



In early April, Jessica Boritz, Grace Art Teacher & Atelierista, presented at the [National Art Education Association](#) Convention in San Antonio. Jessica's talk was entitled, "From Art Teacher to Atelierista: Applying Reggio-Inspired Practices to Enrich Student-Centered Learning...with Beauty." Below is an excerpt from her presentation in which Jessica discusses the role of the atelierista within the [Reggio Emilia](#) philosophy, how it informs her role as Atelierista at Grace, and the importance of beauty in learning, justice, and well-being. Jessica's full presentation dives deeper into these concepts along with the history of Reggio, the emerging field of neuroaesthetics, creating joy in learning, and so much more.

"An atelierista is someone with a background in the arts, and her role is to work with teachers and children. She is a specialist who helps expand awareness of the properties and potentials of materials, to see beyond what we think we know. Roberta Pucci, a former atelierista at the Loris Malaguzzi Center says, 'What we know is useful, but it can limit our relationship with the world. I am not using a material for a goal. I am starting a relationship with the world through the material.' In Reggio Emilia (RE), ateliers and atelieristas create space for beauty and aesthetics to emerge. A atelierista is different from an art teacher in that she does not necessarily teach content. Rather, she uses her knowledge of materials, tools, and processes to support and enrich children's authentic inquiry. She leads work to keep the 100 languages alive in the school.

If beauty's various manifestations are indeed simultaneously personal, cultural, and universal, how might that impact our teaching? If children offer *their* version of beauty, if they are motivated to share it with others through various expressive languages, what does it mean for a child for their idea of beauty to be recognized? To be ignored? How can we help create learning environments that attend to the personal aesthetic dimensions of each and every child in our care? How can we facilitate expressive languages that allow children to share their versions of beauty and co-create a collective vision of beauty?

I feel I am really just beginning to understand how to do this, and to tease out how this process may be different in an American context than in RE, and how it relates to the education of older students, not just early childhood. I have a lot of questions and few answers, but I am trying to allow the children to guide me. I think one of the things that distinguishes the Reggio approach, and indeed how beauty relates to the Reggio pedagogy, is listening. This is an educational approach that is not only about being actively, individualistically creative, or solely about empowering the individual to be empowered (which is important!), but it is about listening and being receptive. We receive beauty when we are present, open, and actively listening.”