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‘Museum Mindfulness’ as Space, Place, and Provocation: Supporting Global Development, Community, and Identity in Early Childhood

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Abstract

While this article focuses on activities and classroom practices that provide for children’s learning, its main objective aims to underscore how considering museums as space and place and creating a sense of ‘museum mindfulness,’ can activate young children’s global development. Furthermore, the provocation of museum characteristics as an environmental proponent, a space of “the third teacher”, as proposed by the Reggio Emilia approach, may indeed support a communal place for early development of holistic human growth. Such experiences at integral stages of development can lay

foundations of identity, powerful enough to rouse one's sense of self and place in the world.

Introduction

Throughout the foundational years of early childhood, children's learning emerges amid the breadth of their experiences. Depending on the setting, and contingent on the stages of growth, children's knowledge develops by way of their observations, imitations, understandings, and ultimately their capabilities to recall and affirm information as their own. Moreover, the conceptualization of young children's learning, and the experiences that will be presented to them, often rely on the image of the child and on the adults who are caring for them. Research by Claxton and Carr (2004) has corroborated that in order for young children to develop into sound learners, they need to be positioned to learn, creating openness and willingness to enter unfamiliar learning spaces. Undoubtedly, when providing for development of such receptive learning dispositions, meaningful engagement needs to be provided by an educator, and essential developmental domains require provocation. Those domains include social, emotional, cognitive, physical, linguistic, and aesthetic areas, namely the fields of children's global development. Classroom spaces typically attend to the development of the young child; however, for many educators encouraging learning dispositions may be a challenge.

In consideration of supporting learning dispositions, meaning young children's eagerness and spontaneity when learning, and with respectful acknowledgement to children's families, culture, and prior knowledge, indeed a learning landscape can be found in museums. Children's museums may include interactive settings whereby they are physically partaking in exploration, such as in a science museum; or museum venues may center on topics or artifacts particularly attractive to young children, such as dinosaur museums. Certainly, art museums can be contemplated as rich environments for learning wherein children may observe, inquire, interpret, and discuss their honest perspectives of a sculpture, photograph, or painting. Considerable research demonstrates that young children (2-8 years old) benefit greatly when art museum education is part of their learning repertoire (Bell, 2011; Bowers, 2012; Knutson et al., 2011; McArdle, 2012). Long ago, Dewey (1934) suggested that young children's encounters with works of art can be so significant that they can be explained as "having an experience" (p.37), one that exceeds common practices because of art's complexity and intensity. Museums provide that stimulating place to offer children opportunities to connect with an interesting object or artefact. Exhibits and thoughtful scaffolding by a knowledgeable adult can evoke children's curiosity, build knowledge, create memories, and provide for great conversations. I argue that if learning is viewed as a trajectory of building knowledge,

attitudes, and values, then museums deliver. Semper (1990) posits that “a museum is an educational country fair” (p.50) beckoning creative deliberations to a place filled with exploration and discovery and is an arena that affords unique opportunities for early learners to explore concepts in math, science, art, and cultural enhancement (McLeod and Kilpatrick, 2000). Such a learning landscape is lived, and ‘museum mindfulness’ an aura of space and place- is present. However, art museums are habitually considered more for adults and older children’s enjoyment. Art museums are often regarded as daunting places that house a multitude of valuable art pieces and artefacts not suitable for child focused exploration (Weier, 2004). Mallos (2012) asserts that despite young children's spontaneous attraction to art, and its abstractions, assortment, dimensions, and experimentation, art museums are the most hesitant to embrace young visitors.

In any museum setting children visit, museums grant children provocative learning environments whereby they might connect with an idea, an object, or an experience, and with support of adult guidance, learning and dispositions of embracing knowledge can be activated in unique ways. Research by Carr et al. (2012) confirms that the formation of young children’s learning, with a focus on building positive learning dispositions can be stimulated by museum experiences. Specifically, they acknowledge the deep potential of museums to generate interest due to the ample number of resources on hand and how time can be afforded for critical observation. However, Carr et al. (2012) distinguish that learning in museums can be situationally restrictive, and similar attempts for supporting in-depth learning and children’s global growth ought to be transferable to the early childhood classroom.

