



By Shauna Woo*
The emergent curriculum has recently become a popular topic of conversation when it comes to programming and planning in early childhood.



Facilitating an emergent curriculum

For most early childhood staff, particularly those who have been trained to program using the curriculum framework, it can be a daunting task to change from their usual programming style to the emergent curriculum.

The emergent curriculum is largely based on interest-based learning or the interests of a child or a group of children. When a child shows an interest in a topic or activity then early childhood educators are encouraged to facilitate this interest by providing resources and materials to help guide the children's learning, exploration and discovery.

The aim of facilitating children's learning is not product driven. The aim is to find out how children learn and how they use their personal experiences and knowledge to reach conclusions.

Emergent curriculum practices

There are three main areas which need to be addressed when changing to the emergent curriculum:

Reflective diary – Most early childhood educators have heard the terminology 'programming in the boxes'. By using a reflective diary or journal the emphasis is not on programming weekly anymore for the different learning areas as the diary-style of programming encourages educators to program on a daily basis using diary style entries. These entries give the educator the opportunity to reflect upon how the day went and how the children's interest and learning is progressing.

Documenting learning – Based on the entries in the reflective diary the children's learning can be documented through project style displays. Educators are encouraged to use a camera or better yet, a digital camera, to record the children's exploration and discoveries during free play. A project is created once the photos are displayed along with interpretations, recordings of what the children are saying and inquiries into how the children are learning about a particular topic.



Time – This is something we never have enough of in childcare! There definitely needs to be enough time for children to explore and expand upon their interests for the emergent curriculum to work. There needs to be enough time for staff to capitalise on spontaneous interests and learning of the children as it happens or you will lose the moment for it to become the focus of an intended topic and eventually a project. Time is also needed for staff to be able to facilitate the learning with resources on a daily basis and to be able to find time to put the projects together.

For a successful transition to the emergent curriculum most centres need to find a balance of what works best for the individual rooms and the children. Most people in early childhood find a combination of using the emergent curriculum and the curriculum framework often works best depending on the age of the children and the routine of the room.

A lot of centres now use emergent curriculum practices for the programming of the room while still using curriculum framework practices for their individual focus on child portfolios. By using this combination we are still covering the developmental learning areas of each child as

well as providing choice and opportunity for all children to contribute towards the program and their learning. This comes in very handy at accreditation time!

The emergent curriculum has changed the way most of us think about children's learning. Children now have a more active role in their learning and the day-to-day programming of the room. For the emergent curriculum to work all staff members of the room need to be committed to contributing and participating in the daily reflective diary and in facilitating the interests of the children. A strong and committed team forms the basis of a successful transition to the emergent curriculum.

* Shauna Woo is a recruitment manager and private consultant for Sydney childcare centres at Expect A Star Education Services, leading provider of services for the childcare industry (www.expectastar.com.au). Inquiries are welcome, email ryan@expectastar.com.au or phone 1300 669 653. ■■



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ryan@expectastar.com.au
1300 669 653

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