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**Are early-elementary students too young for aesthetics?
 How art educators can establish foundations for aesthetic understanding.**

Art educators trained to understand the developmental stages of elementary students possess the knowledge to introduce sequential aesthetic understanding. Various methods and techniques can be utilized to meet the learning needs and/or challenges of elementary students as early as kindergarten while continuing to meet state standards. Some academics such as Eaton (1994), Parsons (1987, 1994), and Moore (1994) surmise that early elementary students (*from here forward to refer to grades pre-k -4*) may be too young to understand this philosophical aesthetic conversation. Others such as Tarr (2001), turn our view to such pedagogies such as that of Reggio Emilia¹, Italy which is often used in scholarly publications¹ as an example of aesthetic education for pre-school to school age children.

Much discourse has occurred over the developmental cognitive abilities for early-elementary students to process and understand aesthetics². In 1994 the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*³ devoted an entire volume to this very subject. Many views were offered through writings by respected academics such as Battin, Eaton, Moore, Parsons, Rostankowski, Walsh-Piper, and Stewart. The theme of the journal addressed the many challenges in presenting

¹ I.e. *Journal of Aesthetic Education; Art Education*; (Reggio Children USA 1996)

² (Moore 1994)(Parson 1987,1994) (Rosario 1981)

³ *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Fall 1994

aesthetic philosophies to early-elementary students. Most notably were several writings on creative ways in which educators can lay the foundation of aesthetic understandings rather than expect young minds to grasp adult philosophical concepts. This theory was proven in case studies by Battin (1994, 89-104) who utilized “thinking puzzles” to encourage problem solving and open up discussion of artistic interpretations.ⁱⁱ The journal also included an essay by Stewart (1994, 77-88) whose proposal is summarized in the abstract:

“[A]esthetics [*can*] be incorporated into the art curriculum. [Aesthetics] should form an integral part of the art curriculum because considering philosophical questions and issues is central to what it means to be a real human being who is investigating the meanings inherent in the activities of making and responding to art”.

This statement is echoed in varying ways by additional authors who will be cited further in this paper. What is lacking from the collection of the 1994 *Journal of Aesthetic Education*'s special issue is the inclusion of pedagogies that have more recently emerged, particularly *Choice-Based Learning/Teaching for Artistic Behavior* (CBL/TAB)ⁱⁱⁱ. At the time of the journal's publication in 1994, *Discipline-Based Art Education*^{iv} (D.B.A.E.) founded by the *Getty Center for the Education of the Arts*^v was the prominent and promoted pedagogy for art education. While it did have success in applying techniques and methods in teaching aesthetics to younger students⁴ through activities such as museum visits, it has been pedagogy under hot debate since its origin. Opponents worry that it is too stringent, that it lacks any need of teacher training, and could in fact diminish art in schools,⁵ while others question the theoretical integrity

⁴ (Walsh-Piper 1994) *Museum Education and the Aesthetic Experience*

⁵ *Pros and cons of DBAE for debate. Teacher Exchange.* retrieved on April 25, 2011 from <http://www.getty.edu/education/teacherartexchange/archive/Jan98/0395.html>

of DBAE. (Delacruz and Dunn 1996) Many art educators who embrace CBL/TAB do so from personal experience and advocate that allowing students to drive the artwork process allows for the introduction of “artistic behaviors that sustain engagement, such as problem finding, and innovation”, as well as, support artistic behaviors of reflection to include, perceiving, questioning, interpretation, assessment, critique of self and others, applying understanding, and finding meaning. (Douglas and Jaquith 2006)

Within debates over which models of art instruction are the most successful is a gap. What is lacking is a determination for the need, or perhaps not the need, of providing aesthetic education to younger school aged children, particularly those in grades prek-4. This discussion will examine different models of pedagogy, review published essays and studies and determine if aesthetics are appropriate for the developmental abilities of younger students. Key questions to be addressed arise; Instead of a DBAE style of formulated art instruction, could students, when given a choice about their art projects build not only skills but an appreciation of aesthetics?; Do certain pedagogies benefit the implementation of aesthetic training over others (I.e. Reggio-Emilia, DBAE, CBL/TAB)?; Is it possible to utilize the more open-ended techniques and methods known in CBL/TAB to successfully introduce and educate early elementary students to grasp aesthetics?

Why teach aesthetics to early elementary students?

