Tuesday morning, 5/14/19

At the Malaguzzi Center in Sala Kuwait

“The hundred languages of children, the culture of the atelier”

Isabella Meninno, atelierista, RC

Marina Castagnetti, teacher, Preschools and Infant Toddler Centers

**l’atelier**

Marina:

Yesterday an intense day but fruitful. I’m sure during the visit to the school more questions were suggested. Once again I invite you to write down these reflections, comments and thoughts because we will have time to discuss these together. You will find answers to some of your questions, but not all. This is due to the fact that we invite you to work as a team and focus on your own research - to further elaborate in our own context. We continue our journey today focusing on research. Will have an introduction, will only be an introduction, to the 100 languages and the culture of the atelier. Will spend morning with Isabella, lots of experience working in preschool and with pedagogical and didactic proposals to children, working in ateliers here at LM for last few years. She is going to share with us the theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic principles applied in every day work with ch. This idea of atelier is everywhere (and a big idea), we speak of diffused atelier. Find out the principle of circularity of thoughts bec this is the attitude we have in our work with ch. Isabella and I worked together for several years and realized I did not introduce myself yesterday. Was teacher many years (Diana) and as young teacher also collaborated with LM. And then also worked several years in the LM documentation center and educational research. Currently I’m dealing with projects developed by RC. Isabella and I, and others we’ve met/will meet, have different roles and share different perspectives on this work (?). Our role is also very important - relevant opportunity to share (with each other). We always keep together theory and practice = wil work and reason together in the ateliers later today.

Isabella:

Start with a fragment of our history. I think that the establishment and birth of the ateliers is connected to ethical and political issues. In the 60’s Italy was recovering after this harsh period from WWII. Wars cause destructions and the people were lucky enough to survive. They wanted peace, but they wanted to renew, the entire society. Italy at that time was considered to belong to the third world countries. The occupation of Italy was a cultural occupation of the country. At that time Italy experienced a cultural awakening. People experienced a new culture all around the world. People tried to create connections among anthropology, math, science. People needed to fix boundaries, and they also needed to reconstruct the cultural context. Freud, Freire, Piaget, Bruner - in the field of pedagogy. “The Relevance of Education, On Knowing - Bruner,

A revolution that affected art was also happening, less well known.

Had new roles on the cultural stage. Art of philosophy added new cultural references. Rudolf Arnhem -Toward a Psychology of Art

Not art critics, but art philosophers speaking about art - a huge difference. The speak about a new history of art, and later on I will explain why this is related to children. They make bold statements because they say art doesn’t exist, art is a process, and that we may speak of the genesis of an artwork. Art is a way of thinking. We need to first understand the grammar, the \_\_\_\_ of the artist, and also that there are perceptive differences because every human being has their own perceptions of reality. So this difference has some cultural, historical rules. Especially in Europe where reality was a source for art - a twist. On a cultural level humans developed cultural ways

We are not so free for us to look at the world, and school is not a help in this. We are told the sea is blue. The sea is never blue. Depending on how the light changes, the color of the sea changes. To help us understand what kind of structure we were able to construct. All of a sudden RE was in the middle of this cultural and scientific revolution and LM was there. And in 1960 he was pedagogista, in charge of the schools. School couldn’t be separated from reality, but one of our tasks was to bring reality into the schools. He made a revolutionary choice, even now it is still a revolution. He added a second teacher to the team, introduced male teachers. Introduced brand new role, who did not come from pedagogical world, the atelierista. We also have to remember at that time, there was the name of the figure, but everything was set up. Our Italian reference were the French ateliers, the Italian Renaissance - in a certain sense the 20th century destroyed all of the codes created. Our artistic culture is different from Asian cultures - kept changing over the years and kept changing the codes to art. Wanted to have a critical approach, even to reality, because we had to cope with the changes happening in our society. Why was it a revolution? At the time, verbal language was the privileged language - the only language. The Atelier proposed something different, that didn’t exist. It gave children the opportunity, the chance to explore NOT adults artistic language, but their OWN language because actually art existed even in the time humans lived in caves to help understand the world we are living in. Children are really equipped from birth with \_\_\_ skills - they can interpret reality. Because children are not actually interested in finding out religious conceptual or a mystic key that they need to understand…

They have the need to share their understanding of the world.

They are involved with all of their senses, not just using their eyes or ears. Big difference with the artist. As the artists do, children also have this need to represent the world according to the ideal beauty they have. But to narrate the world you need to speak the languages of art. To be able to narrate all of the nuances you need to know the techniques and the languages - and this is what the atelier did. Without actually knowing what could happen the atelierista started to offer brushes and tools and not just infantile tools. The atelierista started from the need for every child to express themselves in different ways by supporting different competencies of children and skills. This is a primary need and right and we are not all able to do the same things - we are not the same. The atelier was an everyday experience, it was there to just work on a daily basis. The atelier was not meant to be an art school. The difference was the starting point was given by children, not by artists. Art was our compass and we use art to find directions, suggestions and to ask questions about our world. We didn’t want to have children simulating artworks of the artist. If I’m required only to copy a work of art I am only making a mere copy…

I’m really far away from the processes the adult went through but I am also betraying children’s processes.

