

Emergent curriculum

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Emergent curriculum is a way of planning [curriculum](#) based on the student's interest and passions as well as the teacher's. To plan an emergent curriculum requires observation, documentation, creative brainstorming, flexibility and patience. Rather than starting with a lesson plan which requires a "hook" to get the children interested, emergent curriculum starts with the children's interests. This is not to say that the teacher has no input, in fact teachers may well have a general topic they think is important for children to study and they may purposely include certain materials or experiences related to it as jumping off points.

Elizabeth Jones points out:

We are the stage directors; curriculum is teacher's responsibility, not children's. People who hear the words emergent curriculum may wrongly assume that everything simply emerges from the children. The children's ideas are an important source of curriculum but only one of many possible sources that reflect the complex ecology of their lives. (Jones p. 5)

This process requires a great deal of flexibility and creativity on the part of the teacher. Carolyn Edwards notes: "The teachers honestly do not know where the group will end up. Although this openness adds a dimension of difficulty to their work, it also makes it more exciting." (Edwards p 159)

Once teachers see an interest "emerging" they brainstorm ways to study the topic in depth. Webbing is often used because of its playful and flexible nature. A web doesn't show everything that will be learned, it shows many things that could be learned. However it is important to use the webbing as a tool to open the teacher to possibilities not a "plan." Teachers brainstorm many possibilities for study sparked from the particular interest, not as a plan but more as a 'road map' as one teacher put it: To get a plan, we chose an idea and brainstormed ways that children could play it – hands-on activities we could provide. Putting all the activities on a web gives you a road map full of possible journeys. (Jones p. 129)

An idea for a curriculum topic may be sparked by anything or come from anywhere. For instance, a teacher may overhear a group of students having a discussion about bugs that leads to the class sitting down and coming up with a web topic that explores all the possible directions the class could go in their quest to learn all they can about the topic of bugs. Ideas may also be sparked by offering experiences such as taking a walk through the neighborhood, visiting local businesses, or reading books.