

## Emergent Curriculum

This curriculum was first published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in 1994. The curriculum is built on a trust in the power of play and on the concept that children are active rather than passive learners and learn primarily by doing rather than listening. It espouses the need for curriculum to be responsive to particular classroom (children and adults), at a particular time and in a particular place; that curriculum should be neither “canned,” “teacher-proof,” nor “embalmed” - using the same plan a teacher has developed every year regardless of children’s changing needs and interests. Important learning is specific to the individual learner’s needs, therefore the curriculum will look different in each classroom and from year to year.

Emergent curriculum is neither directed by teachers or by children but instead is negotiated between teachers and children. Curriculum arises from a variety of sources: children’s and teachers’ ideas, concepts teachers want children to learn, physical and social environments, community values, unexpected events, conflict resolution and a variety of curriculum resource materials. Every child and adult is seen as a source of curriculum ideas and individuals are encouraged to act as “resources to the learning of other adults and children. Connections to the broader community are seen as crucial to success, with strong roles for families and the surrounding community. Teachers and children’s interests, as sources of curriculum, always need to be evaluated in term of the values held by the community and family, and not all interests need to be incorporated into the curriculum.

In emergent curriculum the children are the teacher’s models for play and the teacher’s co-players. Teachers have responsibility for the curriculum and create the physical environment, setting the stage for children’s play. However, children’s ideas are an important source of curriculum. Careful observation by the teacher reveals their shared interests and what is individually appropriate for each child.

Teachers are expected to observe what children are interested in and write up plans that include webs of possible activities that support and extend those interests and teacher goals. Open-ended themes are used as starting points for emergent curriculum involving children and adults as learners together. Teachers are perceived as learners, benefiting from the experiences of other teachers. The curriculum encourages teachers to take their ideas and other peoples’ ideas, brainstorm in an open-ended process and then try them in the classroom. Teachers as a group choose an idea, brainstorm hands-on activities to create a web of activities children can play. An important element is staff meetings which provide staff with an opportunity to discuss theory and practice as they brainstorm classroom activities and plans.

Environments are created that offer opportunities for “discovery and inventiveness” but specific interest areas or centers and materials are not designed by the curriculum. Teachers help children “play,” “debrief” (or talk about their experience/activities) and “replay “(return to play, building on what they have learned.)

Rules, like the curriculum, are emergent and are tailored for each group of children. Rules are tied to “concrete situations” and may even differ for each child in the group, depending upon each child’s abilities. Teachers model intelligent problem-solving. Adults are expected to provide children with the ability to make wise choices. Conflicts are seen as opportunities for creative thinking, including opportunities for children to negotiate and develop strategies for calculating and overcoming risks. However, when safety is threatened, the teacher acts as the decision maker.

In evaluating effectiveness, teachers consider what was planned, what really happened and what was learned. Assessment is through developmental portfolios compiled by the teacher over time. The teacher serves as the recorder of children’s activities.