

INVESTIGATING AN EXPERIENCED EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER'S PROCESS
OF DEVELOPING AN EMERGENT CURRICULUM

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the course of the past ten years, a lot of individuals have provided valuable support to me as I completed my graduate studies. I am eternally grateful to each and every one of them. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my chair, Dr. Kristen Mary Kemple, for her guidance, encouragement, and inspiration. To Janet Davies for her willingness to honestly and openly share her perspective, her time, and her classroom with me. To Jane Townsend for generously offering her expertise and challenging me to stay genuine to myself throughout this long process, even into her retirement. To Tina Smith-Bonahue and Sondra Smith for their patience and valuable support. To the teachers, children, and families at Imagine Learning Center for igniting my passion for providing engaging and provocative early childhood education, which inspired my research. To countless friends for their words of encouragement along the way. To Jordan Glen School for instilling in me a curiosity about life and a love of learning. To my family for their loving support, which motivated me to complete my studies. Sincerely, thank you.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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OF DEVELOPING AN EMERGENT CURRICULUM

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May 2020

Chair: Kristen Kemple
Major: Special Education

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the process used to develop an emergent curriculum by a teacher experienced in using the approach. The following research questions guided this exploration: How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum? What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum? What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?

This research required an in-depth inquiry into a specific context. The method of instrumental case study was used to illuminate this issue. My primary source of data included an initial interview of the participant with guiding questions and a second interview with follow-up questions. I collected anecdotal notes from several observation sessions in the teacher's classroom and took photographs of her classroom materials and documentation to support the primary source of data. Using a modified version of Creswell's (2014) interactive process of data analysis, I extracted and organized the ideas that emerged from the data about this teacher's process, what she sees as her

role in the curriculum development process, and strategies that she uses to develop her emergent curriculum. I learned that her continual pursuit of professional development leads to her deep understanding of teaching and learning and contributes to her ability to question, observe, listen, reflect, and engage in the classroom. These findings offer insight into an example of a teacher's perspective on the creation and implementation of an emergent curriculum.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Emergent Curriculum

To understand the concept of Emergent Curriculum, one must first break the term down into its parts. The word curriculum typically invokes ideas about a set course of action, a plan, even a published set of materials used to guide instruction. However, according to Jones, “Curriculum is what happens in an educational environment. It may be prescribed, emergent, or accidental and unidentified” (1977, p.4). The word emergent suggests ideas that are the opposite of predetermined, such as those surfacing naturally and evolving organically. Emergent curriculum is an approach to curricular development in which teachers and students are engaged in a reciprocal interaction of inquiry and discovery. The approach involves listening and questioning, observing and facilitating. Through these behaviors, the curriculum is formed from the interests of the children in the classroom (Wien, 2006). “Once teachers select a focus, they plan provocations or interesting events that stimulate children’s thinking and activity. Teachers document children’s responses and think carefully about the next step” (Wien, 2006, p.1).

A major goal of an emergent curriculum is to incorporate students’ individual interests while provoking open-ended experiences to enhance independent exploration and further inquiry (Wien, 2008). Teachers engaged in developing an emergent curriculum are tasked with taking the initiative to recognize and enhance topics of inquiry. When introduced thoughtfully and with intention, provocations can elicit children to explore based on their intrinsic motivation, which sets the stage for co-constructed learning. This set of circumstances is vital to the process of developing an

emergent curriculum, and a play-based environment is where this type of practice can thrive (Jones & Nimmo 1994). In a beautiful environment filled with rich materials and opportunities for experiential learning, children and teachers can play and explore together, co-constructing knowledge about the world (Wien, 2008).

The teacher, or facilitator, is an important component in an emergent curriculum. The curriculum emerges from the children and the teacher(s) (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). The process of developing the curriculum relies on the facilitator paying attention to the children's interests and inquiries. The facilitator then helps expand those investigations by asking questions and setting up provocations. During the entire process, the facilitator is thoughtfully documenting the children's discussions, ideas, and other visible indications of the learning process, expanding discussions, and provoking new experiences. The nature of this intentional process of co-constructed learning that an emergent curriculum is drawn from lends itself to individualization and is a catalyst for strengthening the connection between the teacher and the learner.