According to Moore (1994) skeptics claim that aesthetics is too big of a concept for young students to understand. Moore states that these critics further suggest that it is an adult

subject which is disconnected from the essential core concepts of art education and serves as a distraction rather than an enhancement.

Students are often not given an opportunity to show what they are truly capable of achieving. In the current situation, with standardized testing and more and more demands on teachers to teach specific curriculum in specific ways, the unique learning opportunities once available to young learners have been set aside due to time constraints. (McNeil 2000)

In providing young students with the tools to become well-rounded adults, beyond the basic functions of reading, writing and arithmetic, it is crucial to develop creative, inquiring, problem solving adults who can be leaders and innovators in the 21st century. (Clark University, 2011) Further evidence of support for the implementation of aesthetic education in the classroom is found in multiple sources. Moore (1994) noted prominent sources including “the Discipline-based Art Education project (DBAE) sponsored by the Getty Center for the Education in the Arts, and Project Zero, founded at Harvard University by Howard Garner.” Moore states that it is:

“through aesthetics that the questions get asked, the controversies raised, and the values assessed that elevate the business of the arts from production and delectation to a thoughtful, influential force affecting and being affected by the rest of life.

The argument for the indispensability of aesthetics in an integrated arts curriculum turns on the simple fact that many of the issues posed by the other disciplines are themselves philosophical.” (Moore 1994)

The above statement can be seen to not only in art but in other areas of the curriculum be it young musicians, writers, artisans, or scientists. Each of these young scholars find themselves engaged with problem solving where the answer might not be answered by a simple or pre-determined formula but instead require a challenging philosophical alternative consisting of alternative approaches and solutions. The benefits of higher-level thinking using philosophy is supported by the likes of Moore, Flannery, and Battin, et al.⁶, who also ponder on what age young children can access aesthetics, in what manner is it to be presented, and how can success be determined.

Determining age appropriate, aesthetic instruction for the early elementary student

The discourse in exposing aesthetics to young school-children has been an active one. Studies have been conducted in this subject, most noteworthy being Michael Parsons's *How We Understand Art*, of which traced identifying stages of development, cognitive connections, and multiple ways of understanding. (Parsons 1987) In a later study, Parsons (1994) states that "children do in fact think in characteristic ways about the arts and have, at least implicitly, philosophies of art. Moreover, these implicit philosophies of art are shaped by the development of important underlying cognitive abilities" (33). Parsons further maintains that "the development of abilities with respect to aesthetics is closely related to the development of the more general abilities required for mature aesthetic response" (33).

Parsons recognizes other studies such as Gardner's involvement with *Project Zero*^{vi} which looked at the development of abilities of young students in regards to recognizing art

⁶ (Battin, et al. 1994) (Flannery 1977) (Moore 1994)

genres, methods and materials, and perceptions of artworks. Overall however, Project Zero focused more on behavioral aesthetics (creating artwork they personally enjoy) rather than understanding the aesthetics of objects. Parsons conclude from this date that art educators should instruct students in theories of art which allows them to discuss and experience art in new ways. (33-41)

Marcia Eaton (Eaton 1994) stated that in teaching aesthetics we must be able to recognize it. She agrees with many theorists who have agreed that there are four areas to contemplate when considering the validity of aesthetic experiences (19). Before applying these considerations it is important to be aware of how people, children in particular react to aesthetics. Just as music provokes a variety of recognizable yet different reactions in its listeners, viewers of aesthetics will too respond in similar ways. Eaton maintains that the core concepts allow not only philosophical conversation on aesthetics but allow students to access this same inquiry at their own developmental level. The concepts:

- A. Objects (artwork) which are the focus of attention
- B. The makers of the object
- C. The audience
- D. The art world of society in which the object exists.

Eaton suggests that educators can provide activities for students in using representation and expression. Students might consider representation by creating a drawing of a horse, next study historical ways in which horses have been represented by other artists, finally, using the accessed knowledge decide why a horse drawing is good or not, and hold a conversation on their thoughts (19-21).

Establishing a foundation for aesthetic *understanding* not *philosophy*

Setting the stage to allow young students to understand the concepts of aesthetics is dependent on the type of pedagogy being used. Clearly, it has been assumed that young children are not cognitively ready to participate in philosophical aesthetic conversations we might deem worthy as adults. This however would ignore the sequential learning and understanding that accompanies those adults who study aesthetics. The question lies then in how educators can set the stage for sequential understanding of aesthetics. Just as motor skills develop so does a child's brain. Each year reading, writing, and awareness improves and heightens. It is quite possible to also integrate aesthetics into this early education and has been done so in Reggio Emilia, Italy. While many scholars debate over aesthetic education the model *Reggio Emilia approach* founded by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) provides methods which should not be ignored. This internationally recognized school (with similarities to North America's Montessori modes^{vii}) is often sourced as a successful model in providing *aesthetic codes* in early education classrooms.