In this article, I aim to draw attention to specific resources and the environment of early childhood classrooms as space and place for ‘museum mindfulness’, thereby encouraging unique learning to happen. Museum education is steeped in collecting, preserving, reflecting, and displaying artifacts, shouldering cultural, scientific or historic significance (Falk & Dierking, 2016; Munley, 2012), in-depth characteristics of ‘museum mindfulness.’ Museums are such rich spaces for interpretation and learning. How can those attributes of museum education be presented in an early childhood setting? Not all school communities have access or funds to visit actual museums. Indeed, empowering young children to observe, respond to, and discuss art in the context of a museum affords powerful learning opportunities. With respect to these considerations, I ask the following questions: In what ways can educators consider re-creating ‘museum mindfulness’ in classrooms and at the same time offer requisite cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and aesthetic development? How can global development of the child be infused with creativity to make way for critical reflection to mirror ‘museum mindfulness’? Can arts-informed pedagogy find a place in an early childhood classroom? How can “play”, the crucial learning tool of early childhood, be considered part of a classroom’s ‘museum mindfulness’? Undeniably, play is vital to early

learning and healthy development (Cavanaugh et al., 2017, Daly & Beloglovsky, 2014). Children become deeply engaged, gain understanding and interests when given the space to learn through play (Elkin, 2007; Harlen, 2001; Pyle et al., 2018; Rapp, 2005). Can the richness of ‘museum mindfulness’ be recreated into an early childhood playful classroom, and at the same time support global development of the young child?

My deliberations here arise from almost forty years of being an early childhood practitioner and researcher. I take on a narrative approach; for me it is knowing. My stories spanning years of being involved in early childhood arenas indeed have provided meaningful foundations for thinking about changing pedagogies when it comes to early childhood education. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge I have been “living the story”, and had sentiments that have matured along with me through close collaborations. I select a narrative methodology as mutually constructed stories that have emerged out of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and indeed my documentation practices over the years have provided for rich data.

Turning to Reggio Emilia

As part of my many years of teaching in schools, in universities, working with preservice teachers, and in my research journeys, I have come to embody the philosophies of the Reggio Emilia approach. Well-known for their guiding teaching methods, and ultimate respect for the main protagonist in learning, the child, young learners’ experiences take the form of creative work whereby they observe, inquire, explore, and are free to elaborate on their ideas. The focus on the arts is intentional, aimed at fostering creative thinking, providing a means for sharing of ideas and re-visiting experiences, thereby allowing children’s innate expressive understandings to emerge. Vecchi (2010) explains that “the pursuit of beauty and loveliness is part of our species in a deep, natural way and constitutes an important element in our humanity; a primary need” (p.9) is fundamental to Reggio philosophy. This vision is certainly a unique mindset to what is meant by ‘arts-based’, a perception not typically considered for early education.

Moreover, the Reggio Emilia view of children, established as the ‘image of the child’, acknowledges the rights of children as they are perceived as capable, creative individuals with abilities to utilize their “100 languages” (Malaguzzi, 1998) to comprehend the world around them. Those languages may include dance, or drawing, or painting, or building; it is up to the child to reveal how they desire to express their ideas or understandings. Whether the child’s choice be verbal, or graphic, or symbolic or a logical mathematical creation, the thought processes are key and intended to be shared. Envisioning young children as capable to use their ‘languages’ in such a way allows educators to enter into meaningful dialogue with them, question their choices and invite explanations of their work. The educator indeed gets to know the child well-enough to develop close relationships and is prepared to scaffold experiences to move a child forward in their endeavours. In addition, this process of making meaning

happens via play, which indeed permits children to be in charge of their reality, "...to decompose and recompose it, and consolidate convergent and divergent thinking" (Rinaldi, 2005, p. 118).