The development and implementation of an emergent curriculum can be quite daunting and abstract to new, as well as seasoned, teachers. The approach involves releasing control to the learners and trusting the process. The facilitator of an emergent curriculum must be comfortable embracing the unknown and be open to letting a sense of wonder guide learning. In order to gain insight into the process of developing an emergent curriculum, I followed a seasoned teacher who has been successfully implementing this approach for many years. The primary criterion for selecting this teacher, specific to the purpose of this inquiry, was that she, first and foremost be experienced at developing an emergent curriculum. Secondary criteria were that she

have a passion for teaching and lifelong learning, years of experience creating an engaging learning environment, and that she used reflective teaching practices to constantly review and revise methods. I found these qualities in a local kindergarten teacher whom I call Jane. I went into this inquiry with two overarching intentions – to gather information from this teacher and her classroom that sheds some light on her process of developing an emergent curriculum, and to reveal insights that will be of value to the larger educational community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the process used to develop an emergent curriculum by a teacher experienced in using the approach, in an effort to provide insight into the practice. This topic has become of interest to me as a result of my experience as an administrator at a small preschool. The curriculum at the school I founded has influences from various approaches and philosophies; however, the school is predominantly influenced by the approach from Reggio Emilia, which utilizes an emergent curriculum. This approach, as discussed in the literature review, requires skillful, observant, and reflective teaching practices. Each year, I observe new and experienced teachers make this approach their own. Watching experienced teachers be inspired by Reggio Emilia and go through the processes and struggles of building an emergent curriculum has motivated this inquiry. I will use the following research questions to explore this issue:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?

- What does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

Significance of the Study

An in-depth case study, closely following a teacher's process of developing an emergent curriculum for young children, will provide the early childhood education community an example of a teacher's perspective on the creation and implementation of this practice. Creating developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children is a process that involves a thorough understanding of child development, as well as thoughtful planning. According to the The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement (2009), a developmentally appropriate curriculum "helps students achieve goals that are developmentally and educationally significant. The curriculum does this through learning experiences that reflect what is known about young children in general and about these children in particular" (p. 20). Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) involves an understanding of age-appropriateness as well as individual appropriateness (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The premise of DAP is the awareness that child development occurs across the developmental domains (physical, social/emotional, cognitive, communication/linguistic) and that development does not happen at the same time, at the same pace, or in the same environment for each child (Horowitz, Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). Teaching, therefore, should be guided by knowledge about typical child development, each individual child's development, as well as the culture in which the child is surrounded (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). There are many approaches to curricular development that are influenced by DAP and a multitude of theories about

teaching and learning, theorists, and research from a variety of disciplines (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009).

In the early childhood education community, there is a discourse about using an emergent curriculum based on the interests of the students. This type of curricular development requires the teacher to think on her feet in a different way than that of a predetermined curriculum. It means taking time for intentional observation, allowing for flexibility, and being ready for some ideas to take off, while being open to letting others fizzle out. In these days of for profit, scripted curricula and high stakes testing, how does a teacher hone her craft to enable the integration of an emergent curriculum in her classroom?

With today's pressures to meet standards in early childhood education, even preschools are moving away from playful, organic learning opportunities toward direct instruction that focuses on standardized test performance (Hirsh-Pasek, Golnikoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009). This era of national interest in assessment and accountability in early education began with a concern for social equity in cognitive development that resulted in the implementation in 1965 of the federally funded program Head Start (Jones, 2012). Federal tax money was being allotted for early childhood education, so the public wanted to ensure that the program was effective. With that goal in mind, an influx of research in early childhood education followed, and the development of pre-made curriculum for purchase emerged. The original publication of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Bredekamp, 1986) was an attempt to balance the demand for accountability with the needs of children to learn in an appropriate environment.

The NAEYC DAP position statement (2009) advocated for standards that were comprehensive, including emphasizing the importance of all developmental domains, and for the focus of curriculum implemented based on those standards to be equitable across the domains. The position statement emphasized that some schools and teachers are using a comprehensive approach to meet standards, but many are narrowing the curriculum to focus on meeting primarily the cognitive based standards.

