

Mirrors of children's thinking

**A mirror of the hundred "languages" of
young children in and through their
expressions.**

**Beverley Clark and Nicky de Lautour
ACEI, Vancouver, 2014**



What are the metaphorical hundred languages of children according to Loris Malaguzzi?

▶ **thinking**, **playing**, **speaking**,
listening, **marvelling**, **loving**,
being joyful, **singing**,
understanding, **discovering**,
inventing, **dreaming...**

▶ (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998, p.3)



Lorus Malaguzzi: An interview with Leila Gandini (1998, p. 75)

► *They (children) are apt to explore, make discoveries, change their points of view, and fall in love with forms and meanings that transform themselves.*



research

- ▶ Methodology and method: *Qualitative, Interpretive, participant observation*
- ▶ 2 centres: infants to young children
- ▶ Emergent curriculum
- ▶ Open-ended inquiry
- ▶ Morning sessions: 5 sessions in each centre
- ▶ Recording: on paper

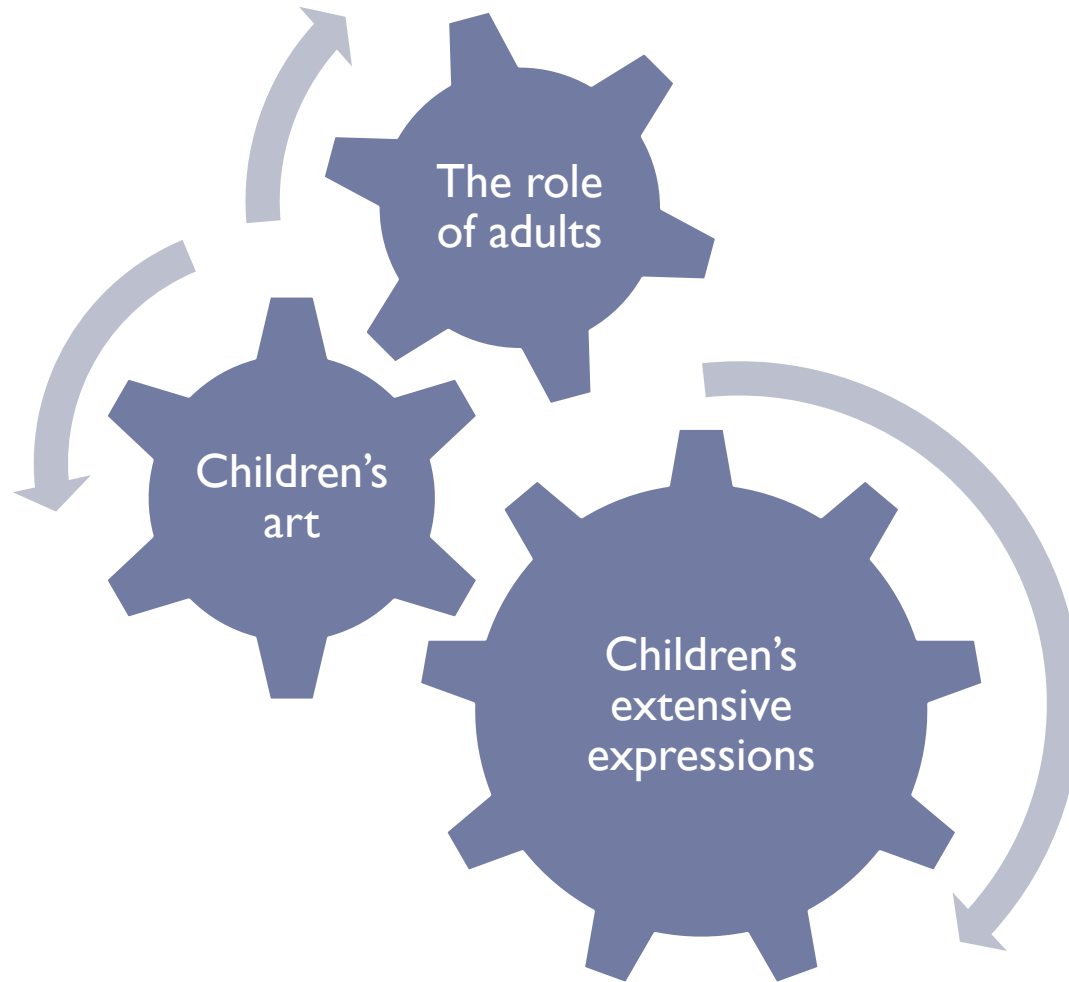


Research question

- ▶ *What are the myriad expressive languages of young children?*



Where we have come from



Abstract: why, how and so what

This research has at its core **a deep respect** for children and **artistic, non-verbal and linguistic expression**. It seeks to explore the depth and complexity in the artwork particularly the visual arts that may