetic experience. Aesthetic encounters can infuse our perception with "a first-time ever quality," as Winnicott proposes for creativity, that makes us care about what we experience. His description of a baby exploring a mother's face is certainly an aesthetic experience. It would seem that the role of imagination in this case is a kind of emotional/cognitive investment the baby has in finding meaning. In describing the role of the atelier (art studio) in Reggio, Vecchi (2010) writes that it represents "an attitude of care and attention for the things we do, a desire for meaning," which promotes "curiosity and wonder; it is the opposite of indifference and carelessness, of conformity, of absence of participation and feeling" (p. 5). She suggests that artists and children alike have a "completely new way of seeing" (2010, p. 114) when they experience or observe the world. For Vecchi there is a clear connection between a sense of care and aesthetic experience.

The notion of aesthetic relationship as a potential space that exists between two entities is echoed in philosopher Martin Buber's work *I and Thou*. For Buber (1923/1970) it is common for people to have relationships in which an individual objectifies and distances herself from another, so that the other remains an object, or something held as a fixed idea within her mind. He calls these I-It relationships (Buber, 1923/1970, p. 53). However, Buber proposes that it is possible to listen to another in a way that is immediate and affirms the specificity of a particular encounter. Such a relationship, which he calls I-You,[1] is participatory, it is about the space and time connecting the two. Buber (1923/1970) describes the way he can contemplate a tree in its scent, movement, colour, size, details of outline, its "infinite commerce with earth and air" (p. 57) but that in this contemplation the tree "remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition" (p.58). The tree remains an It. It is also possible, "if will and grace are joined," to be "drawn into a relation" (58) with the tree that involves what he calls "exclusiveness," what could perhaps be understood as exchange of an acute specificity. This relation does not negate all that was perceived in contemplating the tree: "There is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparable fused" (p. 58).

Buber's conception of an I-You relationship is one of absolute physical immediacy in which we encounter another with full present-ness, or as he calls

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[1] In Walter Kaufmann's 1970 translation of *I and Thou* he has chosen to translate the German *Du* to *You* instead of *Thou*. Kaufmann argues that *You* is closer to the common usage of *Du* as a personal, informal way of addressing another (p. 14). His reasoning makes sense to me and so I use his version here.

it, exclusiveness. This idea of present-ness in an encounter suggests to me a sensory and embodied way of experiencing much like aesthetic experience as I have described it in the previous chapter. An object, conceived of as an object with an "aggregate of qualities" belongs to the past tense and "the world of ideas" (Buber, 1923/1970, p. 65). The I-You relationship is one of love, which he describes not as a feeling but a force—through which we have a relationship of exclusiveness:

> Love is a cosmic force. For those who stand in it and behold in it, men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness; and the good and the evil, the clever and the foolish, the beautiful and the ugly, one after another become actual and a You for them; that is, liberated, emerging into a unique confrontation. Exclusiveness comes into being miraculously again and again—and now one can act, help, heal, educate, raise, redeem. Love is responsibility of an I for a You. (Buber, 1923/1970, pp. 66)

Embedded in Buber's notion of love is responsibility, an ethical relationship with another. In his description love is the basis for ethical action. In order to teach or help another one must first see that person as an actuality, within the specificity of encounter. Is it possible that aesthetic relationships are infused with love, or at least affect, and this is what heightens their vivacity and immediacy? Being in love or feeling strong positive emotions can also heighten one's awareness of aesthetic sensations.

Buber (1923/1970) suggests that our desire for I-You encounter is fundamental: "the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles" (p. 78). He proposes that the yearning for I-You relationships originates in our prenatal life with our mother, a world of "pure natural associations" (Buber, p.

77). Once born, we become engaged in a process of making our "reality...by seeing, listening, feeling and forming. It is in encounter that creation reveals its formhood" (Buber, p. 77). The idea that empathy and love are fundamental to growth, something we seek from our mothers, resonates with a pedagogy of listening. When we consider that a baby does not simply wish to be cared for but also to *know* its mother, to encounter her as a being, to have a relationship with her, it highlights our fundamental search for relationship. Buber (1923/1970) points to reciprocity as a force that is vital to relations: "Our students teach us, our works form us...How we are educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity" (p. 67). Reciprocity can be interpreted then as a desire to change, and at the same time, be changed by, another.

Buber considers art as ultimately an act of turning a You (that which is encountered through love) to an It. And yet, he suggests, the *It* holds a creative potential to become a *You* again when encountered by another:

> This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being...Such work is creation, inventing is finding. Forming is discovery. As I actualize I uncover. (Buber, 1923/1970, pp. 60-61)

I'm not sure I agree with Buber that art turns a You into an It. The dynamic and relational aspect of aesthetic experience seems to me to be fundamentally reciprocal. What is interesting to me in his depiction

of art making is that the subject (the thing being made into art) has desire, it "*wants* to become a work."

Reciprocity with Material

What happens when we are open to being changed by the material we work with, if we view the material as if it were alive? This sense of relationship with matter is much like Reggio-inspired educator, Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi's (2010) notion of an intra-active pedagogy in which material is not considered passive but has agency and is part of a complex web of intra-acting forces. All elements: discourses, materials, ambient spaces, organisms are "immanent" (2010 p. 29) to each other in an educational experience, according to Taguchi. She suggests that thinking about things having immanence means, "there is no hierarchical relationship between different organisms (human and non-human) and the material world" (p. 15). Instead of seeing material as passive, we might consider instead the materials as exerting a force on us (Taguchi, 2010). Perhaps considering the potential of these intra-acting forces requires us as teachers to find a different way of looking at/listening to materials.

Taguchi (2010) relates a story of boys using sticks as weapons in the playground of a preschool in Stockhom. Rather than tell them they should not use sticks in this way, a student teacher invites them to bring their sticks inside. In this new context the boys become interested in making a collection and bring more diverse forms such as large branches with leaves. They examine them but also

through play make new proposals, such as animating the branches and giving them personas. The teacher offers materials (shiny bits of paper for example) to augment the personification that has begun; the sticks are thus transformed into characters. Taguchi (2010) suggests that focus in education can in this way be on the relationships that occur among elements such as discourses, materials and beings, which constitute each other through relationship. What is significant as well, she proposes, is that each of these agents is in flux, continuously shifting in meaning. Taguchi (2010) suggests that the role of documentation is to try to view the relational waves of interference in a situation (p. 50). When we freeze moments through documentation we can examine the relationships at play, acknowledging that these traces represent a cross-section of an event, subjectively recorded. She writes:

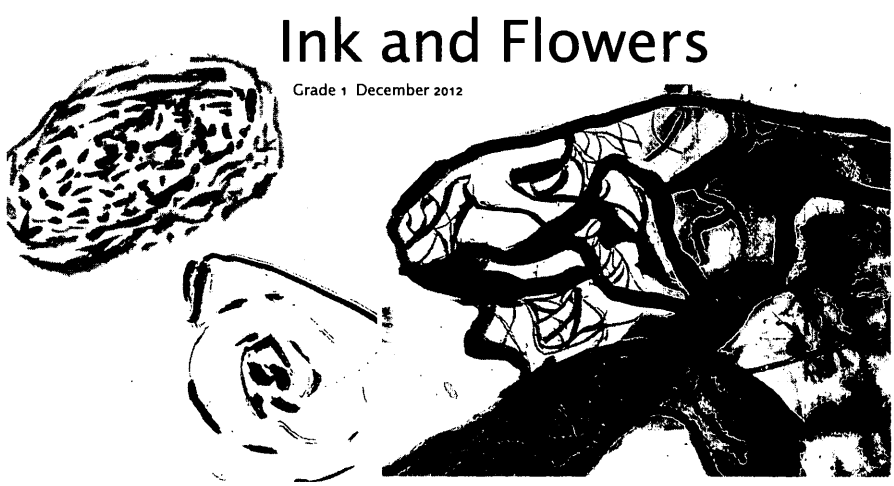
> For the teachers, the focus shifts from being exclusively preoccupied with the individual children's cognitive knowledge constructions or the dialogue between the children, to the learning event taking place *in-between* the child and the material in the...event of learning. (Taguchi, 2010, p. 35)