The statement included the following:

To be most beneficial for children, standards need to be not only comprehensive but also address what is important for children to know and be able to do; be aligned across developmental stages and age/grade levels; and be consistent with how children develop and learn.
(p.4)

Then came the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which swung the pendulum away from DAP and toward teaching to the test (Jones, 2012). And there lies the juxtaposition – a teacher should feel confident that her curriculum is providing her students what they need to succeed throughout their educational experience. But does this mean that the future of education consists of a world of teaching to the test and high stakes assessments, or is it a world of wonder, inquiry, and discovery? Developing meaningful curriculum for young children requires not only a thorough understanding of how children develop and learn, which includes established standards and the teacher's own goals for students, but also an awareness of appropriate subject matter and a strong grasp of different strategies to deliver that content (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2019). An emergent approach to curriculum takes these elements into account and is one way to help swing the pendulum back in the direction of comprehensive, developmentally appropriate experiences in school.

One of the hindrances to utilizing an emergent curriculum is a teacher's lack of understanding of how it is developed and implemented. Hence, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the process by which a seasoned teacher, immersed in the ideas of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and emergent curriculum, facilitates the phenomenon. Investigating the context of her work and her perspective on designing and implementing an emergent curriculum will help me gain a better understanding of this teacher's perspective on the thought process involved in developing an emergent curriculum. This will also help create wider implications for teachers and children and inform educators who wish to utilize this process.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This research will investigate an experienced teacher's process of curriculum development, using an emergent curriculum model. Because of the nature of this study, the perspective of an educator engaged in the experience of planning and implementing an emergent curriculum, a theoretical framework of social constructivism is appropriate. An emergent curriculum is situated in social interaction among and between the teacher and students. The development of this type of curriculum is socially constructed and creates shared meaning, which is why it lends itself to being viewed through a social constructivist lens. This review of the literature begins by examining social constructivist theory. Because the emphasis of this research is on curriculum development, I reviewed the literature of curricular theories, focusing particularly on those related to social constructivist theory, as emergent curricula is in that category. The teacher followed in this inquiry was influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach, so literature focused on that specific process model was reviewed. I further concentrated my examination on research about play, teacher quality, and inquiry and documentation as they relate to the process of developing an emergent curriculum. Finally, I discuss literature associated with qualitative case study research, establishing a rationale for the design of this study.

Social Constructivist Theory and Theories related to Emergent Curriculum Development

According to the NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (2009), "The curriculum consists of the knowledge and skills to be acquired in the educational program as well as the plans for experiences through which children's learning will take place." (p.42). Curricular approaches range from

prescriptive and predetermined to emergent and driven by student interest. For the purpose of this project, the focus will be on the side of the pendulum that the latter represents. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) caution that prescribed curriculum models, though useful, should not replace a teacher's professional judgment on what works best for his/her students. The ideas that lead to emergent and child-driven curriculum stem from the social constructivist theory, based on the premise that humans learn through interaction with others and our environment and create shared meanings (Lindfors, 2008; Donaldson, 1978; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986).

The development of an emergent curriculum occurs in the specific context of a classroom and involves interaction between and among a teacher and students, as well as students and students, which suggests that the phenomenon is embedded in the social and cultural atmosphere of the classroom. The process is an organic and dynamic progression that emerges from the wonderings of children, facilitated by the teacher. In accordance with this theory, each student takes on the responsibility for his/her own learning, making the learning relevant and actively sought. By taking ownership of one's own learning, each child participates in creating the classroom culture. Engaging in in-depth exploration and investigations based on topics guided by the children's interest is the central aspect of the Project Approach as well. This curricular theory is attributed to Katz and Chard (1989). The process of planning and engaging in project work facilitates children's thinking, problem-solving, and social-negotiation skills (Katz & Chard, 2000). In the case of this study, a teacher's process for developing an emergent curriculum in the context of her classroom will reveal how

the participants in the process make the learning their own and how their wonderings guide the curriculum. How do the interests of the children shape the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom?

Early theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1990) assert that cognitive development is fostered through interaction with others. In fact, for Vygotsky as well as Bruner (1990), social interaction is the key to cognitive development. Listening to the perspectives of others aids us in understanding our own world. Gaining insights into the perspectives of others broadens our own perspective, which enhances our cognitive development. Internalizing the actions and ideas of others enhances our thought processes in our own actions and ideas.