Interestingly enough, museums and Reggio classrooms are both intensely cognizant of the impact of the "environment as third teacher" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.77). Vecchi (2010) explains that in Reggio classrooms, the attention to children's identity becomes part of the environment as it is through organizing space and materials that essentially becomes a metaphor for organizing knowledge. Reggio schools, like art museums, are beautiful, serene physical environments in harmony with pedagogical values. In consideration to both places, the child's construction of understanding is located physically within space and ample time. Museum researchers Falk and Dierking (2000) underscore that learning in a museum is influenced by "...the personal, socio-cultural, physical, and temporal contexts in which it takes place" (p.12). Vintimilla and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2020) maintain that from an epistemological perspective, practice in Reggio environments is focused on socially constructed knowledge, reliant on the contexts and relationships involved. Reggio principles acknowledge that the environment is a teacher, a place where the aesthetic dimensions of learning and its epistemological capacity are distinguished as noteworthy sources of community and knowledge. Museums and Reggio classroom environments are both conscious of that space for learning; it is not a passive container for information, but it has an active presence prepared to be interpreted by the observer. Such environments afford children implicit messages about their place in the world (Gandini, 1998), and in so doing, facilitates learning and the construction of self-identity.

Exceptional to Reggio practice is the extensive documentation teachers carry out almost daily. Documentation becomes the 'museum pieces.' Documentation may include collections of sequenced photos, transcriptions of conversations, video recordings, children's sketches, all evidence of children's process of learning. This comprehensive documentation permits educators to 'listen' intently to each of the children's 'languages.' Designated as pedagogical documentation, the exercise is "creative and transformative...because it works at the intersection between theory and practice, pedagogical thought is active" (Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020, p. 631). Educators' thought-filled recordings underscore the image of the child as fundamental to all learning; capable, deserving, and having the right to be heard. Along with the documentation practice, displays of progressions are part of environment. Teachers and children are able to revisit, reflect, rethink and re-consider how to move forward on a project undertaken. As a bonus, the exercise of contemplative documentation adds to an educator's development, providing opportunities to consult with colleagues, and share with families. Machado (2019) insists that pedagogical documenting is a key reflective professional practice that adds to teachers' competence and knowledge.

Turning to practice: Kindergarten teaching

Upon reflection, the power of Reggio's environment as 'third teacher', and museum's mindfulness in providing space and place to generate positive learning dispositions, it becomes clear that both locations can be rich sources for cognitive, social, and cultural development. While museum collections are prepared and organised for easy access and viewing, classrooms require intervention of resources to focus on building children's developmental domains, as well as a need to consider space and place. During my years of working in kindergarten environments, I have witnessed how the environment, artifacts, and suitable materials are necessary for emotional stimulation and intellectual provocation. Those resources can invite children into meaningful playful opportunities to engage and extend children's thinking as well as strengthen social, emotional, and aesthetic sensibilities (Topol & Gandini, 1999).

My passion for including active arts-based Reggio experiences for young children has been motivational in my career. On a past trip to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, I purchased a collection of art posters depicting a variety of famous pieces by well-known Israeli artists. At the time, I was working at a Jewish school in Montreal and the curriculum included Jewish culture and identity. I figured that at some time, I would be able to include those museum poster representations in my work.

During a week of celebrating Israel's Independence Day, *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, the Kindergarten students became increasingly inquisitive about the foods, incorporating Israeli produce that we were newly tasting. Following great discussions with the group, we decided to carve out a corner of the classroom and create an Israeli market loaded with oranges, dates, and olive products. Our market, the *Shuk*, was fashioned out of recycled materials; crates, empty olive oil bottles, baskets of dates and oranges (student-produced out of papier maché), and tables and boxes to create that *Shuk* feeling. The excitement was palpable as each replica was constructed and role-playing experiences filled hours of the children's day. Tarr (2004), an advocate for attention to environments for young children, maintains that educators need to think beyond just decorating a classroom; classroom environments need to clearly display the purpose. Indeed, this was what was unfolding as I photographed and displayed the stages of cooperative building in a classroom. Such an experience prompted children to think beyond the walls, offering spaces of learning willingness to move forward in understanding in age-appropriate ways.

