

A Reggio-Inspired Music Atelier: Opening the Door Between Visual Arts and Music

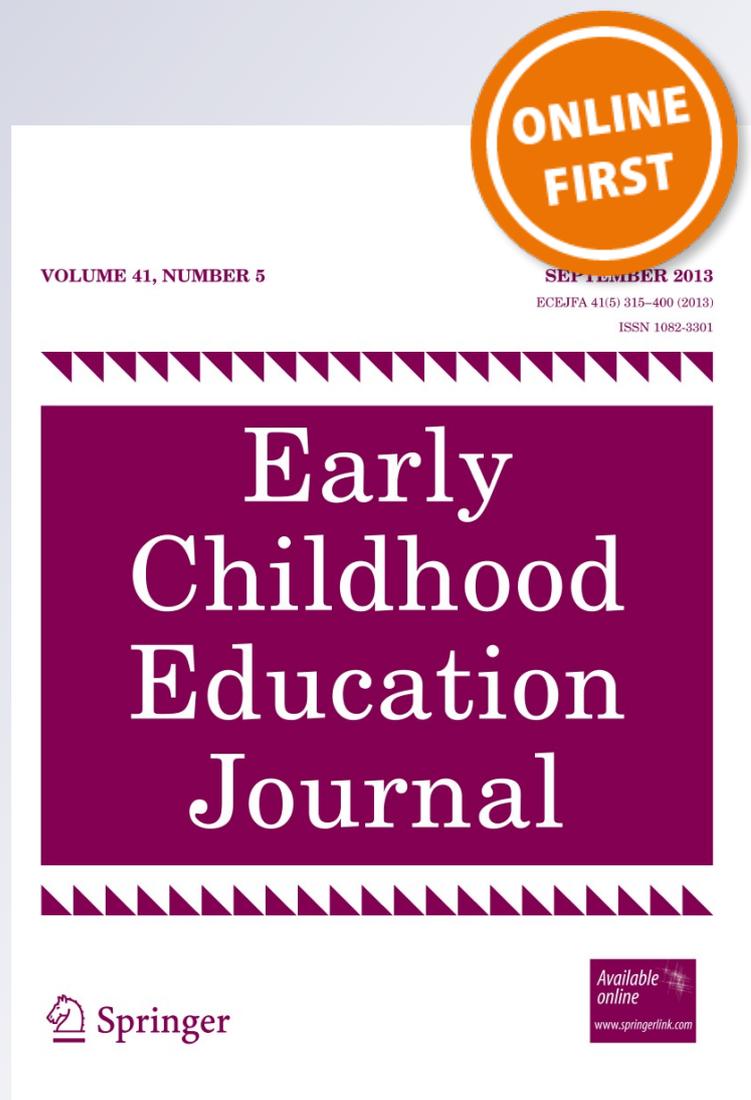
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Early Childhood Education Journal

ISSN 1082-3301

Early Childhood Educ J

DOI 10.1007/s10643-013-0610-9



 Springer

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A Reggio-Inspired Music Atelier: Opening the Door Between Visual Arts and Music

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Abstract The Reggio Emilia approach is based on the idea that every child has at least, “one hundred languages” available for expressing perspectives of the world, and one of those languages is music. While all of the arts (visual, music, dance, drama) are considered equally important in Reggio schools, the visual arts have been particularly central in the development of the approach. This article explores how a Reggio-inspired atelier (art studio) can be expanded to include music. Commonalities between visual art and music are discussed, as well as the use of music learning techniques, materials, and documentation for the music atelier.

Keywords Early childhood music · Reggio Emilia · Atelier · Arts education · Emergent curriculum

This article outlines how the Reggio-inspired atelier (art studio) might be expanded for music-based learning. A brief review of early childhood music practices and “musical play” will be followed by an examination of how the philosophical foundations of the Reggio approach align with the idea of musical play. The purpose of the atelier and atelierista is discussed and the important role that artistic languages play in the Reggio approach. A case will be made that those teachers who understand aspects of visual art can expand the art atelier to include music-learning experiences. Finally, there is a discussion of how

music learning techniques, materials, and documentation might be used in the development of music-based ateliers.