Communication is an important tool for this perspective taking, and language is the primary mode of communication. These interactions, that are social in nature, would not be possible without the ability to first process language. Chomsky (2000) theorized that humans are born with much of our ability to process language, that our brains are structured with language competence built in, waiting to be activated through communication. Donaldson (1978) theorized that the innate capacity was for inference making, which contributes to the social interactionist theory of language development. When engaging in social play in school, young children play to communicate and communicate to play. Social interaction facilitates language development, and language enhances social development. How children and adults see the world is shaped by and shapes the individual's use and understanding of language (Bakhtin, 1986). This social constructivist perspective is shared by many

theorists and researchers in the realm of early childhood development (Lindfors, 2008; Donaldson, 1978; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986).

Vygotsky (1978) also introduced the idea that development occurs in the “zone of proximal development” in which tasks that are difficult for a child to accomplish on his own can be mastered with the guidance of someone who has already mastered that particular task. In Vygotsky’s theory, play is seen as the framework within which cognitive development occurs – children interact with others and can learn from them. When children interact with other children who possess more advanced skills than their own, playing in a secure and engaging environment, they will comfortably push themselves beyond the level of development they have currently attained to a more advanced stage where they can safely experiment and eventually master new skills with the guidance of more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1986; Lindfors, 2008, Donaldson, 1978).

Vygotsky (1993/1978), claimed that “the child moves forward essentially through play activity,” and observed that “at school age play does not die away, but permeates the attitude toward reality” (p. 104). He further noted, “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (p. 102). Through play, children develop the ability to separate thoughts from objects and actions, which is the beginning of abstract thought. Knowledge is created by working with others, and higher mental functions are developed through this process (Vygotsky, 1993/1998). Skilled and experienced teachers can be inspired and driven to develop engaging and individualized curriculum guided by Vygotsky’s theory that children learn within the context of interactions with

peers and adults. Curriculum that emerges from the child's innate interest in making sense of his/her world is another factor that encourages intrinsic motivation to engage in learning experiences (Chaillé, 2008; Forman & Kushner, 1983; DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002). A curricular approach that embodies these ideals is practiced in the small town of Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Reggio Emilia: An Emergent Curriculum Approach

In the aftermath of World War II, the people of Reggio Emilia, Italy and its surrounding villages were left to pick up the pieces and rebuild. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia schools, heard rumors that the nearby town of Villa Cella was prioritizing the building of a school for young children from the sale of an abandoned German tank, horses, and military trucks (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). Out of curiosity, six days after the end of the war, Malaguzzi rode his bicycle to the town. The subsequent partnership was the seed from which the Reggio Emilia Approach, as we know it today, emerged.

In reaction to the political climate and attitudes that contributed to WWII, it was very important to the townspeople that their children be educated to think critically and to collaborate (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). Therefore, the Reggio Emilia Approach focused on education resulting in children who can think and act for themselves. Because of this focus, children are treated seriously, and their ideas are respected. The Reggio Emilia approach views every child as a partner in the construction of knowledge and a motivated investigator who has a need to interact and communicate with others. The image of the child is a guiding principle of the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). In the world of Reggio Emilia early childhood education, the common term for this particular view of children is

known as “the child as protagonist” (Gandini, 1993). Along with teachers and parents, children are seen as vital contributors to the educational process. The child is viewed as a collaborator in the educational community as well as in the child’s family, peer group and larger community (Gandini, 1993). Children are seen as having the right and ability to make their thinking visible through many modalities, including but not limited to words, drawing, building, music, and play (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). Other key components of the Reggio Emilia approach include a classroom designed to be utilized as a space for exploration, communication and learning, and extensive documentation to make children’s experiences and growth transparent. In addition, the role of the parent as a partner in the educational process is key, as is the role of the teacher as a partner in learning, a nurturer, a facilitator, and a researcher (Gandini, 1993).