reveal a sense of identity (as distinct from otherness) and community (connection with others). It acknowledges that children's artistic expression stands on its own, it has its own place without explanation or interpretation but that additionally children's voices and non-verbal expression (such as body language) as well as linguistic expression; can offer insight into the meaning of both the experience and the outcome.

Rather than the window into children's art which McArdle cautions against (2008), we regard this research as a mirror which **reflects the child's thinking and knowing** in relation to artistic expression, and reflects their sense of identity and their connection with others.

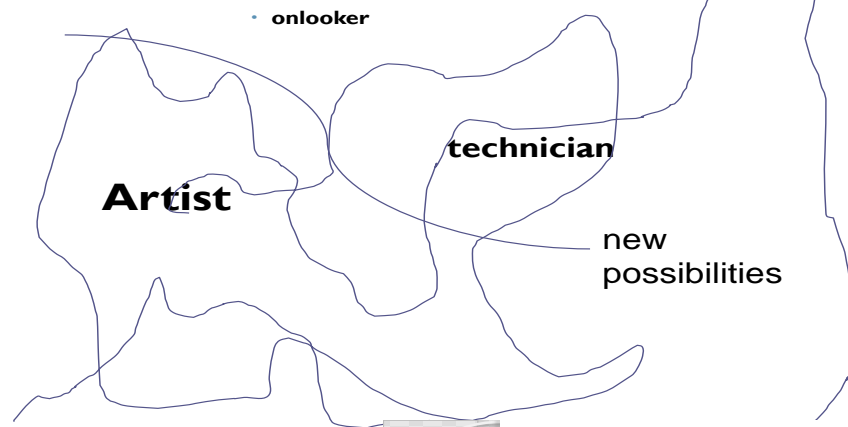


What did we do?

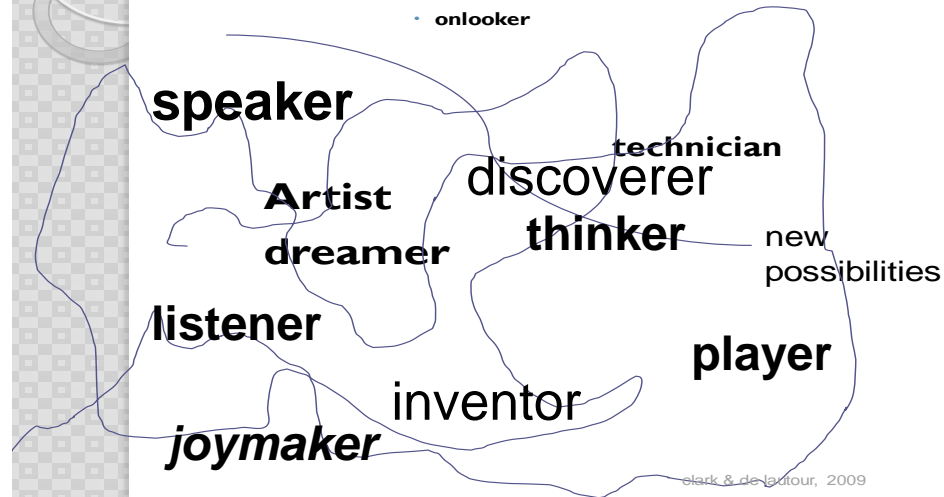
- ▶ *This research involved two researchers spending time in two early childhood centres to identify instances of the hundred languages of children through the visual arts. It is a small piece of qualitative research that is focussed around children's artistic experiences from 0-5 years of age conducted through observations 5 days in respective centres. The researchers have been participant observers who communicated with children during the time in the centres. Observations and communications were analysed as the researchers found meanings and themes through a hermeneutic lens.*