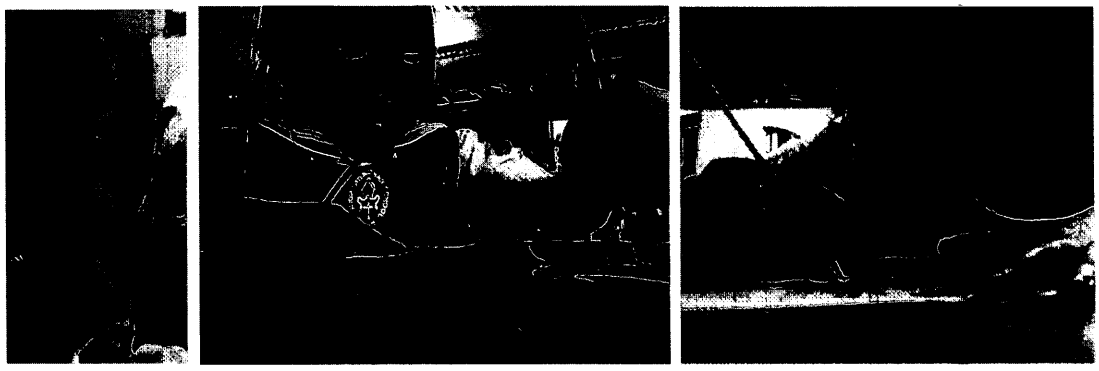
Indeed materials can have shifting meanings as well as possibilities for transformation (composition and decomposition) depending on context and conditions. Light is ephemeral, intangible and inviting, shadows can be dramatic and playful, suggesting narratives and metaphor. Clay is mutable but also dries as we interact with it. Materials can carry cultural meanings as well. For children in a northern mining town, stones have other meanings and associations than for children in a large urban centre. In Reggio Emilia material, environments, ideas and people are often referred to as having

identities (Vecchi, 2010), which suggests that their qualities are mutable and subjective, and have an impact on those who use them. Vecchi (2010) writes: "materials can allude to realities—re-evoking, narrating or representing them in personal multi-sensorial memory processes, connections of a sensory character" (p. 32).

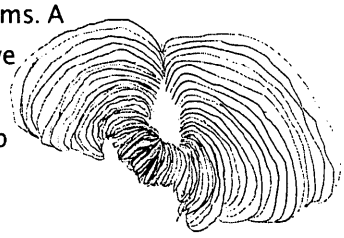
Vecchi (2010) gives the example of colour and how its potential is stripped when it is spoken about as a simple category (red, yellow, blue). Children may be asked to mix primary colours because it is a "vaguely scientific, easily reproducible technique" (Vecchi, p. 30), but Vecchi argues for opportunities that allow colours to "express their different identities in complex, subjective relationships with children" (p. 30). Colours have a rich expressive and communicative capacity that can be elicited through experience and experimentation. Vecchi writes:

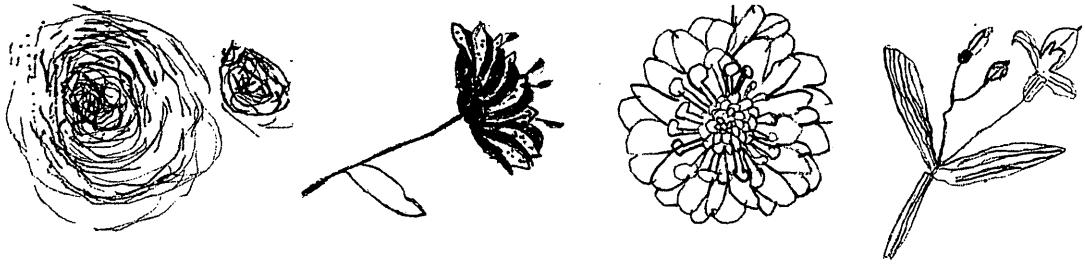
> "A certain shade of yellow changes if the size of the area it covers changes; if an object is rubber or velvet or satin; if a yellow is juxtaposed with a similar shade of colour or with a complementary one; or placed in a particular quality of light." (2010, p. 30)





India ink is a striking medium. When applied with a brush it has a jagged impenetrable blackness that is bold and expressive on white paper. On the other hand, drawing with fine pointed sticks changes the way ink speaks. Now the lines are quivering and delicate. The children seem startled when they make a stroke that is so precise and this slows them down. At they same time they are allured by the flowers we have brought into the art studio. The marks the children make in ink have an affinity with the elegant forms of the lilies, carnations and chrysanthemums. A new conversation begins between material and child. For forty-five minutes this normally boisterous Grade One class is completely captivated by their task, their attention riveted by the relationship between ink and flowers.





(Embrey, Grzybowski, & van Veghel, 2012)

In my teaching experience, developing sensitivity to the potential relationships among and meanings of material has involved us as teachers becoming more aware of and in tune with the qualities (emotional, physical, political, dynamic) of the materials themselves. If teachers recognize the richness and complexity that offering new possibilities (different kinds of paint, applied with different tools, for example) might bring they can offer these materials with greater intentionality and awareness of the relationships that might be provoked, also helping to increase such awareness in children. Vecchi (2010) writes: "The size, shape, colour, grain and surface quality of paper are not neutral" and we "should not be indifferent to any of these" (p. 111) qualities. Also the value of the material is important; cheap paints, of the variety found in some "educational" catalogues for example, look and feel very different from those available in art stores, not to mention the differences between watercolour, acrylic and oil paints. Giving children choice of materials, conveying at the same time the preciousness of those resources, provokes relationship and affect and encourages children to take responsibility for the materials they use. Vecchi suggests "small gestures of care and attention, like illustrating the potential of a tool with children, or letting children choose the size of paper or where they would like to sit are all elements predisposing children to work willingly, concentrate and feel pleasure" (2010, p. 111).

I have also noticed the way teachers can transfer an aesthetic of care for materials through their attention to display, organization and selection of resources. I find this is a way of listening more carefully to the environment. By organizing and preparing materials carefully (attending to size, texture, colour, for example) we as teachers are giving a message about our relationship with matter, its communicative potential and importance. Choice is also a way to heighten affect for children. When children are allowed to select elements such as the size of brush, fineness of pen, size of paper or are allowed to mix and experiment with hues, tints and shades of paint they are being invited into a more complex and sensitive relationship with the material. As well, discussions with children about the properties and emotional, aesthetic qualities of materials can sensitize them to the possibilities of those materials. The Grade Ones I work with had a conversation about the identity of different colours. The children noticed that people respond to each colour in unique ways:

> All of the colours are different things. Some are peaceful, some are actions.
> Blue is peace and quiet, when you look at the sky it is blue.
> Coral is a special colour, like orange but specialer.
> Black makes me feel excited because when the sun shines on it, it is hot. It makes me feel all the colours are mixed together.
> Blue reminds me when I'm mad to be happy.
> White makes me think of how the sun could make the clouds very bright.
> Green makes me think of school.

What is interesting to me about considering material as having agency is that this attitude is in tune with children's propensity to feel a strong emotional

connection to matter and objects. Vecchi gives examples of children's "gestures of solidarity" (2010, p. 116) with matter (both living and non-living) such as a girl who made a shelter for violets from the strong wind, or a boy who picked up a rose from the ground and laid it on a wall to sleep. These are common observations in our school as well. The kindergarten children, for example, love to draw pictures and write notes for their pets and post them in view for the fish or bunny to see. Vecchi (2010) asks: "Should we only smile and hurriedly write off" these attitudes "as infantile phases to be superseded? Or should we not instead support this tenderness and care for other lives flowing by our sides?" (p. 116). Vecchi goes on to propose that this behavior represents a need for "*concreteness*, [sic] which has relations as its basis, an instinct that over time can become awareness, environmental and ecological" (p. 116). This idea of concreteness has echoes with Buber's notion of exclusiveness. If children are encouraged to feel empathy for materials, objects, animals and ideas, to care deeply about all that they experience in school, is aesthetic experience not laying the foundation for more radical listening and meaningful learning?

Listening for the Beat of Life

I argue that the closeness or sense of affinity children can have with animals or other elements of their environment can also be seen in their relationship with ideas and subject matter. I have observed in studies with children as varied as ants, the extinction of dinosaurs or the meaning of math, that children often have

intuitions that are remarkably close to current knowledge about that subject, or that resonate with ways that artists or philosophers have investigated such topics. Vecchi (2010) remarks, "Children's intelligent intuitions, including those on scientific topics, are generated by the particular sensibility they have for the beat of life" (p. 116). Vecchi writes that if we are able to support and respect the natural empathy children feel, the knowledge that is constructed might be "not only more ethical and more based on solidarity but capable of a broader world vision" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 116).