The method is well known for the documentation of children’s dynamic learning process while exploring and playing, an emergent curriculum built on the strengths of the child, and extraordinary projects created by children (Rinaldi, 2001). A major goal of an emergent curriculum is to respond to each child’s interests, while encouraging open-ended and self-directed experiences (Wien, 2008). Rinaldi (2001) expresses the importance that the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education places on the image of the child. In this approach, children are seen as strong, capable, and critical to the learning process. Education is viewed as a right for all children, not something that is forced upon them by adults. Teacher initiative and children’s intrinsic motivation for co-constructed learning are vital to the process of developing an emergent curriculum, and a play-based environment is where this type of practice thrives. This is

due to the nature of setting up space for play in a classroom, which in and of itself encourages inquiry, independence, and engagement. Emergent curriculum development requires a thorough understanding of child development, skills in facilitating inquiry, and thoughtful documentation.

Key Elements that Contribute to the Development of an Emergent Curriculum

A body of research exists that addresses a number of elements contributing to the development of an emergent curriculum. Of those elements, three surface as vital to the process – play, teacher quality, and inquiry and documentation. Teacher quality is a complex issue with many factors to take into account. When using an emergent curriculum, the focus is on ^[1]_[SEP]the process of learning and the diverse strengths and interests of each participant. Rather than focusing on a specific skill set, teachers using an emergent curriculum facilitate inquiry – learning how to ask questions and search for knowledge. This approach shows an authentic trust of teachers and learners that engenders a mutual respect for the process and for everyone involved. Guided by Vygotsky’s theory that children learn within the context of interactions with peers and adults, skilled and experienced teachers can be inspired and driven to develop engaging and individualized curriculum. In the context of early childhood education, these experiences often occur naturally in the form of play.

The development of an emergent curriculum is a learned and shared dynamic process. When teachers thoughtfully record this process to interpret, assess, reflect on, and develop the curriculum, the resulting documentation helps to clarify what drives and enhances children’s play, exploration, and understandings about their world. The ensuing inquiry builds on what children already know and what they wonder about.

This process requires connectedness between teachers and students, and students and students.

Play as Dynamic Interaction with Peers and Adults, Informant to an Emergent Curriculum

Noticing, enhancing, exploring, and documenting children's ideas during play are also fundamental to developing an emergent curriculum in an early childhood classroom (Duckworth, 2006; Chaillé, 2008). "Emergent curriculum is sensible but not predictable. It requires of its practitioners trust in the power of play – trust in spontaneous choice making among many possibilities. Good programs for young children encourage children to become competent players" (Jones & Nimmo, 1994, p.1). According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the opportunities provided by play are essential for constructing knowledge. Exploration, experimentation, and engagement with the environment and peers contribute to the development of intellect, imagination and creativity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Research supports the suggestion that play fosters cognitive development such as language skills, problem solving, taking on the perspectives of others, representational thought, memory, and creativity (Newman, 1988; Peisner-Feinberg, et.al.,1999; Hart, Yang, Charlesworth & Burts, 2003; Pellegrini, 1985; Pellegrini & Van Rysin, 2007; Bodrova, 2008).

Some of the research supporting the benefits of play has been challenged over the years, including a descriptive review done recently by Lillard et al. (2013). Lillard et al. (2013) specifically looked at evidence surrounding pretend play as it related to early childhood development. The authors discussed some of the methodological issues involved in many of the studies on pretend play, including insufficient experimental standards. The authors state that there is a tendency to imply that findings are causal

when they are correlational, that a failure to replicate is frequently overlooked, and experimenter bias is often present. Several other issues with this body of research were stated including small sample sizes, nonrandomized samples, and questionable statistics.

Lillard et al. (2013) separated theories about the relationship between pretend play and development into three camps based on work done by P.K. Smith (2010). The first aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theories, discussed later, that pretend play has a crucial role in development. The second, Smith's (2010) position, which he calls equifinality, is the idea that pretend play can aid in development, but it is not the only way to get there. The third theory, associated with Piaget's (1962) work, is that pretend play is an epiphenomenon, or a secondary effect of a contributor to development, but not in and of itself the causal influence. The authors scrutinized a large body of research focusing on research that examines the relationship between pretend play and nonsocial cognitive aptitudes (creativity, intelligence, problem solving, reasoning, and conservation), theory of mind (solitary pretense and social pretense), social skills (solitary pretense and social pretense), symbolic understanding (early language and literacy), narrative, and self-regulation (executive functioning and emotion regulation). In each section, after reviewing the literature, Lillard et al. (2013) related the evidence to the three theoretical views of pretend play on development.