Teacher presence as agentic: embodiment of multiple roles



Children as agentic: flow, initiation and expression of a thousand languages



Clark & de laetour, 2009

Conceptual framework

- ▶ The Arts seen as symbolic languages in early childhood education. 'Hundred Languages' of children evident in children's expressions particularly through the Arts. Loris Malaguzzi

The arts allow us to share the details of our lives with others and to explore abstract and complex concepts such as 'the future' through the intangible probing of 'what might be.'

(Wright, 2012, p. 2).

Children assess the aesthetics of their environment, their work and respond to this.



▶ Curriculum is found in the children

Malaguzzi, (1998, in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 88)

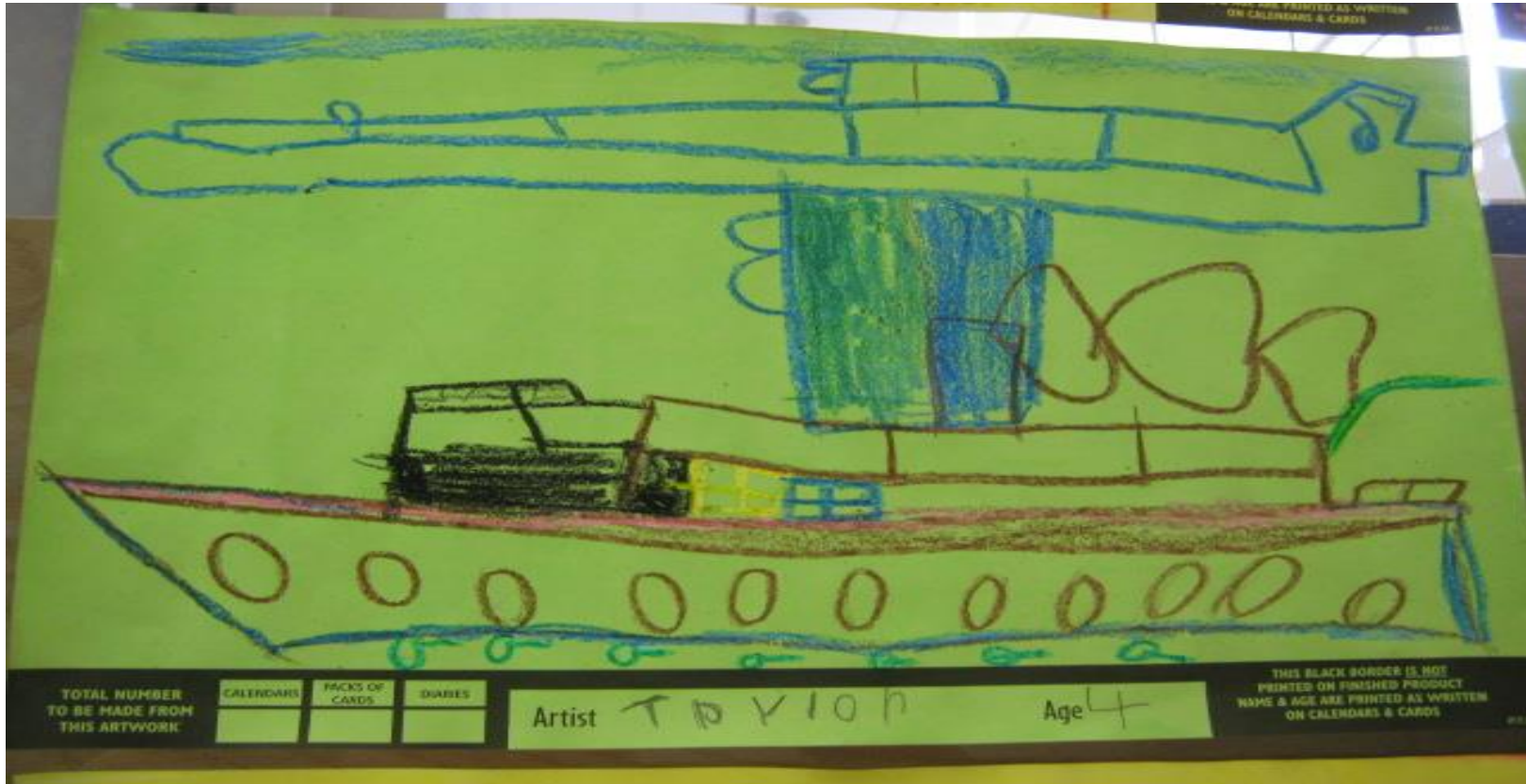


Making thinking visible

- ▶ *Graphic or symbolic languages are a vehicle through which children communicate their ideas, feelings, understandings, imagining and observations* (Katz, 1993, p.25 cited in Robertson, 2000, p.154)



Symbols are the bearers of culture



Malaguzzi, in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p.88

-
- ▶ In this research the 'languages' are more than symbolic, more than graphic: they encompass the physical, the heart (feelings), the spirit and the mind within the social context of that moment and that learning.



Empathy and harmony

Hoffman (2000) says that

empathy enables social life, and without empathy the human race would not have survived



What is often most noticeable:

- ▶ Expression through the visual arts
- ▶ What we noticed was the layers and layers of other connections, experiences and encounters – beyond what we expected to see...
- ▶ Presence: Being truly present, both researchers and teachers – just there to see and to respond at a deeper level– can bring the layers to realisation



So what?

- ▶ How do we as educators understand and interpret children's expressive languages through their actions, experiences and ideas and through visual arts engagement?