The Atelier - children own their own perceptions of life, reality. They have their own awareness about their reality surrounding them. And the world represented by children is not a simple one, it’s pretty complex. Starting from children’s skills and desires, we started to twist and change completely the programs we used to have in our schools. Changed traditional didactic proposals because we got to know better our children and above all we work through projects, not a program. Programs follow well paved paths and they also have a heavy hand which is different from working from projects. A program establishes procedures so everyone reaches the same output, an amalgamation of thoughts. If you tell children how they have to work you are affecting their way of thinking so there is NO way out. Maybe children do have doubts or questions but school does not allow them enough time to ask them because we \_\_\_\_\_

What did the Atelier do besides address these philosophical issues?

If you look at the world with new eyes, you see some new things. Even a chair is the world. Cannot say there is one chair, there are many for different uses. Philosophy is the capacity to take out something to be able to look at it with new eyes. The capability of the context relies on something , but then put something back into the same context

I can speak to children about the chair, and I can also envisage what children will think about this chair because children always have this capacity of playing with the structures and give us a completely different idea. The chair has its own identity - front/back/ profile - as children do, also a leaf - if you look at a leaf in profile it looks like a line. Or a chair comes in context at a table. Whenever ask children to represent something I should be aware of what I am asking. We often think this is a simple task - we ask them to represent a human, a tree. When I ask children to represent people just sitting around a table and so I asked them to rep something that is pretty big and on a bi-dimensional sheet of paper. I didn’t teach them how to do, by granting them freedom of finding out their own solutions for the representation I realized how many creative solutions they were able to find.

First figure (birds eye, 4 around table)

The brain is moving around and scanning the venue - so we can represent an entire world beginning from what we know.

This child opened the table and created a flat surface with everything. It’s a sort of Egyptian representation, based on all possible info this child could convey

Next - more like a Greek representation

Two goals are different, can’t say that one is wrong and one is right. If I teach them

I am telling them there is only one way to represent the work

Third - child created an X-ray vision

Everything is transparent. This child doesn’t draw the legs because they are hidden by the table but there are details we should be able to pick up. If we don’t do it, we are not interested in children’s learning processes. This child represents all people with their hands raised up because he wanted to show that everyone had hands - could really speak one hour about this. This child also had a representation of a profile, no one else did. We can see that children are at different stages of their learning processes - so the Vygotsky zone is real. So what does the teacher do? Everyone did a drawing, move on. Atelierista says no - she complicates the situation more. At the same time the atelierista tries to find a different access, according to you what language could we offer to children? Clay. Then of course clay has a lot of complicated issues to deal with. If the legs of the table are too thin, it falls down, if it’s too thick it doesn’t look like a table. And if I don’t tell you what to do, you have to think about it. As an adult you may take it as granted, but what is the starting point to construct a chair - this is a first question. How do children start a chair? If you start from legs, have issues, if you start from flat surface have other issues. When you work with clay you immediately see the problems - the atelier really invented documentation.

Documentation meant following step by step what children were creating/constructing. We could also share and tell others what happened. Let’s go back to the drawing.

Sharing Laura’s drawing - showing her notes

“Laura draws a first table with people around”, then drew first figure, tried to draw profile, one leg, one arm - did two legs and the face is a profile but shows as from the front but only one eye (because in the code profile is one eye) (faces in profile as we intend it is a line, it doesn’t exist) The Greeks worked with profile for thousands of years and the children had to figure it out in a morning.

The head of a friend on one side - but stops, a real crisis. I thought that a critical issue could have been the profile, but it was the person in front of her. What was she thinking? We could have asked, but I think it was an embarrassing atmosphere and other friends there observing each other. In the very moment I begin to intervene - she goes to the window and uses the window as a light table to hold up the sheet and she draws the back. If I didn’t know children, I could think this was weird. Even if she was aware she couldn’t see the back of the child, she had to represent it for her self-confidence to make sure she did everything.

She turns the paper and draws the body of one child behind the table”

Then she turns back again and draws the visible parts of the body” - draws only what she sees when she goes back

I would have intervened in a completely different way. Think about what happened inside her mind.

Every child finds his/her own solution. Allow them to find these. Interesting to know the kinds of solutions children can figure out thanks to the observation tools that we know.