When the municipal schools in Reggio were first being established, Loris Malaguzzi made a choice to ensure that all preschools in Reggio Emilia opened up to the presence of an atelier/art studio and atelierista/artist-teacher (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). Malaguzzi emphasized that the whole school "environment must be set up so as to interface the cognitive realm with the realms of relationship and affectivity" (Malaguzzi, 2012, p. 45). Malaguzzi describes the atelier as a place that "generates complexity and new tools for thought," and promotes "rich combinations and creative possibilities among the different (symbolic) languages of children" (2012, p. 49). Aesthetic experience and artistic process are ways to activate and connect human intelligence with emotion and experience. Vea Vecchi (2010) suggests that aesthetics brings things into relationship so that we may "sense how things dance together with one another" (p. 15). I have found that offering children opportunities to engage with aesthetic elements that support their inquiry into topics of formal learning from the curriculum can bring a new life to projects. I return to the example from Chapter One of children examining the concept of structure in Grade One by studying snowflakes. They delighted in trying to collect snowflakes outside

on black paper, watching with magnifying glasses as their intricate form dissolved quickly into the paper. The beauty, mystery and ephemerality of a snowflake generated strong interest as well as a sense of care in the girls.

What is math?

Susan Hislop, Justine Montgomery, Kerri Embrey
December 2011

In September the Grade One teacher, gave the girls a math survey to gauge their confidence in mathematics. Their initial comments were that they didn't know what math was. She decided the girls needed further probing to raise their consciousness of what they do, in fact, know about math. Implicit understanding can be difficult for to articulate and so they were encouraged to draw their ideas as well.

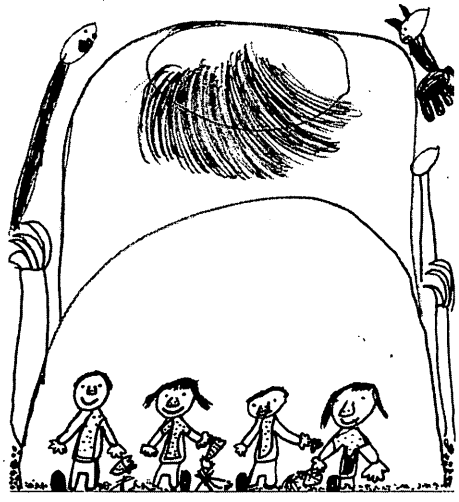
THE EGYPTIANS INVENTED MATH TO COUNT THEIR PYRAMIDS.

MATH COMES FROM CHINA. THE KING INVENTED NUMBERS.

MATH WAS INVENTED BY ONE PERSON FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.

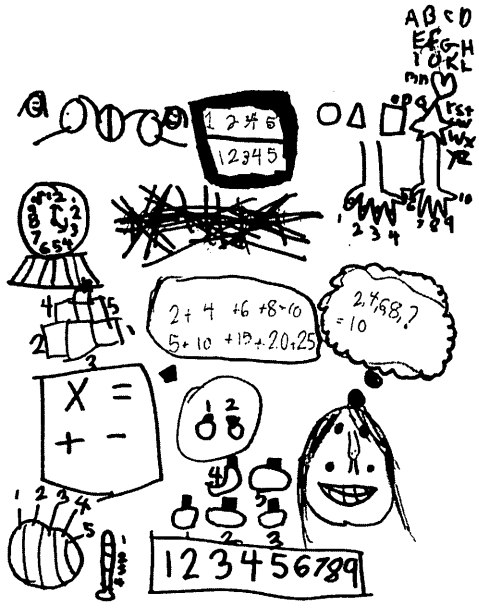
MATH IS WHEN YOU TRY AND FIGURE SOMETHING OUT BUT IT GETS HARDER AND HARDER AND IN THE END YOU FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANS.

CAVE MEN NEEDED TO SHARE FOOD SO EVERYONE GOT THE SAME. THEY INVENTED NUMBERS.



A SCIENTIST INVITED MATH TO EARTH FROM A LONG TIME AGO.

MATH COMES FROM YOUR IDEAS. DIFFERENT COUNTRIES HAVE DIFFERENT NUMBERS. IN THE OLDEN DAYS 2 WAS LIKE II.

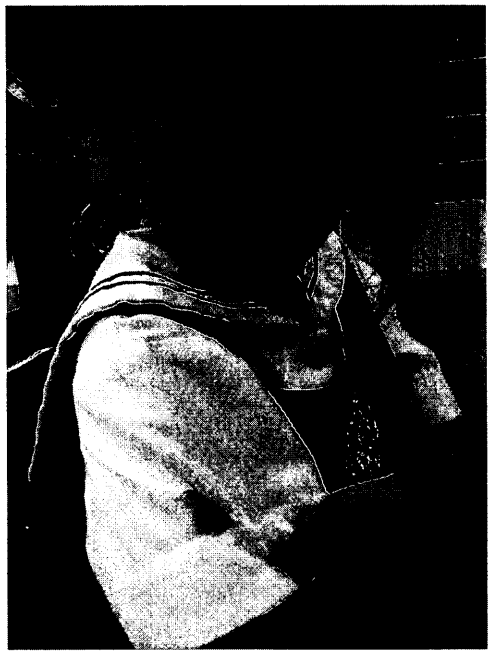


(Embrey, Hislop, & Montgomery. 2010)

Reggio schools view inquiry as deeply relational, emerging from a very sensitive kind of listening to life, to others and to materials: this listening does not push aside feelings (Rinaldi, 2006). Coming closer to a subject involves aesthetic (emotional and sensory) engagement with a subject. Vecchi (2010) explains that the act of drawing gives "the eyes lenses of solidarity," which "confers on drawings and other forms of representation...a particular kind of sensibility and originality, which would rarely be found otherwise" (p. 7). The empathy that aesthetic engagement feeds, also has a magnetizing quality, pulling us toward the subject, inducing greater attentiveness and at the same time producing an energy or sense of vitality in research. Vecchi suggests that "an empathetic attitude, the *sympathy* or *antipathy* [*sic*] towards something we do not investigate indifferently, produces a relationship" and injects "a 'beat of life' into explorations" (2010, p. 7). Tapping into this beat of life often "solicits intuitions and connections between disparate elements to generate new creative processes" (Vecchi, p. 8). The proposition here is that valuing subjectivity and affect by offering aesthetic experience injects projects with a living, vibrating quality.

Another way to think about the task of drawing a subject such as a flower is the sense of care and emotion that this work might engender in children. Which objects are chosen for sketching (or any other kind of representation) and why? The question of what tasks and materials are offered to children is one that depends greatly on how much value is placed on both aesthetics and affect in learning. Do we listen for what the children care or have questions about? Do we as teachers care about the content of our class inquiries? If expressive and aesthetic materials and

processes are viewed as only useful for artwork then their potential to aid other kinds of inquiry may be lost. While certain aesthetic choices and processes of aesthetic engagement can enhance receptivity and listening, caring about a subject or material is also highly motivating for children. I find that an emotional connection to an investigation fuels aesthetic sensitivity and fosters cognitive growth. When children then have a chance to explore a subject they really care about through an aesthetic process, their sense of connection and engagement is cumulative and radical listening has greater possibility. This effect was evident in an inquiry about snails in Grade One. The children began bringing in snails in September. The teachers chose to encourage them as long as they could research the best way to keep the snails safe and happy. Part of this research included sessions in which the children studied the snails by sketching and photographing them. As a team of teachers we decided to use the snails to investigate the idea of identity (part of the curriculum for that grade). The growth of the children's ideas overwhelmed us. This captivating subject seemed to help them deeply internalize meanings of identity in complex and nuanced ways.



The Identity of Snails

The snails have different identities because my snail likes cucumbers but not all snails like cucumbers for their diet.

Identity means who you are. The identity of the snails is they have shells and we don't. We wanted to find out who every snail was. Every snail is different. Even though some had the same shells they still had other things that were different about them.

My snail always gets together with other snails. He likes to play with all snails. He's friendly. My snail is a half Christian and a half Jewish snail but the other snails don't celebrate Chanukah. What they celebrate is part of their Identity.

All the snails have their own identity. Each one was born one way and they live like that.

Inside your body there is information of who you are. That information is about your identity. My snail's identity is smart and has lots of energy and has a great personality. Some of the snails in the tank can have the same likes of food or something but it can't be completely the same but it could be a little bit the same. It's like with people, you and I both have brown hair but we're not the same person, our identity is different.

