

Speaker 1: I'm a new pedagogist and working in a childcare center in the city of Toronto. So I'm starting to work with a bunch of educators who are very, very new to Reggio. I'm wondering, if I were to have this kind of conversation with some of the educators, could you give an example of a very simple research question that you may start out with?

Lorenzo: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Do you already have like some defined spaces in your centre?

Speaker 1: We are still under construction, so we're opening in October. So we will have classrooms always, and outdoor space.

Lorenzo: Okay. Well, I'll just give a maybe a simple example. So, we tried to use some months ago these sort of digital technologies that, actually they're not very much digital, that allow you to grow vegetable on a tower. They're called a hydroponic towers, for example. So you can actually grow like small plants or vegetables on that specific tower. So we grew, for example, strawberries or some salad. And what we did was to place these hydroponic towers very close to an actual the garden, but it was separated from the gardens. So sometimes we would pick some of the things that were growing in the garden and, we actually put them on a table right beside the hydroponic tower.

And so the very simple research question for four years old or three years old children: "What was, what is the difference?" That they could experience between the two things. So like an actual natural environment where plants for growing and a very artificial device that would actually help us to do something that has never been done before and experience it in a different way. So this was a research question for the children: how do you think this works? What are your ideas? What do you think changes? A very simple question; very observational questions. So they started taking pictures, trying to make drawings about how it might work. Where does the water come from? Where does the weather come from in nature? How, what are the differences? You know they started developing all these different theories by making drawings, by taking pictures, by creating visual narratives.

Speaker 1: And this is a simple research, right? Question. Or children for example, you were also referring to a research question for educators though, or just research questions that you could offer to children?

Lorenzo: Children.

Speaker 1: But you know, if I was speaking to the educators to give an example of something they might put forward to the children.

Lorenzo: So another example, using a media projector and a web. Can we ask a group of children to bring their oldest toys, something that belongs to their past, even though they're very young, but something that they used to play with and maybe they're not playing anymore with? And then they brought these toy, and we took some pictures of them. And then the research question was: how can we change, redefine your old toys and make it alive again?

Lorenzo: And make it meaningful again. So the sort of play had become to take pictures of the old toy and then basically, by using a very simple app, draw some lines and video project their old toy and starting to create stories about what old toys could tell to another. What had happened: they started to invent a narrative. So the research question was: how can we transform this object? This was the research question for changing; the main theme was transformation. The day after, since the theme remained, transformation was not any more about their old toy, but it became how can we transform the space? So they started to take objects and mostly recycled objects and redefine some of the small spaces that they were using in order for the spaces to be new.

Lorenzo: And then they would have to tell us how they did it. This kind of a simple research question. So about transformation. then we also asked how can you transform, uh, yourselves basically? And so they're starting using different materials and create, uh, you know, like how, how could you define like dresses or, uh, you know, like so it was about transforming your image. So am I still the same when I'm using this particular object? What is changing? Um, very simple I think research question, but they then start to develop possible activities and possible experiences. I hope I answered.

Speaker 1: It was brilliant.

Lorenzo: Thank you.

Sylvia: Hi, I don't actually have a question. It's just a comment. I think I really appreciated how you connected aesthetics with the aesthetic experience because you're, at least from what I'm hearing, you are thinking about aesthetics as a relational list. That it, it's not aesthetics as if it's in something, but it's in the connections in the relations. And I think what you've, what you've articulated is a really important idea that then when we're thinking about an aesthetic experience, it's a particular kind of experience. It's a relational experience and you've enlarged that to what's going on in the space, how the space is designed, the questions that are designed, what the children are doing. It's not in the objects, in the things themselves because that's one of the, one of the things that I think in North American Reggio interpretation, it's as if we put something beautiful out. Beauty is in the materials and then the beautiful materials or arrangements provoke something to children rather than how you've articulated as trying to orchestrate and choreograph these aesthetic. It's relational aesthetics experiences. So I really appreciate what you've, how you've described that.