After several weeks of play, a few class members proclaimed that they would like to have a window, or a scene that would depict the location of the market in Israel. Listening well, I soon presented the children with a stand holding a large white sheet of paper with small partially cut-out doors. Behind the sheet of paper was one of the art posters I had purchased. I

informed the group I had found a good scene that could be hung on the wall behind the market area, and it was hidden behind my white paper curtain. I challenged the children to guess first what the scene would be, offering peeks behind the cut-out doors. One by one volunteers opened the minuscule apertures. Guesses included the desert, Tel Aviv, a railway station, and a date palm (that was a close guess!) (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Peeking Through the Doors.

After much excitement on the part of the children, I revealed Anna Ticho's (1940) charcoal sketch of "The Olive Tree" (See Figure 2).

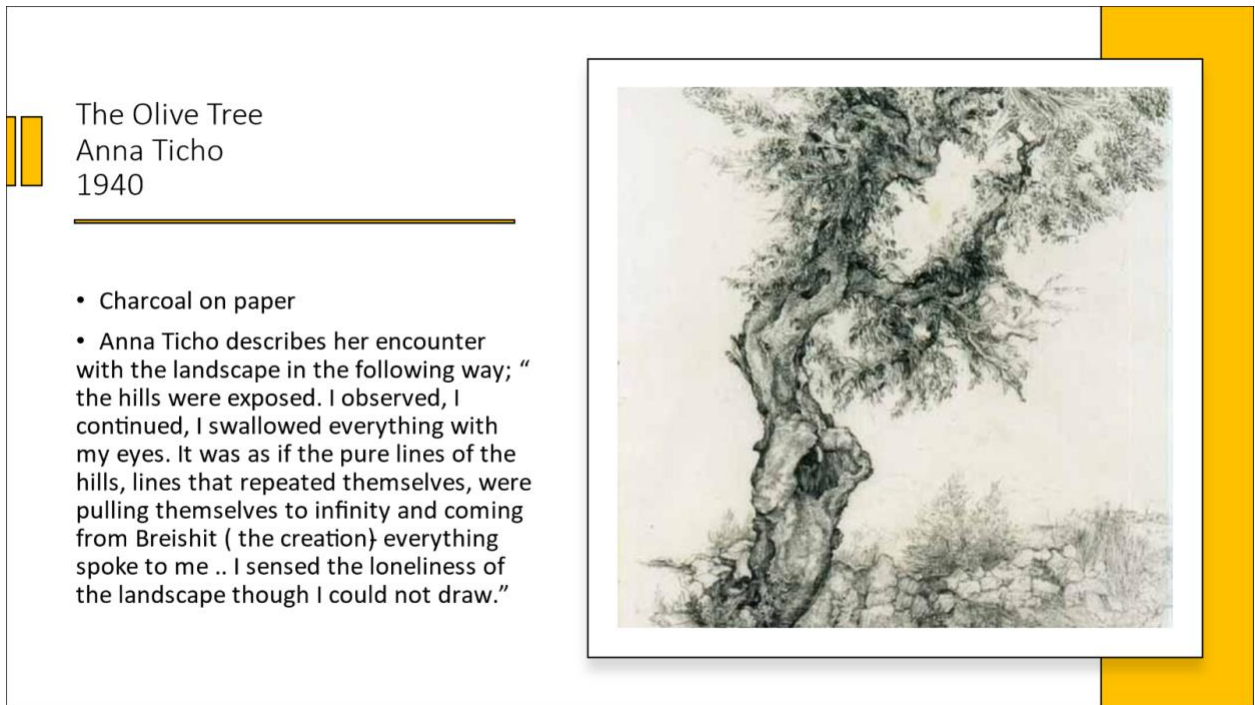


Figure 2. The Olive Tree.

