

# EMERGENT CURRICULUM: BLENDING THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TEACHING

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## Emergent

- Rising or coming forth from a surrounding medium
- Coming into existence, developing
- Coming into view or notice
- Arising casually or unexpectedly



## Objectives

- Explain the key features and goals of an emergent curriculum.
- Describe how an emergent curriculum benefits children developmentally.
- Describe the importance of intentional and reflective teaching practices to an emergent curriculum.
- Practice emergent curriculum development using classroom vignettes.



## Discussion

- How do you plan what to teach and how to teach it?
- What are the pros and cons of creating curriculum in that way?



## Traditional

- Teachers follow a predetermined curriculum and choose what information, materials and activities children receive
- Product-oriented
- Instruction is based on age and generalized
- Teachers create lesson plans (often theme-based) ahead of time
- Success is measured by ability to get children to take interest and maintain focus
- Children's natural curiosity often redirected
- Length of inquiry is arbitrary



## Emergent

- Children have rights, not just needs
- Curriculum is organic & emerges from play of children
- Co-constructed by children and adults
- Honors child's natural attention span and learning rhythms
- Lessons based on individual capabilities, interests and learning styles
- Children allowed to pursue learning at different paces, using different materials with different guiding questions and outcomes
- Process-oriented



## Children learn by doing.

- Through relationships
- Through opportunities
- Through own actions
- Through inquiries
- Through repetition



## Teachers are research partners for children.

- Offering materials and tools to inspire individual children
- Supporting investigation
- Seeking answers to questions



Teachers inspire delight, curiosity and inquiry.

## Developmental Benefits

- Builds intrinsic motivation
- Strengthens child's sense of identity
- Fosters life-long love of learning
- Develops broader and deeper knowledge base
- Encourages self-monitoring and self-regulation
- Inspires concentration and deep focus
- Facilitates numerous ways of symbolically representing ideas



## Sources of Emergent Curriculum



Jones, E. and Nimmo, J. (1994).  
*Emergent curriculum*. Washington, DC:  
 NAEYC.

- Children's interests
- Teachers' interests
- Developmental tasks
- Things or people in the environment
- Unexpected events
- Living together: conflict resolution, caregiving and routines
- Values

## Teacher's Responsibilities I

- Know how children learn.
- Observe, watch and listen carefully.
- Invite inquires and investigations.
- Facilitate investigations to help children answer questions.
  - Start with something someone is excited about.
  - Make sure it has clear educational relevance.
  - Provide opportunities to work across many curriculum areas and use many skills.
  - Provoke on-going socio-emotional learning.
- Express general goals and hypotheses about what direction activities and projects might take.



## Teacher's Responsibilities II

- Thoughtfully plan and maintain the environment.
  - Encourage choices, problem solving and discovery.
  - Create a beautiful classroom.
  - Foster a sense of well-being and ease, playfulness and joy.
- Take field trips and excursions & invite guests.
- Make the most of conflict and different opinions.
- Collaborate with families.
- Reflect with colleagues.
- Document the learning process.



## Documentation: What?

- Expression of children's learning & process through many media
  - Drawing & painting
  - Modeling
  - Verbal descriptions & dialog
  - Numbers
  - Physical movement
  - Drama and pretend play



## Documentation: How?

- Transcriptions of children's remarks and discussions
- Daily journals with photos and anecdotes
- Representations of thinking and learning carefully arranged to document process



## Documentation: Why?

- To make others aware of children's experiences
- To help teachers understand children better
- To let teachers evaluate their work and grow professionally
- To communicate and exchange ideas
- To let children know their efforts are valued & to help them construct new meaning
- To document history of school and create an archive of learning processes across groups of children



## Intentional and Reflective Teaching

- Educate self widely—beyond professional literature
- Document learning process
- Reflect with colleagues
- Examine practices and continuously readjust
- Be present and support children
  - Be fully present and in-the-moment
  - Ask questions to discover children's ideas and hypotheses
  - Provide tools and materials
  - Scaffold children's learning and help them make connections to prior experiences
  - Share a story
  - Help children seek answers



## Other Suggestions

- Allow children to experience short- and long-term explorations and deep concentration.
- Encourage children to redirect themselves when bored or not engaged.
- Appreciate the learning value of conflict and seek diversity of opinions.
- Spend lots of time outside in free exploration daily.
- Support varied learning styles.
- Give children safe ways to experience noise & chaos.
- Support children to do things beyond their current capacities.



## The Art

- Co-construction and reciprocity
- Relationships, collaboration, partnership
- The environment as the third educator
- Practice drives theory



## The Science

- Observation
- Asking questions and constructing hypotheses
- Devising ways to test hypotheses
- Research, investigation, and on-going revision of ideas
- Theory-building
- Documenting



Webs can focus thinking and generate ideas for classroom materials and activities.



“Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode.”

Loris Malaguzzi, Founder of the Reggio Emilia Schools in Italy

## Curriculum Examples

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