Lorenzo: Thank you very much actually. What sometimes surprises me in what you just said is that this idea of aesthetic as mostly relational actually comes from an American philosopher who is Dewey, right? Uh, so John Dewey argued in very strongly about the relevance that our relationship with the environment, and the importance that our relation with environment as in defining our aesthetic experience. So somehow the importance of this message I think went somehow lost. And then became more some sort of [inaudible] season. And what you're saying is so that somehow the truth lies within the object instead, or what you would argue is that that was relevant part is the relations that we have with that object and with the environment that surrounds that object. Anything we can always experience this if we sincerely think about our aesthetic

experiences, how relevant is the space? How relevant is the context in defining our aesthetic experience and how it makes it meaningful and relevant for us? So I think in this sense we should maybe value more again, the interpretation that Dewey offered, of aesthetics and the static experience. So thank you very much for your remarks.

Cristina: And can I just jump in because I think that also right now I'm following along what Sylvia was saying, what you're saying Lorenzo, you made a very important distinction that for those of us thinking about pedagogy is it's relevant. And I think that we bring pedagogy into the picture when we actually think about aesthetics as an experience rather than when we create what you call Lorenzo an aestheticism, which is just making a space beautiful. You know, I often talk with educators that making a space beautiful is not necessarily creating an experience that is aesthetical or pedagogical. And I liked what both of you are doing because I see in your conversation the encounter between aesthetics and pedagogy. That's, you know, with Sylvia for years we have been trying to think about what happens in that encounter between aesthetics and pedagogy and what is the role of the pedagoga or pedagogies in the Canadian context. And the aesthetics or the atelierista.

Lorenzo: Yeah, absolutely. And in the sense, going back again to Dewey, he would define also not only the aesthetic experience but also the unaesthetic experience or non-aesthetic experience. And by defining it, he would argue that when an experience is not meaningful then it's not an aesthetic experience. In this sense it's important to always consider beauty in a relational way. You could say mostly about the meaning that children are actually capable to find and redefine in a particular space. And in this sense, I think what you said, it's absolutely true. So a learning spaces doesn't have to be perfect. I think it's important for choosing to create meanings means also to interact with objects and to use them and feel free to use them. And sometimes when we exaggerate by defining too much a learning space, then children don't feel too comfortable exploring and using or redefining objects. And in this sense, I think what you're saying is very relevant. Sometimes we forget about this aspect. I think. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you.

Cristina: Tell me, do we have any other questions?

Speaker 2: Can I say something? [Yes.] Lorenzo, thank you so much about emphasizing to me the aesthetic in relation to pedagogy because sometimes, I don't know, sometimes Reggio can be easily misunderstood. So thinking that, okay, we displayed beautiful materials and just children explore the materials. But when you, in the beginning you emphasized the importance of designing space based on your research questions or pedagogical intention. And when you talk about documentation, documentation is not just about accounting what happened, but you also evaluate, okay, what a pedagogical moment in relation to an educator's intention or the research question that you start with. So I want to appreciate emphasizing the importance of designing space

Lorenzo: Yeah, absolutely. In this sense, I think it's also important when we start designing the spaces to already have in mind some research questions, because the two things then can go together, right? So we want to, you know, like raise some questions regarding a specific aspect, then we define the research questions and by when we define them,

then we can start designing the space based on our questions so that the space actually becomes some sort of a context where these research questions are very visible. And I think it's one of the hardest challenges to make the research question visible just by designing the space. Then of course you also help children by eventually telling them what your research questions were, but the space should, I think this is at least my point of view, express as much as possible the research questions that we thought of.

Cristina: Thank you again for that Lorenzo. Anyone else you wanna tell me, not that I can see right now. Okay. I just want to, as a way to keep the, yeah, sorry, Rachel. Alright. Yeah.

Joe: Hi everyone. Thank you so much, Lorenzo, for these thought provoking ideas. I have a question for you or anybody in the group and I'm wondering about the idea of designing aesthetic experiences and pedagogies with children and environments where there is, in particular cultural and linguistic diversity and, and some of the thoughts that might need to go into that in particular.

Lorenzo: Okay. So, this is a very debated problem in Italy because as you know, Reggio Emilia in particular has a very high percentage of first generation immigrants. So we're talking about people who have difficulties, very hard difficulties, with the language. And in this sense, I think that digital technologies can become very important, because the visual literacy there, there's not only grammatical literacy or linguistic literacy instead of very relevant aspect is the visual literacy that children experience since they're very young. And the patrimony, like the culture that a child brings with him as many visual aspect aspects and not only linguistic aspects and in this sense, to give as much value as possible to also their visual heritage is something that becomes more and more relevant.