Music and the Reggio Emilia Approach

Visual arts are a central and accepted aspect of the Reggio approach. This may lead music educators to wonder, why visual art and not music? Early childhood music educator Andress (1998) first asked the question, “Where’s the music in Reggio Emilia?” (p.14) and argues that music would be a perfect fit for the approach. O’Hagin (2011) describes how a music *atelier* (a large area richly furnished with carefully selected and deliberately placed materials for problem-solving and discovery-making in music) could be created in a Reggio inspired setting. Ferris and Nyland (2011) believe that music used in the Reggio approach can foster citizenship in unique and appropriate ways. Smith (2011) observed the use of music in a North American Reggio preschool and determined music to be successfully incorporated into the approach. Bond (2012) observed how music was used in three North American preschools and found that music projects, taught in similar ways to Reggio projects, were excellent additions to these schools. In Melbourne, Australia music was integrated successfully through musical “learning stories” in which the children were the protagonists in each story (Acker and Nyland 2012). Finally, in the town of Reggio Emilia, schools have been experimenting with projects such as “Between Sound and Music” which focus on using musical instruments with children (Reggio Children 2009 *The International Center for the Defense and Promotion of the Rights and Potentials of All Children in Reggio Emilia, Italy*). These examples demonstrating the incorporation of music in Reggio-based curricula, however, are relatively new and rare. The

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majority of Reggio-inspired schools are still limited to the visual arts.

Early Childhood Music Practices

Music is accepted as an important “building block” in early childhood curriculum (Fehr 2011) and musical experiences in the early years are valued for both aesthetic and cognitive merit (Bresler 2002). Activities such as singing, playing instruments, movement, listening and creating music are especially important to musical learning (Cooper 2011; Kenney 2011). In addition, music is not only used for its own aesthetic value, but to integrate into other areas of the curriculum. New Zealand’s early childhood programs have successfully integrated songs as a tool for language and numeracy literacy (Trinick 2012) and in Israel music in early childhood education has been used to increase literacy in reading (Gluschkof and Kenney 2011). In Kenya, music has been found to be useful in bridging curricular themes (Andang’o 2012) and the model of the *Musikkindergarten* in Berlin as “education through music” has also been successful in integrating the arts with early education (Uibel 2012). The quality, however, of music programs has been correlated with teacher and parent attitudes towards music. Brazilian families who spent quality time interacting musically with their children at home found that their children were more ready for music and school based learning (Ilari et al. 2011). Similarly, Taiwanese parents who most valued music learning influenced their children’s attitudes towards music learning more than parents that did not (Leu 2008). And American parents who participated in online social networking regarding their children’s music making influenced children’s attitudes towards music learning (Koops 2012). A cross-cultural study of early childhood music practices in Canada, Italy, Brazil and England showed significant differences in contexts, but similarities in the desire for more time devoted to music making in preschools (Young and Ilari 2012). The amount of teacher preparation in music skills was found to positively affect the quality of preschool music teaching in Australian schools (Garvis 2012; McArdle 2012).

Music Learning and Play

Play-based experiences, not formal music learning, are considered most appropriate for young children (Marsh 2008; Marsh and Young 2006). Play-based music learning is often referred to as “musical play” which can enhance social, affective, and cognitive development (Fox and Liu 2012). Musical play also facilitates physical development, gross and fine motor control and eye-hand coordination