Tarr (2001) studied aesthetic codes while comparing the messages that educational spaces present to students, educators, and the communities in which they reside. Tarr compared early childhood settings in North American schools in comparison to Reggio Emilia, Italy. Tarr maintains that aesthetic codes reflect a culture's image of 'the child', what they value as a culture and educational goals. In the essay, Tarr include a definition by Rosario and Collazo (1981) who coined the term 'aesthetic codes' while looking:

“[At] the kind of children's artwork valued by the teachers in two preschool classrooms. Rosario and Collazo drew on Pierre Bourdieu's work in the sociology of

perception in which Bourdieu described aesthetic perception as a social construction that is learned consciously or unconsciously (Rosario & Collazo, p.74)''.

Tarr applied this defined concept to explore how aesthetic codes were applied in the early elementary classrooms of Reggio Emilia and what, if anything the codes were formally or informally teaching their students. In close relation to Gardner's Project Zero which, as mentioned earlier in this paper focused on behavioral aesthetics rather than the aesthetics of objects, Tarr explored how aesthetics in the Reggio Emilia settings is carefully considered in the objects placed in the classroom and the integration of nature into the indoor environment.

Whereas Eaton (1994) requires a setting of recognizing how children react to visual objects and environments as the primary step in aesthetic education, Parsons (1987, 1994) (who agreed with Gardner) maintains that cognitive and developmental abilities, and maturity are generally lacking and therefore the concept itself is unattainable by early education students.

While Parsons encourages art educators to introduce a variety of theories of art as fodder for aesthetic discussion, Reggio Emilia appears to support promoting aesthetic behavior by placing young students in a natural, organic environment, quite different than the institutional appearances of schools of North America. Contrary to American schools with cartoony images, posters of instructions and descriptions, bright colors, and computerized graphic images, essentially a visual bombardment, Reggio Emilia instead displays cut flowers, encourages natural light throughout the architecture and setup of the school setting. Flannery (1997) as quoted by Tarr (2001) described the Reggio Emilia experience *as coming into aesthetic behavior*:

“As one allows one’s attention to focus intensely upon the multifaceted, multi-layered presence of feeling- visual feeling, tactile feeling, olfactory feeling, kinesthetic feelings, gustatory feeling, and emotional feeling, one comes into aesthetic consciousness and into aesthetic behavior. (p. 19)

The third education, is it the magic method?

The educators of early education schools in Reggio Emilia call this process of environmental exposure to as the ‘third education’. (Reggio Children USA 1996) Through their environment, Reggio Emilia educators believe in the child as a resourceful individual capable of creating meaning of their world when presented with a rich environments which support relationships, world and life experiences, and allows children to express their emotions and ideas. (Rinaldi 1998) (Cadwell 1997).

Tarr points out that Reggio Emilia reflects the educational philosophy of John Dewey. (Malaguzzi 1998) It appears that Reggio Children are considered young adults who having the ability to absorb their environment thus allowing a natural yet deliberate developmental opportunity creating aesthetically aware adults. (Reggio Children USA 1996)

But we don’t live in a castle! How we can get it right in the States.

While Reggio Emilia is often modeled as a highly successful aesthetic education, admittedly, the natural environment of the schools is a gorgeous medieval city. This setting provides an aesthetic awareness that few school sites in the States can compete with. We are a much more modern environment with the majority of our schools being institution-like (Rosario 1981). Add to this that the States do not recognize a “third-education” (Reggio Children USA

1996) as does Reggio Emilia, and it could possibly be realized that what the Italians offer is a unique situation with a set of circumstances that are difficult, if not impossible to replicate in the States. Art educators therefore, if they desire to adopt and adapt the Reggio Emilia mode can do so through the open-endedness of CBL/TAB methods but also by seeking out our own cultural norms for aesthetic opportunities while carefully considering developmental appropriateness.