Lorenzo: So for example, this summer during our summer camp there was a Japanese child who couldn't speak any Italian or English, so she had to be part of the activities. And what we tried to do was to involve her as much as possible under a visual point of view. So she could maybe draw things and then we try to involve her as much as possible in visual work. So providing her with materials where she could have a symbolical impact on. So she could redefine these materials by using her own symbolical heritage, so to say. So the way she would really find them was different than the way a child would use these materials. And to create connections among children by having them using different types of materials can then become for them a way to share something, even though they don't actually share the language or even not by just communicating through gestures are. In this sense, I think all these visual aspects can be very important. And also the fact that most children already capable of using all digital devices, then it can become a way to offer them the possibility to have a role and give some visual contribution to a work that another group of children is maybe doing. And I think in a sense these aspects can be very important. And sometimes we don't think about how to give as much value to this particular aspect. I hope.

Cristina: Thank you, Lorenzo. I would like to take us back for a minute to the question of designing spaces and the role of the educator in the pedagogies because after all, you know, we are orienting pedagogies in the province of Ontario. And if this is how I'm thinking and this is how in the center often we, we, we have many conversations around

the question of “it is okay, it's not easy”, but we could say that we need to create research questions or that we need to document and use documentation. But often in the center I remind the people with whom I work that to create research questions and to create the commentary we need to have certain sensitivities and certain dispositions and to do that. It matters very much to what pedagogies in our Canadian context, pedagogists and atelierists in the current context are exposed to. In fact, one of the reasons why we have these exposures is because we want to enrich all the viewpoints that pedagogists can have when they are thinking about, for example, something as simple and as complicated as creating a research question. Would you agree or disagree with me that it matters a lot? What kind of exposures, what are kind of experiences educators that are pedagogists and atelierists have so that they can propose rich generative research questions?

Lorenzo: Yeah absolutely, for example most of the times the guests that are invited are maybe non-specialists in the field of pedagogy or, and maybe are artists or scientists or people who work in other research fields. And it's important to try to develop relationships with even other fields of knowledge. And what is something that it's very common to do is like, for example, if someone goes to an art museum or an artist exhibition during the weekend, then when it comes back what we always try to keep in mind is how can I transform this visual experience or this aesthetic experience that I've had or the spaces that I've seen, how they were designed and how was the experience designed? How can I rethink of that experience and bring it to my own context? So this is something that we at least always try to do.

Lorenzo: And sometimes, as working groups with sometimes go together to like, museums or exhibitions, and then we discuss how we can actually rethink what we experienced and propose it to children in a way that they can actually have not the exact same experience, but in a way that they can somehow enlarge their possibilities in these terms. I think this is a very relevant element sought to create connections between our public life and in terms of what we see, what we experience with what we actually tried to create as teachers, as educators. And we tend to discuss it as much as possible with colleagues and if we have an idea, we maybe take a picture, we send it to our colleagues and try to say: I thought this particular way of proposing this material was interesting in that place where I went to.

Lorenzo: And then we try to discuss. So how can we actually provide children with some similar experience? Right? So I think this is what you're saying is very, and this is also a way to keep yourself alive and continuously rethink the space is the experiences and keep the school contemporary so the school doesn't become something not contemporary, but the school remains a space where children can experience the world or how the world is right now of course with the filter that we as pedagogists and as educators and teachers decide to have, but a disaster the brain.

Cristina: Yes. Thank you. That's so interesting because, you're once again reminding us that it's very blurry, the relationship between our work as educators, as pedagogists, and our life, right. That the way we cultivate and enrich our lives is intimately related to the abilities and the capacities that we will have to be able to create documentation that is actually, for example, generative. It sounds to me also in what you're saying that it

matters a lot to have conversations with different areas, different disciplines, and interdisciplinarity is also a big aspect of being able to create progettazione or to do the designing that you're talking about.

And in the sense, even the way the space is initially designed in schools in Reggio have a lot to do with the architectural new avant-garde in Italy. So these connections, this friendship between some architects where developing new ways of thinking, the spaces and pedagogical exponents brought Reggio to develop innovative research spaces. But in order to remain innovative, you have to keep this dialogue open. And this means you expose yourself to what the design is nowadays and in which directions it's going to. And at the same time: what is architecture today? What are the new ideas and how to, you know, like implement these ideas in our buildings in like the schools and how to redefine constantly the spaces? And this is possible only if we keep this conversation open and if we are interested in this kind of questions. Absolutely.

