

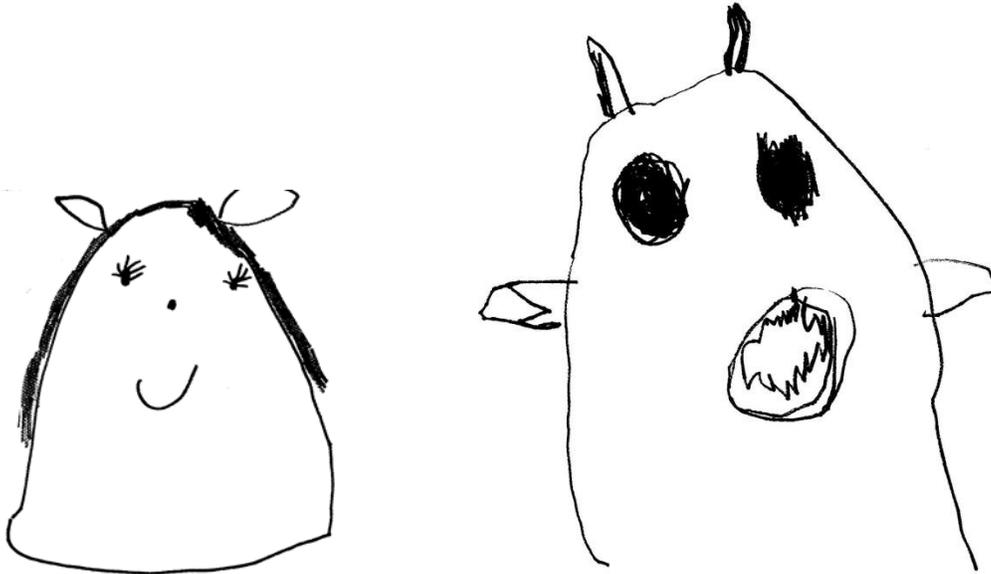
What is Emergent Curriculum?

Emergent curriculum develops from exploring ideas that are socially relevant, intellectually engaging and personally meaningful to children. Ideas can initially come from just about any source: teachers, parents, chance events and of course, the interests of the children. Regardless of the source of the idea, it is an idea that captures the interest and imagination of the children.

It responds to children's immediate interests rather than focusing on narrow or thematic topics.

It is process rather than product driven.

It connects learning with real experiences and prior learning.



Monsters in the Atelier

Theories on How Children Learn

Traditional teaching is rooted in behaviorist theory which places emphasis upon subject matter and how to communicate information to children. Teachers of the behaviorist theory see their role as transmitting information to children to be remembered (Bancscombe, et.al., 2003). As such, the teacher spends classroom time instructing through sequencing content, drilling, correcting and testing.

In contrast, Piaget's social-constructivist theory implies, "the preoccupation is not the teacher's *'instruction'*, but the child's *'construction'*," (DeVries, et.al. 1990) Constructivist teachers see their role as providing creative opportunities for children to have realistic experiences related to content, guiding the learning and clarifying ideas. The focus is not on the subject but *on the process of learning*. Constructivist teachers understand that learning occurs within the context of the classroom environment and the ideas of people (peers and adults) within the life of the child. The desire of the constructivist teacher is to scaffold the child's learning in such a way that the teacher becomes a *co-creator of knowledge*, creating a partnership between the child and the teacher.

What is a Project?

A project is an in depth investigation of an emergent topic. An investigation starts after the children have demonstrated sustained interest in the topic. Projects typically have three phases:

PHASE I – Kick Around Phase

Teachers act as a guide by providing information, personal experiences and activities. Teachers provide experiences not answers. Teachers observe and document what children are saying and thinking about the topic. Children hypothesize about how things work.

PHASE II – Investigation Phase

Teachers ask children what they already know, what questions they have about the topic.

Teachers ask open-ended questions to guide the children in how the class might find answers to their questions.

Teachers and parents work together to provide learning experiences.

Adults with knowledge of the topic are invited to share expertise with class.

If appropriate, a field trip is organized.

Children use representational art to communicate knowledge.

Children are asked to work in small groups, dividing responsibilities.

Teachers use the investigative process to teach to standards.

Teachers document the work and words of the children.

Teachers communicate classroom experiences to parents.

Throughout Phase II teachers are reviewing questions with the children, often new questions emerge. Teachers remain flexible as tangent topics may emerge.

PHASE III – Reflection and Celebration Phase

Teachers review and evaluate the project.

The class shares their findings and understanding with others, often other classrooms and parents.

Teachers provide opportunities for children to see (through documentation & group time) the learning process and review their work.

The project culminates with a celebration, often with parents.

REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

Emergent Curriculum: An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of the children. Topics for study are captured from the talk of the children and known interests of children (puddles, shadows, dinosaurs, and so on). So children learn to count dinosaurs, read about dinosaurs, to draw dinosaurs if that is a topic of interest to them.

Project Work: Projects, also emergent, are in-depth studies of concepts, ideas and interests which have been expressed within the group. Considered as an adventure, projects may last one week or the entire school year. For example, if a group of children are interested in pets then the class may visit a veterinarian. They may open a pretend pet store. The class will read pet stories and so on.

Representational Development: The Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic and social development. Learned concepts are represented in many forms – print, art, construction, clay, drama, music, puppetry and shadow play – all are viewed as essential to children’s understanding of experience.

Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize and problem solve through group work. Within Reggio Emilia approach there is high emphasis on the collaboration among home, school and community to support the learning of the child.

Teachers as Researchers: Working as co-teachers, the role of the teacher is first and foremost to be that of a learner alongside the children. Teachers carefully listen, observe and document children’s work and the growth of the community in their classroom. Teachers are to provoke, construct and stimulate thinking. The teacher is a resource and a guide as she/he lends expertise to children. Teachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning.

Documentation – Making Learning Visible: Documentation of children’s work in progress is viewed as an important tool for parents and teachers. The room is filled with the children’s work, photographs and their words as they discuss what they are learning, doing, feeling and thinking. Documentation boards and personal portfolios are used as graphic representation of the dynamic learning experiences occurring daily in the classroom. Time is provided to revisit children’s work and ideas – discussions which often drive new investigations.