A factor to consider in applying Reggio Emilia concepts to United States schools lies in the diverse population and cultures that make up our country, which Italy does not. Our schools are populated by students not only from diverse cultures but also from a variety of education settings from home, *Head Start*, or private pre-schools. These students are then placed into our institutional like public school settings (with perhaps the exception of charter type schools) and enter a compulsory education setting where, in the majority of cases little value is placed on their environment or any of the arts. Tarr (2001) argues that North American schools do “not challenge children aesthetically to respond deeply to the natural world, their cultural heritage, or to their inner worlds”. And that if aesthetic development in the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia is to be desired that art educators should absorb a responsibility:

“[To] form collaborative partnerships with early childhood educators to raise the quality of education for young children. Art education must go beyond providing art experiences that meet goals for programs involving studio, history, criticism, and aesthetics and begin to consider the environment in which these activities take place.” (Tarr 2001)

Why aesthetics are important and what the art educator without a castle can do (while on a shoe-string budget)

The art educator of current times faces both economic and political changes which have changed the value placed on the arts. While this paper proves that aesthetic understanding can be understood and valued by children, often budgets and curriculum challenged by businesslike committee's gives the impression that aesthetics seem to be of little concern. Although current attention has been placed on the importance of creativity in our modern global society, and although seasoned classroom teachers understand the benefits of servicing the 'whole-child' the arts still continue to be cut, and in some cases eliminated in school settings in order to seemingly access higher test scores as mandated by NCLB, and compete globally. (Bronson and Merryman 2010)

A 2010 Newsweek article stated that until 1990 creativity scores analyzed by scholars at the College of William & Mary had been steadily rising, just like IQ scores. However, after 1990 when educational reform placed heavy emphasis on standardized testing creativity scores have consistently declined and it still remains unclear whether national scores are showing overall academic improvement.

As proven throughout this paper, periodicals, studies, and commentary are easily found which source Reggio Emilia as a model of using an aesthetic pedagogy to create independent, innovative, creative students. Many agree that American teachers often underestimate young children's developmental abilities in visual areas to include observation, and creative thinking (HighScope Educational Research Foundation 2011). Educators at Reggio Emilia take great

pains to interact with their young students while they model and encourage analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of recognizable and natural objects and events, such as plants, flowers, rainstorms, and rainbows. These traits all found to be within the highest levels of thinking according to *Benjamin Blooms Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.^{viii}

Tarr (2001) sources Gardner, who observed that during units of study, the teachers of Reggio Emilia worked as partners with students, providing resources but allowing students choices rather than dictating process and product. Most importantly the teachers of advocated the encouragement of safe risk taking and when simply to be an observer of children's learning.

“Gardner, who has been involved with Reggio Emilia schools for two decades, introduced the research by imploring the audience to do away with their preconceptions about early childhood education. “You may think that learning is necessarily individual, but it's not," he said. What's more, assessment of learning is not necessarily tests, and documentation need not be private. "It can be an intrinsic and magnificent part of learning," said Gardner.” (Potier 2002)

While DBAE educators might find a Reggio Emilia approach challenging to implement due to its lack of organized lessons and paper assessments those who practice CBL/TAB pedagogy might find themselves perfectly at home. It is important to note that DBAE clearly lists aesthetics and assessment as two of its core principlesⁱⁱⁱ while CBL/TAB lists assessment, not aesthetics. DBAE can speak to its clear methods of assessment, while CBL/TAB educators can learn a lot from the assessment techniques of Reggio Emilia, some of which they already use.

What might Reggio Emilia and CBL/TAB offer for assessing aesthetic understanding?

Now that it has been established that younger students will fare better with age appropriate activities which build aesthetic understanding, educators who practice CBL/TAB can glean from the success of Reggio Emilia. Art educators who embrace Choice-based Learning/Teaching for Artistic Behaviors classrooms practice many similar techniques and methods as Reggio Emilia type schools. Similarities between CBL/TAB and Reggio Emilia lie in engaging learners through the art making. In some CBL/TAB classes extended time is given to students so that they may explore materials, techniques, and processes, in Reggio Emilia very similar opportunities exist. Often attractive centers in both pedagogies are set up for children and filled with materials that are interesting and unique, with no specific product to complete but rather to explore.

Let it not be mistaken direction is never given or offered for activities, but it is *direction on where they might explore not directive of what they should produce*. A center might for example contain materials for weaving, with various examples and a variety of directions sheets to inspire students. It is within this type of classroom climate that both Reggio Emilia and CBT/TAB educators provide that makes students embrace serendipity as opportunities to solve unique problems. Art educators in these environments are introducing aesthetic inquiry; in age appropriate ways, and share similar assessment strategies.