(Nyland et al. 2011). Problem solving, concept development, divergent thinking, and language development are also thought to be a part of a musical play experience (Tarnowski 1999). A recent study linked auditory discrimination and attention in 2–3 year-old children to informal musical play activities (Putkinen et al. 2013). And musical play has been shown to be meaningful to children in both cultural and personal ways (Campbell 2010). Other studies have found that when teachers and parents encourage children’s informal music making it enhances the development of musical skills and abilities in children (Acker et al. 2010; Acker et al. 2012; Cooper and Cardany 2011; Koops 2012). Donna Fox (1991) aligned Piaget’s theory of cognitive play to informal music learning processes by showing how Piaget’s four types of children’s play, *functional*, *constructive*, and *dramatic* play, and playing *games with rules*, are related to musical play. *Functional* musical play is when children primarily use their bodies to sing, clap, play instruments, and move to music. In *constructive* musical play children use objects to create structures or forms, such as choosing sand blocks to create the sound of the train moving on a track. In *dramatic* musical play children might act out a character or event in a story by playing drums for the stomping of dinosaurs or woodblocks for the trotting of ponies. Musical *games with rules* such freeze dance, musical chairs, or “Ring Around the Rosie” are common examples of musical play with rules.

Tenets of the Reggio Approach and the Arts

The Reggio Emilia approach originated in the town of *Reggio Emilia*, Italy, when at the end of World War II local educators, parents and community members came together with the intent to plan the best preschool system attainable. After several years of experimentation, the town decided to include the expertise of Loris Malaguzzi, a well-known Italian educational pedagogue. Together, they developed an approach that combined theories from Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, and others. The town of Reggio Emilia created twenty-two community preschools and thirteen infant/toddler centers that focused on a social constructivist approach to learning (Malaguzzi 1998). Today, the Reggio approach has become increasingly popular and is considered one the best preschool educational approaches in the world (Kantrowitz & Wingert 1991).

The Early Pioneers

The Reggio approach was influenced by the philosophies of European pioneers of early childhood education, namely, Johann Pestalozzi, Frederick Froebel, and Maria Montessori.

Pestalozzi's approach to education was highly influenced by the ideas of philosopher Rousseau (1979) who believed that children were a precious resource. Indeed, Pestalozzi applied Rousseau's philosophy, believing that children were special in their own right and not just "little adults". Pestalozzi believed that children were innocent, open and learned best through sensory exploration and in natural environments (Pestalozzi et al. 1977). Expanding on Pestalozzian ideas, Froebel created the *Kindergarten* (Froebel 1899)—a playful environment where children could manipulate woodblocks and balls, sew and fold paper and merrily sing and play games. Froebel believed that the manipulation of materials and physical activity, helped children to form abstract and spiritual concepts like "unity in the universe" and "opposites can be combined together" (Froebel 1885). Montessori, like Froebel, also created schools for young children centered on manipulating objects and playing games, but she first carefully studied children's natural play behaviors to decide how materials and activities could best be used. Montessori believed that through the manipulation of objects, children could understand physical properties, categories, and important concepts such as colors, sizes, and shapes (Montessori and Gutek 2004). Johann Pestalozzi, Frederick Froebel, and Maria Montessori shared the common belief that children learn best in a natural, exploratory, and playful way and the Reggio approach shares this belief.

In contrast to these European thinkers, in Colonial America, children's play was considered undesirable, unproductive and childish. The less children play, it was thought, the more grown-up and responsible they would become. It was American philosopher, John Dewey, who strongly disagreed with this belief. For Dewey, children's play was highly desirable because it expressed a child's current experience and understanding of the world. Dewey felt that during play children learn to reconstruct their experiences and find meaning. Moreover, Dewey believed that a teacher's role was to create a stimulating and playful environment for children to flourish mentally and morally. Dewey's educational philosophy of *experiential* learning emphasized the active role of children in their own education (Dewey 1903). Dewey's ideas influenced the *constructivist* learning theory of today and the Reggio approach is strongly influenced by Dewey's philosophy.

Lev Vygotsky, known for his "zone of proximal development" took Dewey's ideas one-step further. For Vygotsky, cognitive development needs to take place within a social context. Social engagement and collaboration with others are necessary in order to transform children's thinking. Make-believe play is especially important as it allows children to interpret interpersonal roles and better understand how objects operate in the world. Vygotsky claimed that symbolic and dramatic play were essential for abstract thinking and cognitive and emotional

development (Vygotsky 1978). These ideas are also a large part of the Reggio approach.