Cristina: Okay. Denise?

Denise: Okay. Hi, thank you very much. I just want to keep picking up on this current point and an area that is being thought with in terms of the importance of those exposures of thinking with other knowledges. Of bringing that back into one's context for working to create something new or putting something into motion because we do here in Canada certainly have a bit of a tradition where we've, many of us have come through professional learning and our education even where it's a bit more of, I'll digest this, take it and go and apply. And I just wanted to see if you could talk a little bit more about how, what I think you're describing is quite different than I've gone to an art gallery and now that's brilliant. We're going to go do the same thing here or now we're all going to, you know, we watched a wonderful presentation from Veronica a few months ago on plastics, so now we're all going to make a plastic lab in our classroom. You know, I think you're describing something very different and I just, I'd like to talk a little bit more maybe or get a sense of what that difference is and how that, how that learning from being inspired by and turning it into something for con your own context is, is a different thing then than simply applying it. That hopefully that question makes sense.

Lorenzo: Yeah, absolutely. In this sense, for example, there's also another aspect. So there are, I think two main aspects. One is involving children themselves in the life of the city or of a place where the school is located and this means allowing them to experience. I have firsthand experience, and this is something that has become more and more difficult in Italy as well. Because it's now more, much more complicated to children in outdoor activities, but it's something that remains absolutely relevant. And so not only involving children in activities, artistic or theatrical activities, that are thought for children instead allowing students to have the experience of participating to something that is not thought for them. It's not so to say. We could make up a word and say like childrenized you know, like they were created exclusively for children.

Lorenzo: But something that we as adults think may have a part of you for them. The experience in this sense, going to theater, participating in activities in the city becomes a way for the school to remain alive in a control sense. And also for children to have the possibility to be exposed as well. So not only ask us, even then as children can be exposed to

culture, and relevant experiences. And this a first point but of course there's always the filter of the adult. So are we as adults and I think to decide which experiences might be fruitful and meaningful for children. And this means also ourselves as adults going to, and have experiences in what is actually our specific context: providing. And this means maybe try to involve the people we meet.

In actually developing something together, right. Because this is surely one of the most relevant points of our pedagogical culture to involve as much as possible people who may have an innovative point of view. Not just because we want them to do something specific in the space and in the sense where when artists were invited in schools. They would mostly not perform but have conversations with children. So the idea was not much about artists coming and form an artistic work in front of children instead was more the idea of creating conversations between children and artists and musicians. And so points of view doing something together. So in this sense, it's not just recreating what is happening. Maybe in an art gallery and bring it to the school, instead is bringing the point of your specific person and allow students to have some sort of a dialogue with that person. And this means of course creating connections, relationships, moments where children to have this kind of experience. So I think these are all very complicated aspects as I myself struggle very often too actually create the possibility to do these things. But I think, you know, your take away is always important to try our best to provide children with these possibilities and these experiences.

Cristina: I didn't see Tommy telling me of anyone else. I am also aware that we are coming close to our time of closing the exposure. So let's give one or two minutes in case people are thinking through these ideas. I really I am a great believer of giving time for thinking to happen. Otherwise we can pass to Nicole for her to help us with her brilliancy to synthesize, to bring together these thoughts and this exposure. And not to say bye forever to Lorenzo, but we are sure. And we hope to reconnect with you in the future. I see Rachel hand's up so we can hear. That's lovely. Rachel and Laura as well. So I'll start with Rachel first and then we can move on with Laura.

Rachel: Okay. Thank you for indulging me. I have this just this question about digital tools and young children. We are in this very contradictory space in the sense that on the one hand there are digital tools everywhere. And then on the other there are a lot of what we might think of as protectionist kinds of discourses and statements that are put out by lots of different organizations about like the dangers of digital tools and young children. And a lot of discussion about, you know, what digital tools are going to do to the developing brain and things of that nature. So I'm wondering, Lorenzo, if you could help us kind of work through some of these discourses and what is happening in these contexts and what it is that pedagogists might need to be aware of as they are out there in the field – talking about digital tools with educators and parents.