Reggio Emilia documents student work through creating portfolios of work including art, writing, photos, sketches, etc. and adapts the curriculum in order to allow students to progress:

“Teachers routinely divide responsibilities in the class so that one can systematically observe, take notes, and record conversations between children. These observations are shared with other teachers and the atelierista⁷ and parents in curriculum planning and evaluation. Teachers of several schools often work and learn together under the leadership of the pedagista⁸ as they explore ways of expanding on children's spontaneous activities.” (The Reggio Emilia Approach 2011)

CAB/TAB combines the best of both DBAE and Reggio Emilia assessment techniques. In the CAB/TAB classroom:

“Teachers use multiple forms of assessment in the Choice-Based approach. Students have ongoing feedback and assessments. Rubrics are negotiated between students and teachers for projects throughout the year. Students and teachers review the rubric upon completion of the art project. Students are also taught self-assessment through journals, statements, presentations and critique sessions. Teachers use these assessments to redirect instruction. Assessments should encourage risk-taking and focus. Students are graded on mastery of set standards rather than receiving letter grades. The pitfall is that more than likely your school requires a letter grade. The teacher must help with time management and help students move forward.”ⁱⁱⁱ (Delacruz and Dunn 1996)

⁷ Translation: “Art studio teacher”. Source: *Reverse* <http://dictionary.reverso.net/italian-english/pedagogista>. Retrieved on May 1, 2011

⁸ Translation: “Acts as consultant, resource person and co-coordinator to several schools and centers”. Source: *Reverse* <http://dictionary.reverso.net/italian-english/pedagogista>. Retrieved on May 1, 2011

Developing sequential aesthetic understanding

While center work is beneficial to laying a foundation of early aesthetic understanding there must be a way for students to move forward sequentially. It might be concluded that the for-mentioned proponents and critics in this written discussion are in general agreement that aesthetics education in early elementary students is highly dependent on age appropriate developmental understanding and skills (Eaton 1994) (Flannery 1977) (Moore 1994) (Parsons 1987, 1994). It should also be repeated that it is not aesthetic education we are providing early elementary students but instead a *foundation of aesthetic understanding* which can be built upon over the course of a student's academic career.

In supporting sequential learning, early elementary art educators can nurture a natural developmental aesthetic 'understanding' through pre-determined opportunities and environments.

Using Puzzles and Alphabet Books to promote Aesthetic Understanding

Two authors, Battin (1994), and Rostankowski (1994), are noted for their inquiry into exploring creative, developmentally appropriate ways early elementary children can access aesthetics. Battin considers, as have others (Moore; Parsons; Project Zero) that the abstract nature of aesthetics is not entirely suitable for the cognitive abilities of young children and should thus be presented through age appropriate methods. Battin and Rostankowski both utilize child-friendly strategies, puzzles and alphabet books to make the subject of aesthetics more accessible, and perhaps as discussed earlier, beginning to set the foundation for sequential aesthetic understanding, not philosophical education.

Battin proposed that instead of attempting to give a lecture of Kant to early-elementary students that the educator can instead allow students to access the subject of aesthetics through age appropriate kinetic activities, in this case, puzzles (thinking not physical). Battin maintains that puzzles pose problems to be solved, allow young children to engage in Socratic type conversations, similar to adults *minus* the PH.D jargon.

Battin co-authored a book, *Puzzles about Art: An Aesthetics Casebook* (Battin, et al. 1994) which includes a multitude of case studies demonstrating that young students are engaged in age-appropriate philosophical conversations. One such example, *Case 1. The Case of the Chartreuse Portrait* (Battin, et al. 1994) documents a classroom conversation in which students contemplate the reason a portrait would be unrealistically painted in chartreuse, a color that the artist deliberately chooses and sequentially did not amuse the subject of the portrait. In this conversation students advance from not accepting the portrait as acceptable due to its abstract nature to discussing that the color chartreuse may tell the viewer's more about the subjects personality (sour and prissy?) than a realistic image. Case 1 demonstrates that children are indeed capable of age-appropriate conversations. They may not be yet able to understand the adult-level discourse but they are truly engaged in discussing what is beautiful, and if not so, why it still might be artistically acceptable.