(Embrey, Gibson, & van Veghel, 2012)

I return here to Buber's (1923/1970) suggestion that our impulse as human beings is to reach out for relationships of love or exclusiveness. I-You relationships are ones in which we recognize the unique and present qualities of another. In light of this it is interesting to note Vea Vecchi's (2010) emphasis that in beginning an inquiry with children it is important, "to establish an intense relationship with the reality being investigated" (p. 32). Vecchi (2010) proposes that this is especially important in young children, in order to enhance the quality of their inquiry, that they have an opportunity to explore using all their senses in a way that develops relationships. I interpret a pedagogy of listening, as Vecchi describes it, as a way of listening to all aspects of an educational experience so that aesthetic relationships, fueled by care and empathy (as well as a sense that everything is "alive" or has agency) are at the forefront of learning. I believe such an approach is in tune with children's own desire for connection. Aesthetic experience allows for greater attunement in an investigation and also contributes to a sense that the learning environment itself is pulsing. Rinaldi (2006) suggests that a school is "a living organism that pulses, changes, transforms, grows and matures" (p. 85). Because anything living is always in a state of flux, Rinaldi (2006) emphasizes the importance of documentation as a strategy to maintain "continuity of identity" (p. 85). Documentation provides a memory of events and interactions that can inform future paths and decisions (Rinaldi, 2006). What is captured through documentation then, is an index to a living moment, born of numerous forces that continue beyond the snapshot.

Subjectivity and Empathy in Documentation

In considering empathy and affect as aspects of aesthetic engagement and radical listening, I examine stances with which adults might listen in more radical ways to children. The empathy that infuses investigations can also be felt in the documentation that Reggio educators produce (see for example, Malaguzzi, 1999; Vecchi, 2002; Filippini, Guidici, & Vecchi, 2008). They respect the identities and perspectives of children by sharing and making visible recordings they have taken of children's "voices" (words, artifacts, photos). As well, there is empathy in the language they choose to narrate and interpret the children's experiences and ideas (Mantovani, 1995; Malaguzzi, 1996; Vecchi, 2001). These language choices are aesthetic ones, made with great care and respect for the value of children's thinking and also sensitivity to their point of view. The book *The Future is a Lovely Day*, tells the story of a project in two municipal schools in Reggio in which children imagine and conceive of a time that lies ahead of them. The introduction begins like this:

> Daring to use the word 'future' in a project to be realized with children is a way of showing faith in their potential of inquiring, but also and above all it is the desire to discover together—adults and children—profound new and ancient directions of research dealing with great issues in the history of human thought...you will be surprised and you will not be able to help stopping to reflect together with us on a fact that is as banal as it is extraordinary: philosophical thought is necessary to man—everywhere and at all times and above all, at every age. (Trancossi, 2001, p. 14)

The text shows an enthusiasm, an adult sense of joy for the project itself. It indicates that the adults are walking with the children on the journey, as excited as

they are about the possibilities. It also deliberately aligns the interests and questions of the children with the history of human thought. This bold alignment is not just posturing, I believe, but reflects an attitude towards education as a place of continuity and connection rather than a separate and cut off space. It reveals an assumption that children possess the seeds of the complexity of human thought and accomplishment from the beginning of their lives. This brings a sense of continuity to childhood, instead of seeing it as an isolated event, or a series of stages. But most significant for me, it reveals empathy for the children, validating their questions and ideas as worthy of adult time and consideration, worth sharing and pondering together.

In describing the dry and austere language that often surrounds pedagogical theory, Vecchi wonders why it must be "so distant from the world of children and the flow of life" (2010, p. 127). The subjective and aesthetic process of documentation requires and produces emotion (Rinaldi, 2006). The strategies of teachers in Reggio are informed by theory and emotion; their listening and learning contexts allow for subjectivity and reciprocity (Rinaldi, 2001a, 2006). Vecchi discusses the importance in her own professional development of creating photographic mini-stories that "pause on children's expressions and actions...seeking to convey...the learning atmosphere, the sense of life flowing within a group" (2010, p. 134). She suggests that such efforts are important because "they give educational work *a face* [*sic*] that too often gets reported verbally or through photographs with captions, giving us certain facts at the most but never feelings" (p. 137). In order to choose images that convey emotion and atmosphere in this way, Vecchi (2010) suggests the person

documenting "must be highly alert, antennae vibrating" (p. 134). This description highlights the way that listening is not separated from relationship and feelings, and is, in fact, activated by aesthetic sense.

It is also worth noting that teachers must prepare their interpretations so that meetings with colleagues are an opportunity to discuss a piece of documentation that the teacher has already had a chance to reflect on (Rubizzi, 2001). In our school we have come to see that there is a responsibility of the individual to prepare such work for sharing with colleagues so that while the point of view presented is subjective, it has already been carefully thought through and annotated. This preparation is a form of listening to the self in order to form opinions and judgments. It requires solitude and concentration, time spent with the material often listening and re-listening to recorded conversations. Once documentation is shared there is an opportunity to "stretch our ear" towards other interpretations. Parents, when invited in to interpret documentation, offer their own subjectivity; often their perspective is full of hope and love for their children. Their interpretations can give teachers a new subjectivity with which to view their work and the children.

Embracing subjectivity in education can make people uncomfortable because it suggests that emotions might be getting in the way of fairness in assessment and evaluation as well as equality of practice. However, acknowledging that people are engaged in an individual and subjective "search for meaning" (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 79) from the beginning of their lives, is an opportunity to shift the context of school from emphasizing achievement to include a focus on meaning. School can be an ideal environment for socially constructing meaning. We might engage children, parents

and teachers in a conversation about what is significant in a learning event, asking how we feel as well as what we think. I argue that documentation, because it is acknowledged to be subjective, as well as because it involves multiple points of view, makes education more ethical. There is a potential danger in not acknowledging emotion, for it doesn't go away. Multiple points of view give subjectivity greater ethical value by allowing for the contestation and negotiation of subjectivities (Rinaldi, 2006). Thus the problems of partiality, which objectivity seeks to dispel, can be addressed when all the stakeholders (including parents, administrators, along with specialists and researchers from various disciplines) are involved in assessing the meaning of documentation. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) write "Meaning making requires very precise, demanding and public conditions that create an interactive and dialogic process in which prejudices, self-interest, and unacknowledged assumptions, with the distortions and limited vision that they produce, will be confronted and challenged" (p. 108).

Documentation is a tool that supports the role of affect (for children and adults) in teaching and learning. In this way the classroom teacher is not the sole source of judgment and evaluation of children. Multiple viewpoints are vetted and revealed in documentation—a process, which, I feel, can help us to get closer to the children, because each adult listens for something different. Laura Rubizzi (2001) illustrates this in describing a project (collaboratively documented) in which a group of children wish to connect a log and a living tree so the trees can hug each other. Rubizzi (p. 113) analyzes a conversation with the children and their art teacher (Isabella Meninno) about how to build the bridge. In examining the conversation

afterwards Rubizzi questions Meninno's approach when she asks: "Could we build this bridge, make it life-size?" Instead Rubizzi openly wonders if phrasing it in this way "introduces a difficult problem far too directly. Perhaps the question should have been formulated as: How could we connect these two tree-friends with a bridge-hug?" Rubizzi's intention is to introduce the problem "in a way that is in harmony with the children." She suggests that doing so "would facilitate the passage from metaphor to structural hypothesis" (p. 113). For Rubizzi the most important element of the project is that of an embrace because it "emerged spontaneously from their feelings of tenderness and solidarity for the log" (p. 113). As such, she emphasizes, that teachers must be careful in their choice of language when speaking to children in order to keep the "essential sense and meaning of what one is doing" (p. 113). Rubizzi's goal, I find, is to feel greater empathy for the children. This example also illustrates the significance in Reggio of aesthetic elements, such as a teacher's choice of words. In seeking to make choices that resonate aesthetically and emotionally with children, the teachers are developing their own sense of empathy in their work.

CHAPTER THREE

An Aesthetic and Ethic of Curiosity

> If looking...is a practice, a form of attention paid, which is, for many, the essence of prayer, it is the sole practice I had available to me as a child. By seeing I called to things, and in turn, things called to me, applied me to their sight and we became each as treasure, startling to one another, and rare. (Purpura, 2006, pp. 6-7)

I have argued, drawing from Dewey's (1934/2005) ideas, that because aesthetic experience is vivid, sensory, and affective, because it draws sensation together with cognition and a desire for meaning, it heightens attention. I have proposed that the enlivening specificity of aesthetic encounters (as Buber and Winnicott describe) can encourage a sense of reciprocity and promote connection. As Purpura's reflection intimates, aesthetic experience (especially in childhood) has intensity: it can bring about a "startling" sense of immediacy and acuity in our relationships with the world. I believe that within this sense of newness or acuity is the possibility of curiosity. When an unexpected element of a person, idea or object is suddenly revealed, it encourages us to open up our thinking, so that we might become curious and seek new understandings. In John Dewey's early writing, *How We Think* (1910/1991), he examines what he calls reflective thinking, proposing that it has curiosity as its basis. I find there is a natural link between Dewey's ideas about reflective thinking and the aesthetically informed task of pedagogical documentation. I argue that documentation and the responsive process of planning that it fuels (known as progettazione in Reggio) can foster curiosity in teachers in a way that

generates radical listening. I propose that aesthetic experience can develop curiosity and openness to unpredictability in a way that invites greater complexity into education.

Curiosity and Reflective Thinking

At the turn of the twentieth century John Dewey (1910/1991) made the provocative suggestion that what is needed in education is a scientific way of thinking. Dewey describes the "native and unspoiled attitude of childhood," as "marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry" which is "very near, to the attitude of the scientific mind" (Dewey, 1910/1991, p.iii). In this work, Dewey goes on to propose that while the questions children ask are not borne from a need for scientific understanding, they are the seeds of that understanding and define an important quality of what he calls reflective thinking. Dewey (1910/1991) defines reflective thinking as a higher order of thinking that requires "a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates" as well as "an active searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (p. 12). For Dewey reflective thinking takes us into an uncomfortable state:

> because it involves overcoming the inertia than inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful. (1910/1991, p. 13)

While Dewey's proposals point to scientific processes, I find harmony between his notions of reflective thinking and aesthetic experience as an activator of radical listening. The process of documentation I have described (which is perhaps both scientific and aesthetic in nature) can require openness to the possibility that one's plans, beliefs or mental schemas may have to shift. For Dewey (1910/1991), there are many impediments to reflective thinking such as our inclination "to notice instances that corroborate a favourite belief more readily than those that contradict it," or to assume "there is a fact wherever there is a word, and no fact where there is no linguistic term" (p. 22). It is interesting to note that graphic or visual processes may better allow for the creation of "new facts" because they are not primarily linguistic and thus not dependent on or limited by terminology. Dewey (1910/1991) proposes that the scientific gathering of material and testing of inferences is a way of habituating the mind to reflective thinking. This process is fed by curiousity: "Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contact, is found where wonder is found. Such curiosity is the only sure guarantee of the acquisition of the primary facts upon which inference must base itself" (Dewey, 1910/1991, pp. 30-31). I find aesthetic experience, as in the aesthetic process of documentation, can have a similar effect. If we think we know already we are no longer curious about the outcome of our inquiries and are more inclined to gather data that supports our beliefs rather than challenges them. Aesthetic experience can break down that certainty, garnering a sense of wonder by captivating our attention and cultivating a dynamic and present relationship with others.

Dewey writes:

> To the open mind, nature and social experience are full of varied and subtle challenges to look further. If germinating powers are not used and cultivated at the right moment, they tend to be transitory, to die out, or to wane in intensity. This general law is peculiarly true of sensitiveness to what is uncertain and questionable; in a few people intellectual curiosity is...insatiable...but in most its edge is easily dulled and blunted...some lose it in indifference or carelessness; others in a frivolous flippancy; many escape these evils only to become incased in a hard dogmatisim which is equally fatal to the spirit of wonder. Some are so taken up with routine as to be inaccessible to new facts and problems. Others retain curiosity only with reference to what concerns their personal advantage in their chosen career. (1910/1991, p. 33)

Dewey goes on to suggest that a teacher's role is to protect curiosity, to "keep alive the sacred spark of wonder" (p. 33) so that it is fluid and burning, allowed to deepen and grow. I have certainly found curiosity to be abundant in children. Carlina Rinaldi decribes the sensitivity and anticipation with which children listen as, "rarified, curious, suspended, generous" (2001a, p. 82). As I have described in the previous chapters, children are able to find meaning and relationships through this multisensory listening and curiosity. Dewey (1910/1991) suggests that the curiosity to know in children comes from a feeling "that the facts which directly meet the senses are not the whole story" (p. 32) As discussed in Chapter Two, children may have an awareness that there is something more to what we perceive; they may sense a pattern or meaning to be uncovered. Dewey proposes that in this sense is "the germ of *intellectual* [sic] curiosity" (1910/1991, p. 32). If this is the case, our work as educators must be sensitive to children's curiosity, listening to it and allowing it to flourish. Tapping into the *beat of life* in our classroom experiences can give children opportunities to develop their intuition through exploration and

meaningful occupation (as Dewey proposes). I have found that such circumstances often involve aesthetic experience; they contain an unknown, unpredictable, living element, which is sensory and vivid (such as a study of snails, snowflakes or the emotional value of colour). These dynamic, aesthetic qualities of an experience breed curiosity for teachers and students.

Documentation: Making Room for Uncertainty

How do Dewey's observations about reflective thinking extend to a documentation process by teachers? As a reflective practice, documentation has the potential to continually garner and be generated by genuine curiosity. Dewey (1910/1991) points to certain impediments to reflective thinking such as erroneous methods, "fashionable" thinking and limitations of language. I have found inclinations, such as preference for certain ideas, or fixed mental schemas, can be overcome or disrupted if we engage in collective interpretation of the work we are doing. Rinaldi (2001a) notes that the knowledge building of groups of teachers is possible because the thinking of one teacher was made *visible* through her documentation. This thinking, and the biases and assumptions it represents, is then subject to scrutiny in a process of sharing those observations with colleagues, parents and even children. Reggio-inspired theorist Gunilla Dahlberg describes documentation as a way of making "perspectives explicit and contestable" (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 225). While there may be a hypothesis on the part of the teacher, Rinaldi warns that, "It is not sufficient to make an abstract prediction that establishes what

is significant—the elements of value necessary for learning to be achieved—before the documentation is carried out." Rather she suggests, "It is necessary to interact with the action itself, with that which is revealed, defined, and perceived as truly significant, as the experience unfolds" (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 85).

This kind of "visible listening" in documentation is a way to "not only testify to the children's learning paths and processes, but also make them possible because they are visible...making visible, and thus possible, the relationships that are the building blocks of knowledge" (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 83). Adults come to find a "schema of expectation" that is "not prescriptive but orientative. Doubt and uncertainty permeate the context" (p. 85). This gap between expectation and outcome, between what one predicts and observes offers a tension that is rich with possibility and relationship. In allowing documentation to be viewed and altered from more than one perspective, a teacher surrenders authority, acknowledging and seeking enrichment from others. Rinaldi (2001a) indicates that as teachers reflect together on the documentation they are looking for meaning and considering what possible actions to take. This subjectivity brings a certain responsibility because, Dahlberg writes, "there can be no hiding behind an assumed scientific objectivity or criteria offered by experts" (2012, p. 226).

In creating documentation educators continuously invite multiple points of view into their teaching and interpretations of children's learning. Rinaldi acknowledges that the act of documenting is a kind of observation and interpretation and thus represents a "partial" or "partisan" (2001a, p. 84) perspective on how children are learning. However this work of interpretation continues after the notes

are scribed or photographs are snapped. Most significantly interpretation involves other colleagues who may not have been present at the time of recording. The artifacts collected contain the subjectivity of the documenter. However, the observations are then brought to others, "in order to be known or re-known, created and recreated" (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 84). Engaging multiple perspectives and ways of knowing (including parents and members of the community) pushes our interpretations as teachers into a more public realm, so that we must also confront questions and interpretations of our work. I find when one person's point of view has to be reconciled with a contradictory opinion it can spark curiosity and debate. This reconciliation is especially necessary when we are trying to create a more formal piece of documentation such as a panel or book because it is a shared artifact of interpretation.