Lorenzo: Yeah. Absolutely. So there is a really big debate about this topic and I think the most relevant piece is to provide experiences where the digital pools are enriching the general experience of children and not making it for in this sense. Of course digital tools per se have somehow a message as you would say, like the media medium is a message I think has been very famously said. But the fact is that we can redefine that message by providing innovative learning spaces in the sense even books could become instruments

to make the experience something poorer when it's not an aesthetic experience. This means when it's not an experience that brings you to redefine the way you interact with the world in a more profound, in a deeper and more interconnected way.

Lorenzo: And so I think this is the line we should try to draw. Like when an object, it might be an art object, a digital object or a book, doesn't prove it matter makes the general experience poorer or has no connections or doesn't make the way we experience the word richer than maybe we are designing an experience that it's not very meaningful. Instead, when we make it to create these connections, then we're providing an experience that is making children's life richer and more relevant. And in this sense there is a famous dialogue reported by Plato so when writing was invented. Basically the first time we started to write there was this dialogue that has not really happened, but it gave you, it can give you like an idea of what was the discussion back then.

Lorenzo: So they would say that writing made the experience poorer because then people will start to forget, and will then remember as many things as they would before they could write. And so writing would make a life experience poorer or then there is, there have been many debates when the first printing books came out and people would argue that the possibility to read would make actually people's experience poor. So it has been a never ending debate. I think whenever a new tool appears, whenever a new possibility appears, there are always discussions about easy making, per se, our experience a better experience or a worse experience. And I think it's not very much about the instrument itself. It's mostly about the way we propose that instrument and the way we are able to create connection.

Lorenzo: We may make that instrument good or bad. Sometimes you have to make a higher effort to give a deeper meaning to an object because it will be poor or meaningless. But the way you can rethink of that object and redefine it, then can make it meaningful. Sometimes it's easier because the object itself offers many possibilities. Sometimes it's harder because maybe an app or a software are very poor, are very utilitaristic and it's harder to find a way to redefine that specific aspect. But I think it's all mostly always doable. It takes more or less effort, but I think this is the direction that at least I and surely my colleagues, we try to follow if it makes sense.

Cristina: Great. Thank you. Uh, and Laura.

Laura: Hi. I think my question relates to what you were just talking about as well. Earlier I think I've understood stood what you were saying, but please correct me if I've misunderstood. I believe you said that children's meta-cognitive processes differ between a physical experience and digital experiences. And I was wondering if you could expand on that.

Lorenzo: Absolutely. So sometimes if we design a space in a certain manner, it offers to children the possibility to have deeper meta-cognitive experiences. So the fact that for example, by entering in video-projected reality or in an augmented reality by using digital technologies makes it clear that our experience is mediated by our senses. So we're experiencing a space, a reality that it's not always defined so when we add. By using the digital technologies, it becomes clearer that our perception is not always the reality.



Right, and that our perception is mediated by our sentences. So what, as being a useful in terms of developing meta-cognitive capacities as for us being proposing to children, but we're talking now about elementary school children.

Lorenzo: I think like proposing virtual reality, younger children might be more complicated, but by proposing this experience to them, not in an alienating way. So just by themselves or individually by proposing, you know, we do projections to groups and maybe to one child, like the glass that allow you to enter in a virtual reality, but all the other children could see through the video projection what the one child with glasses could actually see, gave them the possibility to think, then the research question was what is real and what isn't real. So we would project places and we would ask the children like, is this place real? They would say, maybe no, but if it's real, why we are seeing it. So what can we do in this space?

Lorenzo: Then the discussion became about dreams because one child said, it's like when I'm dreaming, I'm experiencing something, but that's not real. Right? It's just a perception. So then, you know, this is all meta-cognition, right? About how we perceive the word, how we perceive reality. And it's very deep, though you can do it with an eight years old children in the sense using these digital technologies gives you a way to facilitate this process. I think here I can say a more easy way just do it with a picture and you take a picture of something and then you start asking, is this picture that object or no? Is it different? Then you can make a drawing and, you know, these questions that are recurring in the aesthetic tradition since centuries can now by using digital technologies become questions that more people are confronted with and that also children can actually ask themselves and think about.