Rostankowski, a philosophical lecturer at San Jose University proposes that even more basic methods, such as the alphabet book can be used to lay the foundations of aesthetic education. Rostankowski maintains that "one of the earliest forms of "literature" traditionally made available to small children is the alphabet book". (Rostankowski 1994) Alphabet books are unlettered, serving more as picture books, and are illustrated in a way to access those not yet

literate. These books can be independently enjoyed and understood by a child, who through absorbing, thinking about and forming personal judgments on what they are seeing are indeed, according to Rostankowski, accessing aesthetic understanding.

As noted earlier, in her essay Eaton (1994) stated,

“aesthetic interest is present when people begin to engage in sustained questioning about art, particularly in terms of different sorts of awareness regarding qualities of the objects considered.” She maintains that alphabet books are intended to promote discussion and inquiry”.

The last example of unique ways to establish a foundation in aesthetic understanding is from a journal publication by Kathleen Walsh-Piper, who personalizes her paper with her own experiences in beginning to awaken to aesthetics as a young child. Walsh-Piper⁹, is of DBAE pedagogy, and has presented multiple times in national conferences. She is able to provide assessment evidence through the planned museum activities available to educators of which she authors. Walsh-Piper suggests the use of journals, both for written reflection and for sketching images students find personally significant. She maintains that journals show proof that young students are engaged in aesthetic inquiry and appreciation. (Walsh-Piper 1994)

Most notably however is Walsh-Piper’s personal reflection on her first visit to an art museum as a fourth grader. She recalls being enthralled by an immense ancient floor mosaic made from hundreds of tiny stones. The mere fact that someone had saved this artifact from the

⁹ Walsh-Piper, is the head teacher for the *Department of Teacher and School Programs of the National gallery of Art*. She also authored a *Teacher’s Planning guide to the Art Institute of Chicago*.

ancient past just for her to see, and that the maker of the object has taken the time to make a beautiful mosaic floor for their home left her mesmerized.

Walsh-Piper also recalls that around the same time period of her museum visit that she began to notice beautiful things around her, such as the multitude of bright colors of sliced, juicy ripe plums on her kitchen table.

Benefitting from different (but similar) pedagogies

It is clear that aesthetic education for young children is a subject with significant debate, and there is substantial agreement that success can be found in utilizing age appropriate methods to lay the foundations for aesthetic understanding. (Battin, Fisher, and Moore; Flannery; Moore; Parsons; Rinaldi; Rostankowski; Tarr; Walsh-Piper). A common thread within discussions becomes evident, that aesthetics can be accessible to all ages when presented in developmentally appropriate methods. Reggio Emilia uses cultural surroundings while maintaining strong connections with home and school, DBAE pedagogies rely on well-formed curriculum and assessment, while CBL/TAB use student directed learning experiences within centers and activities determined by art educators based on student needs.

While DBAE can provide easily read proof of assessment it becomes more complicated for Reggio Emilia and CBL/TAB to provide. Traditional methods of assessment via journals are used in DBAE while CBL/TAB might utilize observation and conversation to make assessment judgments. Tomlinson (2009) states that “instruction and assessment go hand in hand; this is highly evident when teaching for artistic behavior. Effective instruction requires teachers to be aware of what is and is not working for students”.

Saphier & Gower, (1997) further explain how CBL/TAB determines understanding using formative assessment methods for the purpose of setting goals and planning curriculum.

“Artwork alone cannot provide sufficient information for assessment. Individual artworks may show a student’s ideas and technical ability, but there is much more about thinking and learning that will become evident when the teacher listens to students given tips and information.”

Douglas and Jaquith add, “It is when students have more control of their learning choices that they build skills, not only technically, but aesthetically.” (Douglas and Jaquith 2006)

Conclusion

Throughout this discussion Reggio Emilia has been noted as being a model for laying a strong foundation for aesthetic understanding. Teachers of Reggio Emilia believe, “that children have a right to environments which support the development of their many languages.” (Reggio Children, 1996). Similar to CBL/TAB, Reggio Emilia relies heavily on observation to assess students understanding.

“The documentation shows children that their work is valued, makes parents aware of class learning experiences, and allows teachers to assess both their teaching and the children's learning. In addition, dialogue is fostered with other educators. Eventually, an historical archive is created that traces pleasure in the process of children's and teachers' learning experiences”. (Gandini, 1993).

There is an existing gap in the acclaimed success of Reggio Emilia aesthetic education. Because adults and older children do not appear to have been analyzed and documented for success due to their Reggio Emilia influence, we must instead rely on existing publications which support their methods which there appear to be an abundance of.