The authors concluded that, from the research examined, pretend play could be a possible cause of development in reasoning, language, narrative, and emotion regulation, which are four out of the eleven areas discussed. The strongest positive association was between pretend play and language. For the other seven areas of

development, Lillard et al. (2013) found little or no correlational relationship between pretend play and development. The researchers determined that there were few and mainly unclear findings, or methodological issues in the studies that lent themselves to the equifinality camp. In sum, the authors concluded that they could not find evidence to strongly support the claim that pretend play is crucial for development, nor could the evidence they found clearly define what role pretend play might have in aiding development. The authors do, however, entertain the idea that pretend play might be an epiphenomenon. They do not claim to know what it could be a byproduct of, but they posit the notion that it might have to do with adult influence.

Silverman (2016) challenges the conclusion drawn by Lillard et al. (2013). Silverman (2016) asserts that the play-creativity hypothesis is likely true and that the criticism of the experimental standards of the research reviewed by Lillard et al. (2013) is not an accurate analysis. He also points out that, although experimenter bias is always a concern, there is insufficient evidence that results were affected in cases where the experimenter knew the intended hypothesis, and there is evidence in favor of the play-creativity hypothesis in cases where the experimenter was not aware of the hypothesis. Silverman (2016) also cites Kim (2011) as an indication that the play-creativity hypothesis is true because the study gives evidence of the negative. Kim (2011) found that for kindergarten through third grade students from 1990 to 2008, creativity has significantly declined. Of course, the decline cannot be definitively attributed to any particular cause; however, Silverman (2016) points out that children's time for free play has also significantly decreased during the same time period.

Lillard, et al. (2013) conducted a thorough analysis and review of this body of literature and their conclusions, as well as rebuttals such as Silverman's (2016). These studies show the need for more research in this area. However, Lillard, et al. (2013) deliberately point out that "the lack of existing evidence should not be taken as an allowance for school programs to employ traditional teacher-centered instructional approaches that research has clearly shown are inferior for young children" (p.27).

Recently, a balanced approach, known as guided play, has been advocated (Yue Yu et al., 2018; Weisberg et al., 2016; & Weisberg et al., 2013). Guided play is a child-centered approach that involves adult scaffolding in the design of the setting and/or as observation and discussion during child-directed activities. I would love to see questions asked about the value of play as a tool for exploration, inquisition, experimentation, inspiration, joy, and wonder in early childhood without it having to be justified by how it is linked to other developmental domains. However, these kinds of questions are difficult to measure and are not a priority because the mission statement from the U.S. Department of Education website states, "Our mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Thus, in order to prove its worth, play must be connected with educational excellence.

However, the negative can be attempt to be proven, that decreasing play in school has an adverse effect on learning. Lillard et al. (2013) touched on this angle, when they stated "despite the poor state of the evidence on pretend play's benefits, research does *not* advocate what is often offered as the only alternative to a playful

approach in educational settings: adult-centered instruction” (p.26). A well-known, longitudinal study that investigated the play-based, child-centered, active learning curriculum, High Scope, showed lifelong positive outcomes, academic and otherwise, for those who attended these preschools versus those who did not (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005).

Teacher Quality: Pedagogical Skill Level and Curriculum Development

The argument is frequently made that the reason policy makers favor prescribed curricula over emergent curriculum design is that there is concern about the skill level of many early childhood educators. It is true that the development of an emergent curriculum requires higher order thinking skills. These are the types of skills that teachers aim to provoke in young children. The same level of expectation should be set for early childhood educators. Lowering the bar is a disservice to our teachers, children, families, and society in general. This brings in the issue of teacher qualifications and the effect that they have on the quality of early childhood education. The social constructivist theory, discussed previously, is based on the premise that humans learn through interaction with others and through our environment (Lindfors, 2008; Donaldson, 1978; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986). As a result, the quality of those interactions in preschool is largely dependent on the ability of the teacher to engage in meaningful interactions with students. A highly qualified teacher has these skills.