The theory of "meta-communication", promoted by Gregory Bateson, was especially important to Malaguzzi in developing the Reggio approach. In Bateson's theory, meaning is derived from interaction with others and does not depend on *literal* verbal meaning (Bateson and Bateson 2000). For Bateson, the intensity and inflection of the voice, facial expressions, accompanying gestures, and secondary signals, as well as the verbal content of the communication determine real meaning during communication. In other words, when children interact, complex layers of communication occur simultaneously that are not always visible. Bateson believed that *multiple layers of learning* provide the best type of education, and Malaguzzi translated this belief to mean that non-verbal means of communication, like visual art, would be especially valuable educational mediums. Bateson's famous adage, "the map is not the terrain", illustrates Malaguzzi's belief that traditional education is often flat in comparison to an emergent curriculum which can embrace subjectivity, curiosity, and creativity. Malaguzzi also believed that Bateson's idea of "double description" was highly valuable in a new vision of education because the combining of multiple perspectives gives a much more complete picture of knowledge (Bateson 1982).

The ideas of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, Vygotsky and Bateson can all be seen as influences on the Reggio approach. It can also be seen that musical play is just as applicable to the Reggio philosophy as visual art and that both can, and should, be carried out within Reggio-inspired ateliers. Artistic activities in the atelier contain complex, multi-modality processes that reflect these philosophical tenets and learning within an atelier is best realized through playful, engaging and meaningful activities.

The Atelier

The Reggio atelier was first established in 1963 and soon became a central aspect of Malaguzzi's preschool design. Later in the 1970's, ateliers were added to the infant-toddler centers and mini-ateriers in individual classrooms. The central role of the atelier was to provide a space for children to become fluent in the use of artistic techniques. Malaguzzi believed that by introducing the atelier into early childhood educational practice the atelier would become a *multi-modal* laboratory for cognitive, emotional, and imaginative expression. Malaguzzi believed that most schools were outdated and in need of reform and that the atelier would be a place for experimenting with new tools for thought. Reflecting on his vision for the atelier, Malaguzzi noted:

We would have gone further still by creating a school made entirely of laboratories similar to the atelier. We would have constructed a new type of school made of spaces where the hands of children could be active for messing about. With no possibility of boredom, hands and minds would engage each other with great liberating merriment in a way ordained by biology and evolution (Malaguzzi 1998, pp. 73–74).

The atelier has never been intended to be an “artist” studio where children learn pre-professional artistic skills. Instead, children explore and interact with materials in an informal social setting. Children are encouraged to experience art in a natural way, using artistic materials while interacting spontaneously with other children and adults in an enjoyable manner. Just as babies don’t need formal instruction in languages, the Reggio approach stresses the importance of a process of exploring and using art in a social setting. By freely exploring art materials with others, children gain fluency to express their thoughts and ideas through producing artistic works. The main purpose of the atelier, therefore, is to allow children to develop a non-verbal language using multiple forms of media including music and the performing arts. Children become empowered to share their knowledge and feelings through the skills and methods they learn in the artistic atelier. Even though it is now 60 years since the inception of ateliers, the Reggio schools in Italy are still experimenting with different types of ateliers, music being among them (Reggio Children 2009).

The Role of the Atelierista

An atelierista has advanced preparation from a formal art school and in addition to being the art specialist, he or she is an organizer, interpreter, and collaborator with the other teachers, children, parents and community. The first atelieristas began their work closely collaborating with Malaguzzi in 1970. During these years the atelier changed from a space where children would work in groups with artistic materials to a “complex organization of expressive languages that spread throughout the school” (Gandini 2005, p. 10). As children became more skilled in using art materials to express their thoughts and feelings, artistic expression became a type of secondary language for them. The role of the atelierista continually evolved as Malaguzzi became more and more fascinated with the work of the atelierista in the Reggio schools. Important to Malaguzzi were the questions, “What promotes the power and pleasure of learning with and through materials?”, “How can an atelier inspire and sustain creative, innovative thinking

and learning throughout the school community?” (Gandini 2005, p. 3). Both these questions still guide the atelierista to maintain an exploratory approach instead of a discipline based one.