It may be concluded that CBL/TAB, with its similarities to Reggio Emilia can also be successful. Despite a lack of substantial studies promoting its success, CBL/TAB is still at the cusp of becoming more mainstream as younger teachers emerge and education rides its slow but inevitable pendulum swing (away from standardized testing) and the public begins to realize the importance of creative thinking for our global society.

Moore (1994) stated that “the introduction of aesthetic subject matter into school curricula provides preparation for critical reflection, redirected awareness, and heightened appreciation as pertaining to an extraordinary broad range of objects.” Moore understood that while students learn to explore that they also discover their individual aesthetic tastes. They have opportunities to converse with other children immersed in the creative process. Through this interaction students often discover a technique they admire and will adopt and adapt it for themselves. These sorts of activities begin to lay a foundation of critical inquiry and problem solving. It can offer also opportunities to fine tune a specific talent in a choice medium. The creative thinking involved in CBL/TAB art activities strengthens a student’s ability to seek a variety of ways to solve a problem which translates to having the confidence to think more creatively and openly in other areas of their lives, including classroom learning, and higher-learning.

Aesthetics is a complex philosophical subject which is cognitively beyond early elementary students as proven by the likes of Project Zero, Moore, and others. Art educators can begin to implement a strong sequential foundation for aesthetic understanding through developing a flexible pedagogy of visual surroundings, methods and techniques, discussion and inquiry, and student driven projects. Aesthetic understanding is possible for younger children to access through the careful guidance of experienced and invested teachers willing to incorporate the finest qualities of CBL/TAB, Reggio Emilia, and DBAE.

End Notes

ⁱ “The Reggio Emilia approach to education is committed to the creation of a learning environment that will enhance and facilitate children's construction of his or her own powers of thinking through the combination of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive languages.” (European Networking Pre-Schools 2011)

“Reggio Emilia's approach to early education reflects a theoretical kinship with John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, among others. Much of what occurs in the class reflects a constructivist approach to early education. Reggio Emilia's approach does challenge some conceptions of teacher competence and developmentally appropriate practice.” (European Networking Pre-Schools 2011)

ⁱⁱ (Battin, et al. 1994) *In Cases for Kids: Using Puzzles to Teach Aesthetics to Children*, Battin states that her case studies of early-elementary students demonstrate “thinking puzzles which are activities which promote evaluating, analyzing, higher-order thinking, and many possibilities to viewing artwork.

ⁱⁱ A. "Discipline Based Art Education is the teaching of Art as a valued academic subject through focusing on all of Art's Disciplines in the teaching process..... Art Aesthetics, Art History, Art Production, and Art Criticism. Students, who are taught Art in this manner, consistent with the Getty Foundation for the Arts Suggested Curriculum Standards, receive a well-rounded background in and appreciation for the Arts"

Source: Discipline Based Art Education Retrieved May 1, 2011 from the Getty website:
<http://www.getty.edu>

B. Discipline Based Art Education

DBAE seeks to impart a well-rounded view of art by studying any given work or type of work using four different disciplines, tailored to specific ages and grade levels:

1. Art Production – Students learn skills and techniques in order to produce personal, original artwork.
2. Art History – of style or technique, and as discussion topics, especially in relation to cultural, political, social, religious, and economic events and movements.
3. Art Criticism – Students describe, interpret, evaluate, theorize and judge the properties and qualities of the visual form, for the purpose of understanding and appreciating works of art and understanding the roles of art in society.

4. Aesthetics – Students consider the nature, meaning, impact and value of art, are encouraged to formulate reflective, “educated” opinions and judgments about specific works of art, and examine criteria for evaluating works of art.⁽¹⁾

DBAE was originally developed for use with the visual arts and then evolved to encompass the study of multiple fields – dance, drama, and music. It may also be used in multiple settings, including higher education, lifelong learning centers and art museums, although it is most commonly applied to the visual arts in a classroom setting.⁽²⁾

(1) Stephen Mark Dobbs. *Learning in and through Art: A Guide to Discipline-Based Art Education*. (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1998), 3-4.

(2) *Ibid*, Preface.

Source: *Discipline-Based Art Education*. Retrieved May 1, 2011 from http://aco.artsnet.org/Portals/10/documents/Educational_Theories_2004/1-4_Discipline-Based_Art_Education.pdf

iii Choice-Based Learning/ Teaching for Artistic Behavior

“The Choice-Based Learning (Also called Teaching for Artistic Behavior or TAB) to art education is based on research on learning theory, psychology, sociology, and business. There are four contexts of the Choice-Based approach: Personal Context, Pedagogical Context, Classroom Context, and Assessment.