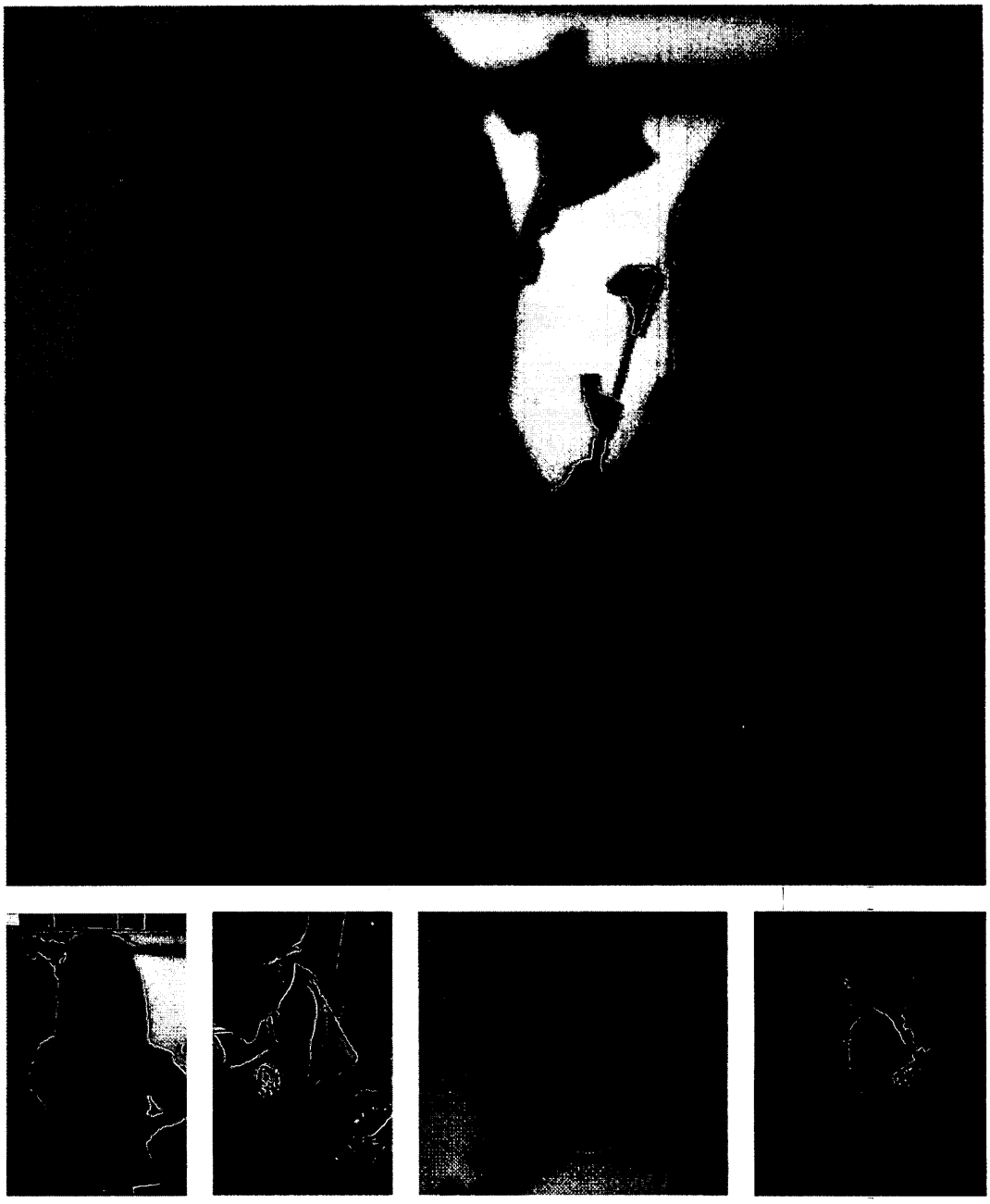
Curiosity and Curriculum

Progettazione is the opposite of program. It is a responsive and creative way of using documentation to "inform teachers' choices for designing learning contexts" (Giudici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001, p. 17). Documentation as a form of listening and research is both an individual and a collective responsibility (Rinaldi, 2001b). Teachers use documentation in Reggio and Reggio-inspired contexts to make provisional plans for future experiences with children. While there may be one teacher documenting in a classroom she brings her recordings and notes to a teaching partner, lead teacher and then sometimes a larger group of colleagues, to

assess their significance and decide on next steps. This formative decision-making process is called progettazione; the interpretation and decisions that result from it are considered provisional and subject to change (Guidici et al., 2001). As Rinaldi describes above this process is not *prescriptive* but *orientative*. Working with uncertainty in planning is a way to amplify the voices of children in learning environments. There is an ethical dimension to believing that children have something to contribute to the direction of a project and ultimately to the knowledge that develops.

In a Kindergarten class where the children had shown a particular interest in stained-glass windows and the school chapel, I met with the teachers to look over conversations they had had with the children. We decided one of the most important elements for the girls was their delight in the effect of colour and light in the high windows, as well as the captivating images they contained (people with bare feet, Jesus holding the lamb, Mary and her baby). We decided to create a small light atelier in which two girls at a time could have an opportunity to project colours and create images on a screen. We provided many transparent materials including coloured cellophane and materials for silhouettes such as metal screens, sticks and strips of construction paper. After girls had spent time in the space we met again to share our recordings of their exploration and to revisit our intentions for the work. We had imagined the girls working with flat images, but instead noticed their strong interest in gesture, narrative and sculptural projected forms. We began adding materials that lent themselves to assemblage such as scissors, tape, wire and pipe cleaners. One of the most exciting sessions happened when two girls decided to begin

crinkling the cellophane and constructing objects with layered colours as well as opaque elements. They developed a narrative around their sculptures. The effect of the translucent objects projected onto the screen was surprising and beautiful.

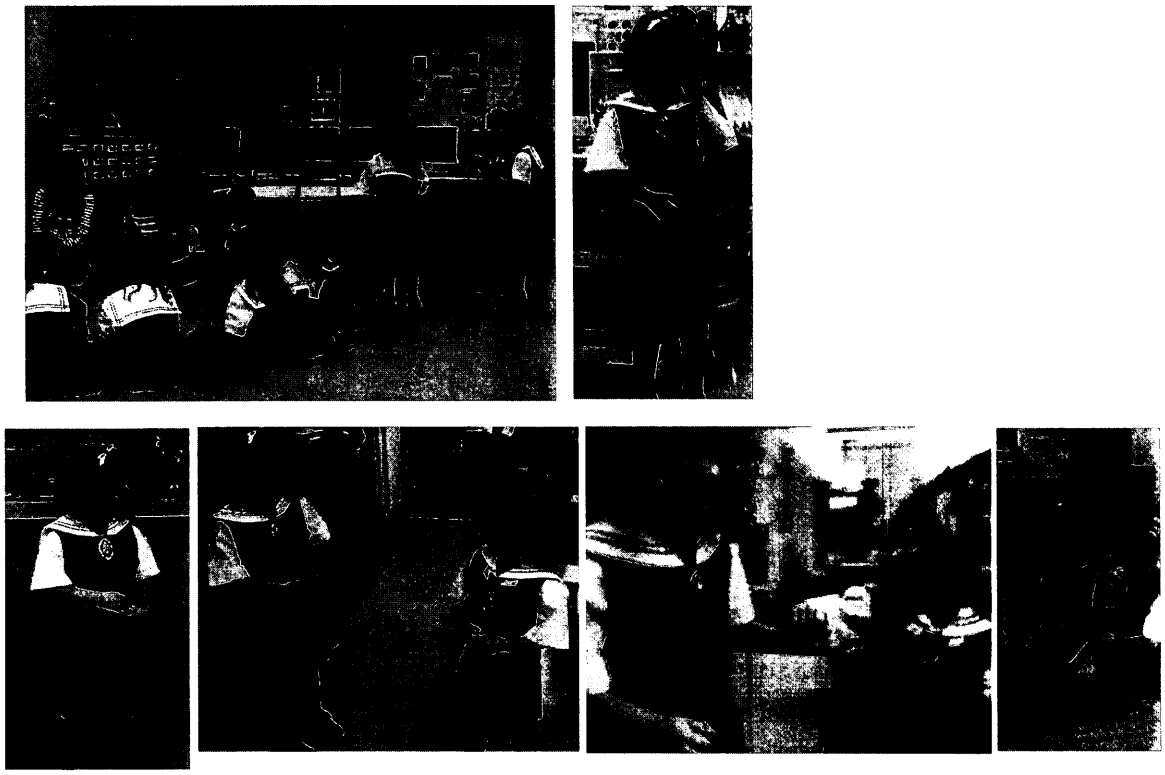


(Embrey, Grzybowski, Papageorgiou, & Roberts 2012)

In Reggio, rather than considering curricula as an object of education, the "object" is viewed as a "relational place," in which the teacher "chooses and proposes" the method of inquiry and "stimulates the subject and the object to encounter each other" (Rinaldi, 2001a, p. 85). While there are proposals for themes of study at the beginning of each year these are interpreted in a variety of ways (Rinaldi, 2001a). In the context of our school "the proposal" begins with the curriculum. Teachers first make an aesthetic investment in the ideas themselves (generating our own connections and interests in the central ideas of the curriculum). Then as the school year progresses we continuously examine how the children are responding to the ideas. As a result the curriculum feels less fixed or pre-ordained. As we meet weekly to interpret and plan how the work will evolve we have an opportunity to bring our own subjectivity and sense of care to the work. I find that because the curriculum is not a fixed outcome but a set of indications with pathways yet to be drawn, there is an opportunity for radical listening available to us. When teachers have a chance to be curious about learning (its content and pathways), our role as careful and responsive listeners can become a kind of aesthetic process in which we are attentive and empathetic, curious about the meaning of children's experiences, their body language, relationships, ideas, questions, delight, fear and frustration.

