



Nancy Walkup at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in Santa Rosa, California.

Magic, Wonder, and Joy

The first year I taught art was one of the most challenging of my career, but there were moments of delight that still stand out in my memory. One day, I held sheets of red and blue plastic against the window to demonstrate what happened when they overlapped. A student in the back cried out, "It's magic!" I suspect, for most of us, such moments are why we teach art. We believe in the enchantment of art for all our students, but it is particularly satisfying to work with the very young ones who are never afraid to express their wonder and joy.

The diverse lessons in this book, developed and taught by art teachers all over North America, share an exploratory approach to encountering artists' tools, materials, and ways of working with an emphasis on discovery and

creativity. These lessons reflect child-centered approaches to art education for three- to seven-year-olds, sharing the-oretic foundations common to the Reggio Emilia approach and choice-based and play-based art education.

The Reggio Emilia Approach

Loris Malaguzzi began this approach in Reggio Emilia, Italy, after World War II. Believing that the early years of development are crucial for children, Malaguzzi and local parents created a program based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and community through exploration and discovery in a supportive and enriching environment.

I was fortunate to participate in a Winter Institute in Reggio Emilia and observed firsthand the program in



“Art is not lecture. Planning an art class is not planning for a lecture. It is planning for a magical experience. It’s planning for an art room that will inspire children.”

—George Szekely

action. In Reggio Emilia schools, importance is placed on the school environment, participation of parents and community, and the child’s interests. Listening to what children have to say, valuing their interests, and documenting them through writing and photography are also important.

A common feature in Reggio Emilia schools is an *atelier*, a combination art studio and science laboratory, usually guided by an art teacher called an *atelierista*. The atelier contains a great variety of tools and materials with which to explore natural objects and recycled and found materials. There is an intriguing emphasis on the concepts of light and transparency, evidenced by large interior and exterior windows; light tables in each class; play with webcams, camera microscopes, projectors, computers, and screens; and large collaborative artworks.

The schools are decorated with students’ work and designed with students in mind. Having their work on display shows children that it is valued. Teachers and children take and display photographs to illustrate and record their explorations. For children who cannot write yet, teachers record what they say.

Though teachers not in a Reggio Emilia program may not be able to completely replicate this approach, it has many engaging practices that can be adapted to fit individual situations and schools. Most of the lessons in this book display elements of the Reggio Emilia approach. Two excellent examples are “The Sensory Nature of Fiber Arts” (page 92) and “Gorgeous Brown” (page 102). In addition,

tion, Davis Publications’ (the publisher of *SchoolArts* magazine) *Explorations in Art: Kindergarten* art curriculum is based on the Reggio Emilia approach.

Choice-Based Art Education

Choice-based art education is a method of instruction that provides students with options for self-direction in three areas: media, process, and interpretation, often by working in studio centers. Choice-based art education was first initiated in elementary classrooms in the 1970s by Katherine Douglas and John Crowe. It involves setting up centers, often based around art media and resources. Choice-based art education focuses on student choice, encouraging children to come up with their own ideas for art-making using the media of their choosing. In a modified-choice classroom, students are given a limited range of options from which to choose—often an assigned theme with choice of media or an assigned media with choice of content.

An example of this approach is Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), which is a refinement of choice-based art education. Developed by Katherine Douglas, Pauline Joseph, John Crowe, and Diane Jaquith in 2001, TAB invites PreK-12 students to think like artists and make all major choices regarding their work. TAB asks, “What do artists do?” The child is considered to be the artist and the classroom is the child’s studio. In TAB practice, every decision made by the teacher—from curriculum to planning, organization, and exhibition—is with the full intention of students working independently in art class.

Individual TAB teachers create curriculum responsive to the lives and interests of the children they teach. A common misunderstanding of TAB is that there is no structure. In fact, TAB classrooms have firm structures in place regarding work and behavioral expectations so students are able to work independently with clarity and purpose.

In many art classrooms today, some version of choice is offered. Lessons in this book showing choice include “Constructing an Appalachian Alphabet” (page 30) and “I Spy an Art Game” (page 112).

Play-Based Art Education

Play is a primary and integral mode through which children make sense of the world, and it is essential to their development and well-being. In 1837, Friedrich Froebel, the inventor of kindergarten, was one of the first educators to emphasize the importance of children’s play in art-making. Froebel developed a series of educational toys called “gifts” and “occupations” that encouraged creative expression in young children. Wooden blocks and other materials were presented in sets that became more complex as children progressed through them. Artists and architects such as Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Buckminster Fuller were influenced by their early experiences in Froebel’s kindergarten.

In contemporary times, George Szekely was one of the first art educators to emphasize the importance of play in art-making. According to Szekely, children’s play is a form of art and play is the finest preparation for students

of all ages to create unique works of art. (He also suggests that adults participate with children in their play.) Szekely recommends the use of open-ended materials and loose parts, stating, “Everything can be an art tool. Anything can be an art supply.” Szekely supports the belief that children are more motivated to learn when they are involved in experiences that are meaningful to them. Examples of play-based art education include “Cellograffiti” (page 2) and “Fledgling Architects” (page 88).

Using National Standards

In each lesson in this book, you will find relevant National Visual Arts Standards. In addition, we have cited National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) Program Standards for Curriculum, which are used for assessing and accrediting early childhood education programs.

In Conclusion

You will find evidence of all three invaluable approaches in these early childhood lessons chosen from *SchoolArts* magazine. We share these lessons in the hope that they will bring you and your students moments of magic, wonder, and joy.

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