The students had been learning about the various trees and produce of Israel, so the topic was familiar. As they observed the work of art, I related a bit of Anna Ticho’s life story; born in 1896 in the Czech Republic, she studied art in Vienna while still a teenager. When she was 18, she moved to Israel and married a famous eye doctor, Dr. Avraham Ticho. Anna helped in his office in Jerusalem and when she had the chance, she would sketch small drawings in pencil. With short and precise lines, she depicted the landscape of Jerusalem- olive trees, rocks, and vegetation. Even today, the Ticho Tea House in Jerusalem retains her sketches, and the original Olive Tree drawing hangs respectfully in the Israel Museum.

I then invited the children to take a closer look at Ticho’s Olive tree, using magnifying glasses to examine the lines she chose to draw. Soon after, children were invited to pencil-sketch a dictionary of lines prompted by what they had observed in Ticho’s olive tree. On a long roll of white butcher paper, the children drew and named the lines they observed. (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Child Adding to a Dictionary of Lines.

Eventually, that long roll of paper was placed on an accessible classroom wall. Pencils suspended from the ceiling offered children opportunities to sketch further, at their leisure, and add their own lines, which included, “s-shaped, squiggly, and rocket pointed lines.” On outdoor walks, the children were happy to bring materials to take tree rubbings from a variety of trees to discover new lines that could be added to our visual dictionary (See Figure 4).



Figure 4. Collection of Tree Rubbings.

When ready, the students were offered a quiet area to sketch their own olive tree, influenced by the work of Anna Ticho. The students used pencil and charcoal (like Anna Ticho). I offered the children as many sittings they desired, allowing them freedom to revisit their own work, use their dictionary for reference, and add or change their depiction as they saw fit (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. Sketching Time

The over two-month experiences that unfolded around The Olive Tree each added to children's growth aesthetically. Furthermore, the classroom environment indeed became that 'third teacher,' playful and open, providing space and place for children, as a result, suggesting 'museum mindfulness'. The opportunities afforded here made place and space for collecting, preserving, reflecting, and displaying artifacts, indeed undertaking cultural and historical significance for these young learners.

Turning to practice: A research opportunity

From 2010 until 2014 I was fortunate enough to carry out research in Kahnawake, a First Nations Mohawk community about 20 minutes outside of Montreal, Quebec. The research was focused on supporting my Indigenous partners in developing a culturally relevant program for an early childhood center accommodating children aged 2-5 years old. At all times in the study, we sought to merge culture and learning within an arts-based approach.

In 2011, the construction of four ateliers occurred at the center, and in the development and construction of the studios, we strove to create a space where the children could experience the language of art and share the pleasure of creating with their peers and teachers. Built on

the previous year's project, this segment of the study focused deeply on children's experiences in order to gain a sense of their understandings of Mohawk culture. The research questions during that phase of research were: How could the atelier and the arts promote goals in early childhood education in Mohawk culture? Would the studios develop into "...a place of research where imagination, rigour, experiment, creativity, and expression would interweave and complete each other" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 35) and also attend to the goals of early childhood education in the context of developing Mohawk identity? Would the offering of art as an expression of ideas expand the children's cultural experiences?

As an active participant in the ateliers, I gained insight into the teachers' and children's interpretations of cultural topics during project investigations. I had the opportunity to work closely with the participants to facilitate and guide in the construction of a project and how to build on ideas (Vecchi, 1998). I observed and actively worked with children during atelier experiences and at the same time I was also supporting teachers in their practice. This dual-focused role allowed me to gain emic perspectives as we were all profoundly engaged in the encounters.

According to the Reggio approach, the concept of having 'ateliers' are usually led by an *atelierista*, a teacher with an arts background who works in partnership with classroom teachers and children. My modeling and coaching role shouldered that practice and supported methods of participatory action research. Characteristic of the Reggio ateliers is a belief in the "...use of visual language as a construction of thoughts and feelings within a holistic education and [the fact] that the atelier becomes a cultural vehicle for teacher development" (Vecchi, 1998, p.139). Similarly, museums too embody that element of being an educational conduit for the professionals involved. Kokkinos and Alexakis (2002) argue that museums are transforming from places of exclusion to places of learning, contributing to "lifelong learning and promoting a pluralistic perspective, acting as a mechanism for shaping culture and critical thinking skills" (p.11). It was with this provocation that we explored the hundred languages of children, Mohawk culture, and the development of teachers' skills.

As a result of our mutual appreciation of the principles of Reggio Emilia, we began the research with faith in the environment as the 'third teacher.' The ateliers were arranged with care, supplied with cultural artifacts and a generous amount of art materials. Fresh paint brushes, categorized by size, were placed in glass jars or transparent tubes. Small clear jars of paint were grouped by shades and placed on low shelves for children to access. Small tables were arranged diagonally between large ceiling-to-floor windows, so children would be provided with light and could have a clear view of the outdoors. The teachers included important symbols of Mohawk culture as part of the décor: a dream catcher; a *kastowah* (male headdress); natural items such as pinecones and twigs placed in baskets; jars of shells or

stones; a sculpture of a turtle or bear. These ateliers underscored the provision of space for displays of cultural significance and offered a slower pace for reflection and preserving identity, an aura for ‘museum mindfulness’- space and place (See Figure 6).



Figure 6. The Ateliers

We began with an exploration of clay that extended over months of research and was revisited as a vital art medium later in the school year during project explorations. The first steps in working with the clay emphasized a manipulation of the material. Pelo (2007) addresses these beginning stages as “understanding [clay’s] identity” (p.59). The notion of ‘culture’ resonated not only with the new media about to be explored (i.e., clay being natural product of the earth) but also with the objectives of this study, seamless integration of Mohawk culture within a space in the school. Culture and the integration of Mohawk language persisted at the heart of all encounters. In the ateliers, I would meet a small group of children (usually three or four) with their teacher, and we would begin to “play,” to get to know the properties of clay. We highlighted and modeled the language of art for the teachers, emphasizing the medium’s technique vocabulary (e.g., pulling, squeezing, rolling, coiling). Vocabulary was important: a common language to use and retrieve when needed in the future when artifacts would be created to represent children’s ideas or understandings. Some classes documented words about activities with accompanying photos of the children engaged in their art and new vocabulary. Some teachers added Mohawk translations to the words and photos of children working, and Mohawk spoken language was often implemented during their sessions (See Figures 7 & 8). This was significant as although this was a Mohawk community, the language of instruction is English with the exception of one Mohawk immersion multi-age class.



Figure 7. Smoothing Pinching, Rolling.