The quality of art in the Reggio approach is never the purpose of producing an art object. Malaguzzi said, “There are no formulas there are only possible strategies” (Gandini 2005, p. 9). The atelierista is merely a facilitator, providing the materials and guidance for exploration. Since the atelierista’s main role is in guiding the artistic exploration of children and not “teaching art”, the artistic products children produce are documents of their cognitive and affective understanding and not stand alone art objects. These documents provide teachers with a unique and rich array of information about children’s interests, motivations, values and their knowledge about the world.

Opening the Door Between Visual Arts and Music

Teachers and children in Reggio-inspired schools are comfortable and familiar with the use of art. Looking at the commonalities between art and music could be a good place to begin in understanding how visual art ateliers might be expanded into music ateliers. Music, when combined with art, influences the effect of the art itself (Stephens 2012). Combining art and music may also build a “whole mind” learning through complex connections of social, emotional, and cultural meanings (Nelson and Zobairi 1999). Musical understanding can be influenced by the use of visual images and these visual images can represent sounds and musical gestures (Logue et al. 2009). Teachers who are already familiar with art materials and processes have a pre-established mental framework in artistic expression that could be expanded to include the musical arts.

Commonalities Between Visual Art and Music

The most striking commonality between music and art is that both are non-verbal languages. But in addition, there are seven elements of art and music, which share striking commonalities (see Table 1). The seven standard visual art elements are line, color, texture, value, space, shape and form. These seven elements in the visual arts atelier correlate with elements in music in interesting ways.

Line in art could be seen as similar to *melody* in music. Children understand that lines in art make “pictures” and the melodies in music make the “song”. Line and melody are both linear and stand-alone; they start at a given point and continue until they end.

Table 1 Shared characteristics in art and music

Characteristic	Art	Music	Possible Explorations
<i>Linear or horizontal line</i> that begins at a given point and continues on in varying ways	<i>Line</i> Straight and curvy lines in art	<i>Melody</i> Ascending and descending pitch contours	Children create varying lines with string, pipe cleaners, or in drawings and perform them on instruments/voices as ascending and descending melodic contours
<i>The distinctive character</i> of a color or tone quality	<i>Color</i> Colors can be cool and warm Colors can affect feelings	<i>Timbre</i> Instruments and voices have distinctive sound qualities Timbre can affect feelings	Children choose instrument timbres to represent specific colors. (e.g. red is a cymbal, blue is a xylophone). After children mix the paint colors together they play their new color combinations (Combined cymbal/xylophone timbres are now a "purple" sound). Children describe how the various color/sound combinations make them feel
<i>The touch, look and "feel"</i> of an artwork. (e.g. rough, smooth, fuzzy, scratchy, bumpy, thin, thick, heavy, light)	<i>Texture</i> Materials, tools and techniques can create "relief" textures (texture you can touch and feel) and "simulated" textures (texture that can only be seen and imagined)	<i>Texture</i> Repetition, sameness of motion and few parts create light texture Thick texture is created through frequent counterpoint, little repetition and many different parts	Children listen to homophonic music (one melody, repetitive, few parts) and create its smooth texture in various artworks. Children listen to polyphonic music (different melodies, little repetition, many parts) and create its rough texture in artworks
<i>A value point</i> expressed on a continuum between two extremes	<i>Value</i> Tones of grey exist between black and white. Adding white to a color can change tint. Shading creates shadows and add dimension	<i>Tempo and Dynamic</i> Tempo and dynamics are expressed on a continuum between soft to loud and slow to fast. Changes in tempo and dynamics make music interesting	Children experiment with strokes of black ink and water. The darker the paint, the louder they sing/play. The less dark the paint, the softer they sing/play. Children move to fast and slow music and paint their movements. The dark values might represent slow heavy movements, while the lighter values are faster
<i>The distance and relationship</i> between objects	<i>Space</i> The areas above, around and within objects	<i>Rhythm</i> Durations and relationships between sounds and silences	Children choose a picture and re-create it like a scene in a play. Children move through different parts of the "picture" in varying rhythmic ways. (longer distances take more steps or longer leaps). Children, who are not in the scene, watch and play the rhythm of the children's movements as they move about the "picture"
<i>Linear, horizontal expression</i> that <i>completes itself as a distinct figure</i>	<i>Shape</i> Shapes are created when straight and curvy lines are connected. Shapes have positive (inside) and negative (outside) aspects	<i>Phrase</i> Phrases are patterns of pitched and rhythms which sound complete in and of themselves A series of phrases make up a piece of music	Children create visual shapes and then draw short melodic contours within each shape. A repetitive "ostinato" pattern is chosen for the "background" of the piece and children arrange and perform the melodic contour shapes in sequence
<i>Three-dimensional artworks</i>	<i>Form</i> Form is created when art objects are three-dimensional instead of flat	<i>Harmony</i> Harmony is created when two or more pitches are played simultaneously	Children create "jungle" plants and animals artworks and choose a particular instrument to represent each object. As each artwork, and its correlating sound, is added a "jungle symphony" is created

Color, in visual art, is quite similar to *timbre* in music. Timbre, or “sound color”, in music is something that children are hardwired to detect. Indeed, Trehub (2006) has shown that from birth, babies are able to differentiate between many different sounds. Color in art is considered a combination of hue, chroma, and value; in music, musical timbre is determined by a set of frequencies sounded with a characteristic attack, decay, and release. Though this sounds scientifically complex, color and timbre are both easily recognizable to children and children often have a favorite color or sound that they love.

Texture in art is similar to *texture* in music. In art, texture is seen, but also felt by children through touching and feeling. Texture could be rough, smooth, bumpy, scratchy, hard, or soft. In music, texture is heard as the way sounds interact. When voices and instruments move at the same time and direction, the texture is smooth; when voices and instruments move at different times and directions, the texture is perceived as rough. Few voices and instruments create a thin texture; multiple voices and instruments create a thick texture.

Value, in art, is a given point on a continuum between dark and light. In music, a specific *dynamic* is also a point on a continuum between loud and soft. And a specific musical *tempo* is a point on a continuum between fast and slow. Value, dynamics, and tempo are particularly important for affective expression in both art and music.

The use of *space* in art has a comparable role in music's use of *rhythm*. Space, in art, refers to distances or areas around, between, or within components of a piece. For example, there are physical materials, such as paper, canvas, clay or wire, upon which space in art is created. In music, the material upon which music is placed is time itself. Rhythms are varying durations of sounds and silences placed within the canvas of time.

Shape in art resembles *phrases* in music. In art, shape is an enclosed form in a two-dimensional or flat surface. A shape is created when a line reconnects with itself. In music, phrases are recognizable melodic fragments such as “Mary had a little lamb”, “little lamb”, “little lamb”. Contrast and repetition of phrases make music interesting, just as repetition and contrasts in shapes give art its visual appeal.

Form in art has three dimensions: length, width, and depth. Similarly, *harmony* in music is created when two or more pitches are sounded simultaneously and is also multidimensional. Separate pitches in music come together through harmony in distinct new ways, and it is often difficult to hear the separate pitches when they are played together as complex “sound-forms” known as musical chords.

These seven commonalities between art and music could be considered the “vocabulary” of the atelier. Children first

become immersed in these elements through explorations, then practice, and eventually become fluent enough to use music and art as a fluid medium for communication and expression. Malaguzzi was clear in his vision that Reggio ateliers needed to continually evolve, be open to innovation, and move beyond the original template of visual art. The expansion of the art atelier towards a music atelier is a natural direction for ateliers to grow.