- ▶ We see this research and the time with the children and in the centre as being part of a privileged dimension of what is possible



The Pipes





The car wash



The car with car seat



The car with
car seat

Children express themselves in every context
as they engage with the environment



**A pile of rocks is reconstructed to make a
circle, then a house, then a house with rooms
and people**

Private and conversational speech: Poetry in motion



-
- ▶ By learning and practising art, the human brain actually wires itself to make stronger connections (Bower, 2004, cited in Gibson & Ewing, 2011, p. 131)



With others: some themes

Relationships

- ▶ Teachers and others as referent points
- ▶ Initiating
- ▶ Tools/skills
- ▶ Restoring order
- ▶ Persevering with difficulty
- ▶ Problem posing/problem solving
- ▶ Frustration

Silence and listening and engaging

- ▶ Viewing and reviewing
- ▶ Negotiation; collaboration
- ▶ Making decisions
- ▶ Imagining
- ▶ Choosing
- ▶ Instructing/demanding
- ▶ Understanding
- ▶ Sustaining
- ▶ Testing ability and skills
- ▶ Protecting self ...



They invite others to connect and communicate

► *Children are great communicators*

- (Headteacher in centre 1)



What do we do with this???

- ▶ extend to new entrant classes



References

- ▶ Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.)(1998). *The Hundred languages of children. The Reggio Emilia approach – advanced reflections*. 2nd edition. Westport, USA: Ablex Publishing.
- ▶ Gibson, R. & Ewing, R. (2011). *Transforming curriculum through the arts*. South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave MacMiillan
- ▶ Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ▶ Nielsen, C. in N. Friesen., C. Henriksson, & T. Saevi (Eds.). (2012). *Hermeneutic phenomenology in education. Method and practice*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense publishers.
- ▶ Robertson, (2000). *Drawing. Making thinking visible*. In W. Schiller, (2000). *Thinking through the arts*. London: Routledge.
- ▶ Wright, S. (2012) (Ed.). *Children, meaning-making and the arts*. (2nd ed.) Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson