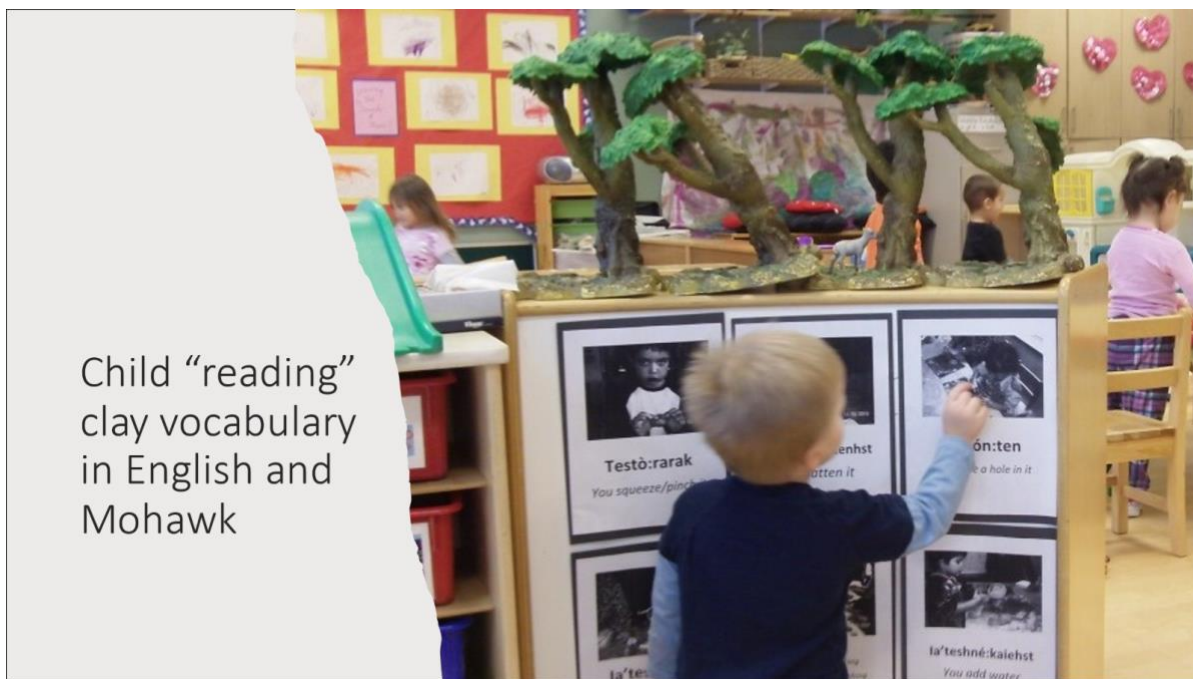


Figure 8. Child “Reading.”

The focused attention on clay provided space and place for weeks of exploration. We began with examining the properties of clay, observing, poking, pinching, braiding, and squeezing. We moved our explorations forward with changing the properties of clay by adding water to the table and acquired skills in smoothing and shaping. Continued manipulation with added materials were devoted to lengthy exploration and, when it was time to create, seeing that the children had practiced various techniques over a span of weeks, they applied acquired skills to fashion their representations (See Figures 9 & 10).



Figure 9. Created Clay Projects on Display.



Figure 10. Finished Project Alongside Documentation of Process.

Those months of studio experiences were occupied by our building a relationship with clay and the documentation reminded us of the well-paced practices that supported inquiry over an emphasis on product or representation. My notion of ‘museum mindfulness’ seeps in here as the ateliers provided an extension to the classroom experiences, a place that supported innovative ways of perceiving those experiences. Importantly it was evident that the Reggio environmental considerations offered an opening for renewed spaces to be considered. The arts became the resource for communication that added to children’s ways of expressing their ideas and values within Mohawk culture. The act of learning through experience resonated profoundly with Mohawk culture and ways of learning (Battiste, 2002; Porter, 2008) and significantly extended children’s learning dispositions as they explored and exhibited openness to working with clay before ever producing a representation. Classroom projects that occurred over time allowed children opportunities to observe, reflecting traditional ways young children learn in communities (Rogoff, 2003). It is important to Indigenous knowledge acquisition that children learn through meaningful experiences and be regarded with respect for who they are individually and socially (Battiste, 2002).

The ateliers, and a concentration on exercising the arts, involved seeking out a balanced approach whereby intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual components of learning would be addressed. By that, I mean children’s global development was attended to because of the participation in the ateliers. The young students were able to work at their own level, in the atelier environments, and at a tempo that was comfortable for them (Wright,

2003), mirroring the space and provocation of a museum experience. Such approaches addressed Indigenous methods of acquiring understanding as well as providing for the child's positive identity. As stated in the Indian Control of Indian Education policy (ICIE, 1972): “[We] want education to give [our] children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them” (p. 1). With the teacher's growing practice in the ateliers, and the emphasis on space and place for the arts as a tool for meaning-making, teaching was impacted, and learning was augmented. Affirmed by the educators and administrators of the center, Reggio Emilia environmental principles supported a vocabulary for a return to what was meaningful to this community. Such rehearsals-built skills of ‘museum mindfulness’, collecting, preserving, reflecting, and displaying cultural artifacts, that would ideally be transferred to a variety of learning contexts.