Jenna's First Day of Kindergarten

9am - 9:20am 13/09/10



(Embrey, Papageorgiou, & Roberts, 2010)

I return to Dewey's idea of concentration as that which holds a mind to a subject in a way that "implies constant change of place combined with unity of direction," much like "holding a ship to its course" (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 40). One way of thinking about aesthetic sense and its strong emotional component is that aesthetic experience represents times when we are aware of connection, *because we are listening for it.* The sensory and emotional nature of aesthetic experience may be a catalyzing factor in our ability to draw new connections between experience and knowledge, to form new

knowledge in a way that requires openness, not "fixity, nor a cramped arrest or paralysis of the flow of suggestion" (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 40). Aesthetic experience can create a cause for concentration but also creates a "stickiness" of mind, a curiosity that seeks to gather and construct ideas. Dewey writes, "Oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all have their origin, fundamentally, in fear of what life may bring forth" (1910/1991, p. 23). Certainly allowing the life of emotion and sensation into research and teaching is a risk; it requires openness to unpredictability and difference. And yet, I have noticed that at times when investigations with children and colleagues stumble onto a new area of uncertainty for all of us they also start to pulse with life. The children and the adults are excited by the possibilities. An enthusiasm can be felt in children's graphic expressions and words. A feeling arises when there is a potential for genesis and meaning in lived experience, which I describe as *aesthetic*. Perhaps this feeling occurs precisely because life is allowed to bring forth possibility, the unknown and an element of risk.

I propose that documentation and progettazione invite curiosity, allowing openness to become a part of how teachers listen to each other and children. Malaguzzi describes this as "itinerant reconnaissance education" (Malaguzzi, 2012, p. 63). He goes on to say that "What educators acquire by discussing, proposing and launching new ideas is not only a set of professional tools, but also a work ethic that gives more value to being part of a group and to having interpersonal solidarity,

while at the same time strengthening intellectual autonomy" (p. 62). Malaguzzi describes some of the questions teachers might wrestle with in this analysis:

> Whether learning has its own flux, time, and place; how learning can be organized and encouraged; how situations favourable to learning can be prepared; which skills and cognitive schemes are worth bolstering; how to advance words, graphics, logical thought, body language, symbolic languages, fantasy, narrative, and argumentation; how to play; how to pretend; how friendships form and dissipate; how individual and group identities develop; and how differences and similarities emerge. (2012, pp. 63-64)

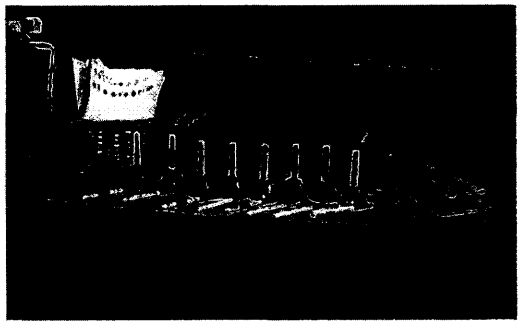
These questions represent a search for understanding about what education really means, what we choose to teach and how learning happens. They are large and complex ideas that require considerable effort but also uncertainty, doubt and curiosity to work through. They make the work of teaching seem like a vital and important research endeavor that requires collaboration and support from all our best resources.

Teacher Reflection

A significant way to support and value a generative curiosity around teaching is to have a researcher in a school, whose chief role is to bring both theoretical considerations and an outside perspective to the classroom. In Reggio Emilia an important figure for such a purpose is the pedagogista. Much like the atelierista her job is to challenge and support and to provide a different point of view than the teacher (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). The pedagogista interacts with various levels of government, parents and teachers, and also meets with small groups of

teachers and lead teachers. This flexible system of meeting and collaboration is described as a "diffuse pedagogical system" which creates "many collegial zones of knowledge creation and exchange" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, p. 137-8). The current focus of professional development in Reggio is on issues that affect everyday practice such as "how and what to observe" and "ways to encounter the zone of proximal development of children, colleagues, and parents" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, p. 138).

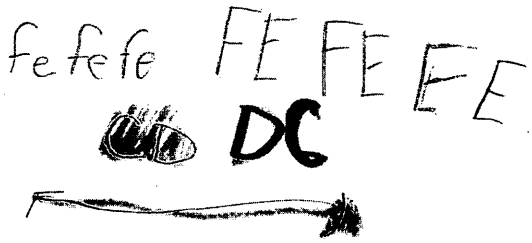
In considering my own role as Lead Teacher, one that continues to evolve and change, I think about the delicate but also generative position that an observer can have in a classroom. While I am a fellow teacher, I do not, in this position, have my own classroom and thus my point of view is sympathetic but also removed from the daily responsibility of working as a classroom teacher. I come in to listen and then offer my subjective interpretation of events that I have perceived. In our school we have created mechanisms for self-knowledge through initiatives such as personal goal setting and video-taping. Along with teachers, lead teachers choose opportunities in which to self-assess our interactions by filming and then choosing clips to view and reflect on with our principal. We are in this way reminded of the risk and also potential for growth that observation brings. In considering the effect of having others observe her in the classroom Amelia Gambetti argues that it heightens her own awareness: "It makes me feel valued, or rather, it makes it easier for me to capture the valuable aspects of my actions" (Gambetti, 2012, p. 121).



Sound the Bells

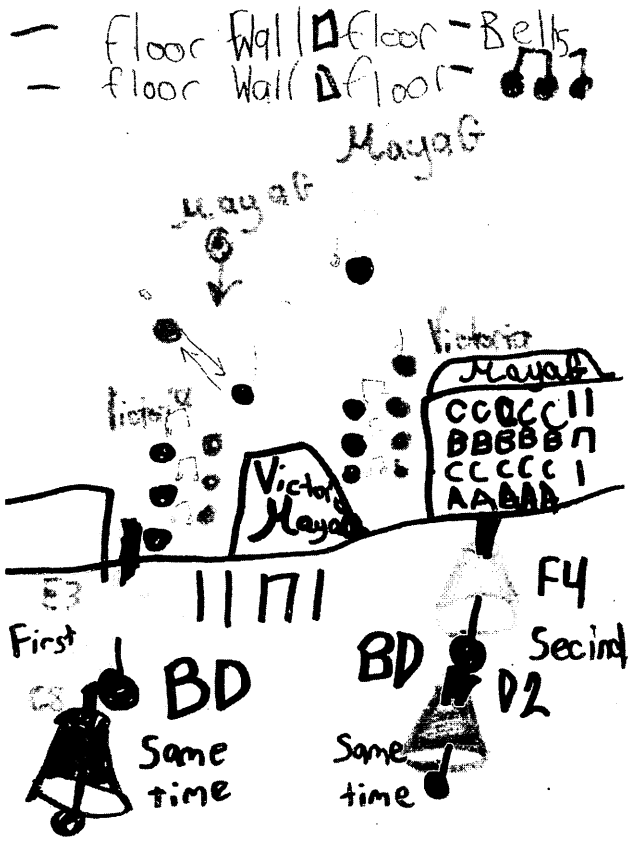
composition and graphic notation

The colourful bells arranged with corresponding markers are an invitation by music specialist, Ms. Dickinson, to experiment with composition and notation. It is an optional centre girls can choose to visit and several become interested in making music. As they try to make sounds visible through notation, they engage logical and creative processes to represent their scores in a sequence that others can follow. A xylophone and glockenspiel are added to encourage them to make correspondence between the matching notes on the various instruments. The public location of the bells seems to encourage a desire for exchange. The girls ask for booklets to organize their compositions and soon a library of music grows, representing individual work and collaborations. We are surprised to notice that some girls transcribe the work of peers into their own composition books—always making sure to credit the source.



a repeating motif

This composition is for the xylophone. Vanessa likes the repetition of the notes F and E and choses upper case/lower case to denote the octave difference in the two sections of her score. It is interesting that she originally has C-D as the finale but then changes it to D-C, which actually fits with musical convention—a composition in C major should end on C. Vanessa has observed that the C sounds more like an ending, showing an implicit understanding of musical theory. She adds the double arrow (a glissando) to indicate a sweeping with the mallet in either direction at the very end.



complex rhythms

Mara and Vanessa collaborate on several compositions and develop systems to represent complex musical ideas. Vanessa plays the rhythm ta ta ta-ti ta by alternating two bells (dark blue/dark pink) then ringing both simultaneously. She then switches and plays the same pattern on different bells (orange/green). At the same time Mara plays complementary harmonies with a mallet alternating the light blue and yellow bells. Mara rests for the first two ta's and then joins Vanessa. In this notation we can also see how they experiment with hitting the wall and floor and use both the notes and colours as well as rhythm symbols and standard handbell symbols (BD=brush damp) to represent their ideas. Later they transfer these ideas to the glockenspiel, demonstrating an understanding that different instruments can make the same pitch.

(Dickinson, Embrey, Hislop, Montgomery, 2012)

Engaging with Radical Listening

Inspired by Reggio educators, who signal the deep importance of listening in educational relationships, I use the phrase radical listening to describe a multisensory and transformative receptivity among people, matter, environments and ideas. In examining my experiences teaching and mothering, it has become clear to me that there is a strong relationship between aesthetic experience and radical listening.

I contend that aesthetic experience is sensual and affective, that it represents times when we are captivated and highly attentive to the details and specificity of our encounters. Aesthetic experience can make us more sensitive to meaning, pattern and connection in encounters, drawing cognitive and sensory process together. I propose that this heightened attention comes from the vivid and enlivening qualities of such experiences or encounters, which makes them ripe with possibility, newness and discovery. What we behold through aesthetic experience can become a reciprocal entity, something alive and dynamic; this awareness of a living quality in experience promotes relationship and may allow for a greater sense of care and empathy. As well, curiosity garnered through aesthetic experience can give primacy to the dynamic and unknown qualities of another, so that we are less fixed in our ideas, more receptive and open. In these ways, I have argued, aesthetic experience is a significant agent of radical listening.

I have examined the potential of documentation, as an aesthetic process, to enhance listening by activating curiosity and doubt and by engaging multiple points of view in our work as teachers. I have looked at ways that documentation informs provisional planning in Reggio schools (progettazione) to allow for revision and emergence. Listening to children and experience in this aesthetic way can require and promote radical listening through attention, care, responsiveness to change and openness to others. I have explored ways that aesthetic choices of materials, organization of space, and approaches to inquiries with children can promote radical listening in education. I have argued that working in this receptive, aesthetic way brings us into greater harmony with children and their keen sense of listening.

Through these various examples and narratives I find that we can become better acquainted with matter, ideas, and beings when aesthetic experience provokes more immediate, curious, reciprocal and caring relationship with them. When the world is alive to us, when everyday experience is new and rare and full of possibility, we have greater capacity to really listen to it.

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Appendix A

Sample Letter of Consent from Colleagues

Dear Colleagues,

As you may know I am completing a Master of Education from York University with a specialization in Early Childhood. I am currently writing my thesis and would like to reproduce some of the pedagogical documentation that I have created in collaboration with you in my thesis. This documentation consists of conversations with and photographs of children along with reproductions of artifacts and graphic work children have produced which has been collected and interpreted by our teaching team from the Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten and Grade One classrooms in the last three school years 2010-2012 at ***** School. You have been an integral part of the work of gathering, editing and interpreting this material as well as devising intelligent forms for its dissemination. As such, for any documentation that appears in the thesis, or any resulting publications or presentations, of which you are co-author/creator, you will be credited accordingly. This rich material highlights the many competencies and intelligences of children and illustrates the importance of reflection and collaboration in teacher growth. It will be very valuable to include some of these concrete examples of documentation in my thesis, which is about the process and effect of a pedagogy of listening.

All participation in this project is voluntary. If you do not wish to have the work you have been a part of shared, I will ensure that it is not reproduced in the thesis.

This research has been reviewed by The **** School's Research Committee. If you have any ethical concerns or questions about this work, please address them to the principa l of the Junior School, ****.

With sincere thanks,

Kerri Embrey
Lead Teacher, Research and Inquiry

Informed Consent Form

For Inclusion of Documentation in a Master's Thesis

I agree that documentation I produced collaboratively with Kerri Embrey and other colleagues at the **** School may appear in the Master's Thesis by Kerri Embrey or in presentations or publications resulting from this work.

(Please check the statement you agree to)

( ) Collaborative pedagogical documentation, of which I was a co-creator, from the school years 2010-2012, **may be used** in the Master's Thesis and any resulting presentations and publications. I will be credited as co-author on any documentation that I participated in collecting and interpreting.

( ) Collaborative pedagogical documentation, of which I was a co-creator, from the school year 2010-2012 **may not be used** in the Master's Thesis and any resulting presentations and publications.

I understand the nature of this project and the extent of my participation through reproduction of documentation that I was involved in. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. My signature below indicates my consent.

_____ _____

Signature of Colleague Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix B
Sample Letter of Consent from Parents

Dear Parents,

As you may know I am completing a Master of Education from York University with a specialization in Early Childhood. I am currently writing my thesis and would like to use pedagogical documentation that I have produced in collaboration with my colleagues at The **** School as a part of my thesis. The documentation consists of interpretations of conversations, photographs of children, reproductions of children's artifacts (such as sculpture) and graphic work (such as drawings) from the Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten and Grade One classrooms from the school years 2010-2012. This material is collected and interpreted and stories are retold as an ongoing part of our research and planning process as teachers. It is also used in order to disseminate and share our work with our parent community and colleagues who visit the school. This rich material highlights the many competencies and intelligences of children and illustrates the importance of reflection and collaboration in teacher growth. It will be very valuable to include some of these concrete examples of documentation in my thesis, which is about the process and effect of a pedagogy of listening.

Your daughter's art, drawings, words and photographic images may appear in some of the documentation. As such, I ask for yours and your daughter's kind permission to reproduce this material in my thesis and any resulting presentations or publications. All participation in this project is voluntary. Your child, or you on behalf of your child, may choose not to be represented in this thesis project, in which case I would ensure that the documentation I use would not include reproductions of artifacts and graphic work, collected words or photographic images of your child. I will not use the name of the school in any part of my thesis and will use pseudonyms for children where their work, ideas or images are identified.

This research has been reviewed by The **** School's Research Committee. If you have any ethical concerns or questions about this work, please address them to the principal of the Junior School, ****.

With sincere thanks,

Kerri Embrey
Lead Teacher, Research and Inquiry

Informed Consent Form:
Reproduction of Children's Photos and Work

For Inclusion of Documentation in Master's Thesis

I agree that photos of my child and reproductions of her classroom conversations, graphic works and artifacts may appear in the Master's Thesis by Kerri Embrey or in presentations or publications resulting from this work.

(*Please check the statement you agree to*)

( ) Photos and recorded conversations that include my daughter along with reproductions of graphic works and artifacts by her **may be used** in the Master's Thesis and any resulting presentations and publications. Her first name will appear when she is identified in photographs and conversations or when her artistic work is credited.

( ) Photos and recorded conversations that include my daughter along with reproductions of graphic works and artifacts by her **may be used** in the Master's Thesis and any resulting presentations and publications. A pseudonym will appear in place of her real name when she is identified in photographs and conversations or when her artistic work is credited.

( ) Only recorded conversations that include my daughter along with reproductions of graphic works and artifacts by her **may be used** in the Master's Thesis and any resulting presentations and publications. A pseudonym will appear in place of her real name when she is identified in conversations or when her artistic work is credited. No photographs of her will be used.

( ) Photos and reproductions of conversations that include my daughter along with reproductions of graphic works and artifacts by her **may not be used**.

I understand the nature of this project and the extent of my child's inclusion through reproduction of documentation that may include her. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. My signature below indicates my consent.

_____ _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date