Techniques and Materials in the Music Atelier

The art and music atelier, despite their commonalities, are quite different in regards to techniques and materials. Visual art materials and practices require paint, paper, glue, clay, scissors, sponges, textiles, found objects and the list goes on. Materials used for music making are very different from the art studio in that children use their own bodies as “materials” to chant, sing, move, and perform instruments. Music ateliers require audio equipment, sufficient room for creative movement, and quality instruments and other music resources. The one time purchase of quality instruments, however, will be used year after year and make the creation of a music atelier extremely affordable in the long run.

In the visual arts atelier children use physical materials to create works of art. For example, children need paint, brushes, a surface to paint on but children also need to know how to handle the materials. Children need to learn techniques; how to mix the paint, hold the paintbrush, or make different kinds of strokes on the canvas. These techniques are introduced by the atelierista as he or she guides experiences, provides prompts, and asks questions that will help to direct children's explorations. The music atelierista is no different. The music atelierista proposes musical experiences and instructs children in the use of techniques by demonstrating how musical materials are used while prompting children to find their own ways of exploring these materials. Some of these ways include chanting, singing, movement, listening, and performing on instruments and playing musical games. The music atelierista initiates the activities, but allows the children to create their own original contributions.

Just as words and sentences are essential to meaningful expression in language, understanding the basic music elements (melody, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, tempo, texture, phrases, harmony) provides the essential building blocks necessary for children to express themselves musically. Music also includes movement and drama. The body naturally responds to music through movement and because music often tells a story, there is a strong “make-believe”, dramatic play aspect to music and to many musical experiences. In addition, since music is an

affective art form and is particularly valuable for expressing emotions and moods.

Documentation in the Music Atelier

Examples of musical documentation in the Reggio atelier might be a recorded performance of a child singing or playing instruments, a spontaneous dance interpretation to a particular piece of music, an original music composition, a dramatic play with musical sound effects, or a vocal or instrumental improvisation produced by a child. In addition to traditional audio/visual recording devices, there are many affordable ways to record children's musical works for later viewing and analysis such as cell phones, electronic piano keyboards that can interface with computers, and computer and iPad software and applications. Musical "documents" can be displayed on computer screens and audio players throughout the school. Public displays and easy access to such musical artifacts allows teachers, parents and other children to provide constructive comments and encouragement. Larger music document files can now be sent electronically to children's homes, or the larger community, with technologies such as *Dropbox*. Just as a child's drawing can hang on the family refrigerator, a child's musical performance can be displayed on the family computer or played in the car. While documentation of musical expressions could take many different forms, it should be noted that these should not be considered "performances". This is especially true since music produced by children is often judged more harshly than art produced by children. Early childhood music expert Donna Fox states:

When we label a two-year-old an "artist", we don't expect this child to paint landscapes and create large sculptures; instead, we acknowledge the physical demands of controlling the crayons and creating the lines and circles known to us as scribbles (but fiercely defended by youngsters as "pictures"). In the same way, identifying a two-year-old as a "musician" should not be based on expectations of precocious demonstrations of adult musical behaviors (Fox 1991, p. 42).

Musical ability, or "talent", is not the point of developing children's musical fluency in the atelier. Musical products are meant to express a child's perspective, feelings, ideas and imagination.

Concluding Thoughts

Reggio-inspired schools are continually developing ideas beyond the original model of the visual arts atelier in

schools throughout the world. Looking at similarities between the visual arts and music might be a useful way to expand the work within the art atelier to include music. Teachers that are already comfortable working with visual art may find it interesting to explore the interweaving of relationships between the visual and performing arts. Musicians can also benefit by looking towards the visual art atelier for ideas for creating unique atelier explorations. Existing art ateliers could be expanded to include music alongside visual art or separate art and music ateliers could be developed. Children, in any case, will benefit from the expansion and inclusion of music, as well as visual art experiences, within Reggio-inspired settings.

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