Contributing to the discussion about teacher qualifications in early childhood education, Howes et al. (2003) examined preschool teacher effectiveness based on whether the teachers held a bachelor’s degree or received their training through alternative pathways. The researchers examined the different pathways of teacher

training in a sample of eighty teachers who were predominately African American (39%) and Latino (39%) teaching in low SES communities. Ninety-six percent of the teachers were women. Out of the 80 participants, 20% of them had preservice training. Most of the teachers with preservice training held BA degrees. Over 50% of the participants had on-the-job training from mentors. Effectiveness was measured based on teacher responsiveness (based on student/teacher proximity) and engagement, learning activities in the classroom through “snapshot” observations and interviews about education levels and training background, as well as their reasons for staying in the profession. The majority of the participants said their reason for staying in the profession was the children. The other main reason was a feeling of responsibility to the community (40%). Howes et al. (2003) then compared their results with the results of two other studies (in one of which Howes was the principle investigator as well). The two additional studies looked specifically at information on teachers with and without BA degrees, and found that the participants in this study were more responsive and more engaged than those in the other two studies. This was a non-representative sample, which would explain the difference from the results of the other two studies that used representative samples.

In this study, the teachers with BA degrees were more effective than the teachers without BA degrees. However, teachers who followed alternative pathways were as effective as those with BA degrees when they were monitored, mentored reflectively, and had a reason for staying in the profession. Given these results, the researchers feel strongly that the implications are that BA degrees help to ensure effective teaching. However, they also suggest that some deliberate, alternative

pathways can produce effective teachers. The issue then becomes how to be sure early childhood teachers who do not have BA degrees are following these pathways to effective teaching? The other issue, specifically with this study, is that the sample is not representative, so the implications cannot actually be generalized beyond these participants.

Early et al. (2007) also investigated the relationship between preschool teacher education and effectiveness. The two indications these researchers used for effectiveness were classroom quality and children's academic skills. To conduct this research, Early et al. (2007) pulled data from seven major studies and used common analyses of comparable data. They used these data to answer the following three questions:

- (1) Does the educational degree of lead teachers relate to observed classroom quality and children's academic skills using a value-added specification? And, more specifically, do teachers with a Bachelor's degree or higher have classrooms of higher quality or children who learn more during the prekindergarten year?
- (2) Among teachers whose highest degree was in early childhood education or child development, does the level of the highest degree predict classroom quality and/or children's academic skills using a value-added specification?
- (3) Among teachers whose highest degree is a Bachelor's, does a major in early childhood education or child development predict better quality or greater academic skills than a major in another field of education or noneducation major, controlling for baseline skill levels using a value-added specification? (p.561)

Using an analysis technique that Early et al. (2007) refer to as "replicated secondary data analysis" (p.561), the researchers searched for studies that had similar data and methods of data collection and analysis. To be included, each study had to have data on teacher education, observed classroom quality, and the academic gains

of 4-year-old children using a pre- and post-test. Five out of the seven studies used randomly selected, representative samples. Checks and balances were used by the nineteen researchers from fifteen different institutions to be sure the studies used met the criteria.

Early et al. (2007) found that for Question 1, whether a degree was related to classroom quality and/or academic gains, less than 30% of the analyses showed an association and 25% of those showed a negative association. Two of the studies found that teachers with a Bachelor's degree had higher quality classrooms, one found the opposite, and the rest found no association. Overall, there was very limited evidence that showed an association between a teacher's degree, classroom quality, and children's academic skills gained.

Question 2 was able to be addressed by only five of the seven studies, three of which found no association between levels of degrees in education-related fields and classroom quality or children's academic gains. One of the studies found an association between levels of degrees in education and classroom quality, but no association on student outcomes. Still another found an association between levels of degrees in education and prereading scores, but none of the other factors. Question 3 compared teachers with Bachelor's degrees in education-related fields versus noneducation-related fields. Very few significant associations were found pertaining to this question. The results found by Early et al. (2007) do not yield convincing associations between early childhood teachers' education level, classroom quality, and/or student academic gains. However, the researchers are quick to point out that these results do not negate the importance of teacher education or teacher quality.