Talking about trees. If you look every child found their own solutions. Some of these trees cannot stand, but it requires time, and schools should grant this time. And sometimes we are not aware that children are complex. If I start from the point of view that I need to teach them something, I deprive them of this complexity. Children really have this capacity of developing structural thinking to keep together all of the information they know. The atelier proposes over-sized goals, over-sized such as going beyond the boundaries of a sheet. Projects involving teamwork, often proposed by adults, but sometimes children propose projects.

“The city makes itself” Project by ch of 5 years old

Ch wanted to make a gift for all of the visitors of RE, need to make a map. If diff to make a chair on a bi-dimensional sheet, think about a map. Ch didn’t just want to create a beautiful map, they wanted to make a real map, a useful map. It would be difficult, but we did not say no. We didn’t know how this map could be developed and this is actually to work by projects. So we visited the city with the ch and they asked for the largest sheet of paper we had. First problem - how should the 3D buildings be represented on the sheet bec rep does have formal rules, we can’t really do whatever we want to do. So they make the buildings stand up on sheets of paper - they all work on their own, they are close to each other and having fun. They didn’t have conflicts or share ideas at that stage, but above all they did not find out a solution because everyone is living in their own project world. I did not want to act as jury/judge, but there was a problem - so we invited the other ch to evaluate the work. It was a big disappointment

What is this? We can’t understand anything. All houses are large or small or weird and my own house is not there, not even mine.

Look at the children’s faces in the image - so disappointed

I could have said let’s talk a picture of this and then it’s done - this is often done to close projects down.

Ch cannot always take this criticism - we were told we have to better draw the houses, we need some books. Went to the library and collected books about RE and they think this is the solution. They exaggerated things (often do) - had to rethink their rep - proportions ((not an issue!), but difficult, complex.

They start to be focused on all of the details - windows on the buildings, the inhabitants, even the number of the diff floors and we have 8 lane freeways so RE is almost Las Vegas. So city is not so imp at this stage, rather desires/wishes are the most important to rep = people, houses, churches. All fo the drawings have diff proportions, so what do we do. Have to find solutions. We have to find an agreement on what we wanted and what the city expected. We had to find an agreement between the possible and impossible - what we imagined and what is real. This is what we should do in schools, develop not only solutions but problems.

Child suggested scanning and reducing the drawings. Had to spend time leaning how to use the scanner, copy machine, not just learning how to use the computer =- they had a goal to learn how to rep the city

Math, geometry, the group starts to really become a group - to have a group is not enough just to put ch tog

Have too many drawings and have to mark a decision. The solution is to train to listen, maybe you lose something belonging to you ideas but your thinking is enhanced by the thoughts of other.s You gain empathy.. and

I reflect in others and others are reflecting in myself.

another problem - how do we put all of these drawings together? All in front or close to each other, and once again we are forgetting the city.

Ch 0 “this is not a city, we need to create a circle of the houses” We go out with this map and its ring around the Rosie of houses and it is not useful

“I got it. The city is telling us how to draw it.”

Not only my reasons are important, i have to listen to the others. If we can’t understand it, we can’t embrace it, we can’t find the solution. Have to listen to the city.

They continue to draw because there were empty spaces and there are no empty spaces in the city.

A new problem, a ch brings a real map to the school for first time bec he never really understood it. Bec he experienced it a

Isabella “we have to start again from scratch” (after 2 months of work!)

Don’t worry we have a copy machine and we can make new copies

“The city of RE is like a leaf” - so poetic - city is a living organism and a living org like a leaf with veins - a fascinating comparison. Adults should be able to address unexpected events and support them. Should be able to dismantle their beliefs to embrace others ideas. So I start wondering

Ch 0 we do as we usually do and now we vote them. It’s not the most beautiful one to win, but the one with a reason why the city is represented by this to win.

Image: a leaf

Rep the needs

They chose the leaf. They choose a larger sheet and they have to enlarge the drawing (not easy). And now we are experiencing the teamwork - they have one goal. After all of the efforts, they have a common shared goal. Since they have the same goal they are quicker and positioning things. And this is the final result.

School is really a workshop for peace. It doesn’t always state philosophy but offers philosophy embedded in practic. Helps ch not to be scared of others ideas and helps them to understand and if you mix your ideas with others you will have a better result.

The city trusted our work a lot over the years and this is one of the moste evident - when the ch were asked to create a theater curtain and it was a very difficult thing  and we went through all of the

What was suitable for a theater? Thought about how to combine diff subjects, how to create it. At final stage people used computers and fancy equipment but the beginning was the project. Children were genius in keeping together science “ring of transformation”

Everything is made of the same matter - we are all composed of cells, sun, humans, flowers - depending on how the cells are combined we have diff things 0 and that is how we are all linked. There are also things deciding what to become. This is also a spiritual aspect expressed by the ch and going beyond boundaries.