Concluding Thoughts

The potential for early childhood education to learn from museums, and for museums to learn from Reggio Emilia philosophy, is substantial. A shared community of practices can be mutually beneficial. Structural and organizational differences between Reggio preschools and museums certainly keep us cognizant that praxis can only be developed according to context. Indeed, there is greater overlap between the two (i.e., Museums and Reggio inspired classrooms) in theory than in practice. Kindler (1996) trusts that one of the most central roles of art museums is to nurture a vibrant relationship with those who visit and to “find ways to keep the romance with art alive beyond the honeymoon” (p.16). For early childhood educators this might hold true for classroom experiences as well. Classrooms for young children need to transform to elevate the curriculum that is being offered in early childhood. Knowing the importance of learning through play, and the inspiration of the Reggio approach, pedagogues can avoid keeping classrooms and teaching as mundane spaces for children, their teachers, and their families.

My interpretation of ‘museum mindfulness’, practices of collecting, preserving, reflecting, and displaying artifacts, and being true to cultural, or historical meaning (Falk & Dierking, 2016), drives me to emphasize space and place with the intention of facilitating unique opportunities for education to happen. Seamless integration of the characteristics of ‘museum mindfulness’ as part of early childhood pedagogy indeed supports thinking about early education in fresh and novel ways. Objectives ought to be designed for children to grow in their developmental domains alongside acquiring positive learning dispositions for the future. Reggio's persistence of the ‘environment as third teacher’ paves the way for place where children's global development can be nurtured through aesthetic dimensions of learning. Vecchi (2010) insists that it is crucial for children to learn in environments that have “... a healthy psychological relationship with surroundings...inhabiting a place which is lovely and

cared for is perceived to be a condition of physical and psychological well-being and therefore a right of all people in general” (p.820).

Furthermore, the teachers’ keen documentation practice, and the space provided for children’s observation, revisiting, and adding to ideas and work, underscore the ultimate respect for the rights of children. Young learners are listened to and followed and permitted to work on their ideas over time. The reciprocal practice between teacher and child builds strong relationships along with mutual understandings amid the main protagonists in the classroom. The space for learning is present. As a result, the child feels empowered, and once more, positive learning dispositions are being nurtured at a young age. I claim that the practices of documentation could indeed be implemented across later childhood and young adult education as well. This routine of documenting learning, reflecting, and creating personal representations are acts of metacognition that are insightful as to how learning transpires.

The focus of my discussion has been to extend thinking with and beyond museum visits and experiences. My narratives aimed to elicit deeper considerations as to what museums offer, and what can be extracted to provide place and space for creative thinking in a classroom of young learners. Falk and Dierking (2016) allege that “subsequent reinforcing events and experiences outside the museum are as critical to learning from museums as are the events inside a museum” (p.140). Our youngest learners nowadays require that stimulation, that intentional creative approach for positive growth. Vecchi (2010) eloquently proclaims that part of the role of education is to look after our humanity. For education to be successful, young children ought to have chances to express and satisfy their curiosity, to have their innate creative abilities nurtured, and their openness to learning encouraged (Vecchi, 2010). Indeed, these are the essence of human characteristics that are not always attended to in the early childhood classroom, or perhaps they are loosely scrutinised. At this time of transformation in education, it is safe to say that we should be looking across disciplines to uncover human influences on learning. My consideration of museum mindfulness, my lived experiences and the inspiration of the Reggio Emilia approach have encouraged an intense regard for the young child, the child of today. Seeing across the fields of learning is further authentication for the value of looking beyond, using the arts as the vehicle, and offering original experiences in children’s education.

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Dr. Sheryl Smith-Gilman is the Associate Dean, Academic Programs in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. She is responsible for the governance of academic programs across the faculty, and coordinating and facilitating the monitoring, evaluation, and development of academic programs, including both undergraduate and graduate studies. Dr. Smith-Gilman has spearheaded various French Immersion teacher education initiatives and has been called upon as an expert on the topics of early childhood education, Indigenous cultural approaches in early teaching, and teaching and learning through the arts. Her research focuses on the relationships within the themes and fields across culture and education. Dr. Smith-Gilman has served as a pedagogical consultant to the Quebec Ministry préscolaire committees, as an authority on the Reggio Emilia approach in preschool and primary school settings, and as an author of several journal articles and book chapters in her areas of teaching and research.

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