PERSONAL CONTEXT -- Choice-based art education regards students as artists and offers students real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through art making.

PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT -- Choice-based art education supports multiple modes of learning and teaching.

CLASSROOM CONTEXT -- Choice-based art education provides resources and opportunities to construct knowledge and meaning in the process of making art.

ASSESSMENT -- Choice-based art education utilizes multiple forms of assessment to support student and teacher growth.

Source: *Promising Practices for a Choice-Based Approach to Art Education*. Retrieved September 23, 2004, from The Education Alliance at Brown University, The Knowledge Loom Web site: <http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit/>.

^v **The Getty Foundation**

The J. Paul Getty Museum mission statement states: “The Getty Foundation fulfills the philanthropic mission of the J. Paul Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the understanding and preservation of the visual arts locally and throughout the world.”

Source: <http://www.getty.edu/foundation/about/> Accessed May 1, 2011

^{vi} **Project Zero**

“[R]esearch programs based on a detailed understanding of human cognitive development and of the process of learning in the arts and other disciplines. They place the learner at the center of the educational process, respecting the different ways in which an individual learns at various stages

of life, as well as differences among individuals in the ways they perceive the world and express their ideas.

Project Zero was founded at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1967 by the philosopher Nelson Goodman to study and improve education in the arts. Goodman believed that arts learning should be studied as a serious cognitive activity, but that "zero" had been firmly established about the field; hence, the project was given its name. For a more detailed history, especially of the last decade, please see, *Ten Years at Project Zero: A Report on 1993-2002*.

David Perkins and Howard Gardner served as co-directors of Project Zero from 1972 to July 1, 2000'.

Source: *History of Project Zero*. Retrieved May 1, 2011 from The Project Zero web site:
<http://pzweb.harvard.edu/History/History.htm>

vii **Montessori Schools**

A. *Montessori* is a revolutionary method of observing and supporting the natural development of children. Montessori educational practice helps children develop creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and time-management skills, to contribute to society and the environment, and to become fulfilled persons in their particular time and place on Earth. The basis of Montessori practice in the classroom is mixed age group (3 ages - 6 ages in one class), individual choice of research and work, and uninterrupted concentration. Group lessons are seldom found in a Montessori classroom, but learning abounds.

Source: *Montessori*. Retrieved April 28, 2011 from the Montessori web site:
<http://www.montessori.edu/index.html>

B. From Europe to the United States: Dr. Maria Montessori

Invited to the USA by Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, and others, Dr.

Montessori spoke at Carnegie Hall in 1915. She was invited to set up a classroom at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, where spectators watched twenty-one children, all new to this Montessori Method, behind a glass wall for four months. The only two gold medals awarded for education went to this class, and the education of young children was altered forever.

Source: *The Woman and her Method*. Retrieved April 28, 2011 from the Montessori web site: <http://www.montessori.edu/maria.html>

^{viii} **Benjamin Blooms Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.**

“There are six levels of knowledge according to Benjamin Bloom. As you learn lessons well, the higher stages of learning want a part of the play. There should be enough time for it, because higher levels of learning have to do with brilliance and getting well (enough) educated.

1. *Knowledge* or recall of data, expresses the natural urge to recall previously learned material. So knowledge, or being told, can be a foundation for very much learning. It provides a basis for higher levels of thinking, but is rote in nature. Insight rides on top of it.

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2. *Comprehension*, the ability to grasp meaning, explain, restate ideas, means understanding the basic information and translating, interpreting, and extrapolating it.
 3. *Application*, or using learned material in new situations, involves using information, ideas, and skills to solve problems, then selecting and applying them appropriately.
 4. *Analysis* suggests separating items, or separate material into component parts and show relationships between parts. It also means breaking apart information and ideas into their component parts.
 5. *Synthesis* suggests the ability to put together separate ideas to form new wholes of a fabric, or establish new relationships. Synthesis involves putting together ideas and knowledge in a new and unique form. This is where innovations truly take place.
 6. *Evaluation* is the highest level in this arrangement. Here the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria will show itself. Evaluation involves reviewing and asserting evidence, facts, and ideas, then making appropriate statements and judgments.”

(Bloom 1981)

Source: Source: *Levels of Learning*, Retrieved April 28, 2011 from the Benjamin Bloom and Taxonomy of Learning Website. <http://oaks.nvg.org/taxonomy-bloom.html>

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