Similar to the indications from the Howes et al. (2003) study, these results imply that there are alternative routes to produce quality teachers. Teacher education and teacher quality are two separate issues. The formal education level of teachers does not guarantee quality, and teachers without degrees are not inferior in quality to teachers with degrees. There are many factors that must be considered.

This examination of teacher quality by Early et al. (2007) was restricted to analysis based on teacher education level. The study by Howes et al. (2003) opens up the discussion to include alternative pathways that produce quality teachers. The implications from both of these investigations indicate that more research needs to be done to examine a broad range of professional development and support. Another limitation to these studies is that quality is based on the physical classroom environment and academic progress, but not on the students' social and emotional growth – one of the most important focuses of early childhood education. In a stimulating classroom environment where skilled teachers are trusted to facilitate responsive, engaging experiences, progress should be seen in all developmental domains.

Skilled and knowledgeable teachers who are given creative freedom and flexibility can develop curriculum around children's strengths and interests and build on each child's innate passion to learn about his/her world and construct genuine knowledge. In comparison to a non-emergent curriculum, an emergent curriculum focuses on the process of learning and the diverse strengths and interests of each learner. This approach shows an authentic trust in teachers and learners that engenders a mutual respect for the process and everyone involved. Jones and Nimmo

(1994) identify several sources that contribute to the design of emergent curricula. Children's interests make a significant contribution, but so do teachers' interests, developmental tasks, the space and items in the physical environment, the people in a particular social environment, available curriculum resource materials, unexpected events, conflicts and conflict resolution, routines, and values and influence of the school, the larger community, the families, and the culture and society. Jones and Nimmo (1994) stress that although an emergent curriculum is largely the teacher's responsibility to develop, the process should take into account the influence of these contributing factors in order to be authentic and dynamic.

Inquiry and Documentation: Asking Questions, Seeking Out Information, and Making Thinking Visible as Fundamental to Emergent Curriculum Development

Another key concept for organizing and carrying out an emergent curriculum is meticulous documentation. The Reggio Emilia approach uses documentation to make children's thinking and learning visible (Gandini, 1993). Goldhaber (2009) discusses documentation as including the records collected during teaching and learning, and also as the process of collecting those records. Documentation can be any and all materials collected and recorded by the teacher to interpret, assess, reflect on, and develop the thinking and learning process. Documentation helps to clarify what drives and enhances children's play, exploration, and understandings about their world. Knowing what to record, how to record it, and what it all means as a learned skill that is vital to successfully developing emergent curricula.

This process can be misinterpreted as an approach that allows children to run amuck, when in fact it is an incredibly thoughtful method that requires teachers to be exceptionally in tune, reflective, and present with young children. It requires a

“pedagogy of listening” (Rinaldi, 2006), that is a process of the teacher noticing, studying, and understanding young children’s thoughts and curiosities, and tapping into that drive for knowledge by facilitating exploration influenced by the children’s own ideas (Chaillé, 2008). The documentation collected through this process is used to shape the motivation and validation for the emergent curriculum (Chaillé, 2008; Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001; Hendrick, 1997).

Gandini and Goldhaber (2001) called this process of documentation, analysis, and exploration the cycle of inquiry. Out of this came the development of Broderick and Hong’s (2003, 2005, 2007) Cycle of Inquiry (COI) System. Broderick and Hong developed the COI system as a tool for organizing the process of developing an emergent curriculum. The intention was for this tool to be used as a guide by in-service and preservice teachers to learn the techniques necessary to do the high-quality documentation that leads to successful curriculum development.

There are five sections in the COI System (Broderick & Hong, 2007) that have accompanying forms with guiding questions and statements. These steps are: (1) Observe, (2) Develop hypotheses, (3) Plan research questions, (4) Plan interventions to guide the thinking of children, and (5) Set up and facilitate play. At the time this study was written, the COI system had been piloted for seven years with pre- and in-service teachers in the field and at the authors’ universities (East Tennessee State University and University of Michigan, Dearborn). One study followed a single undergraduate pre-service teacher through a semester as she navigated the COI system in a practicum placement in a preschool classroom with the authors as mentors (Broderick & Hong, 2011). The participant, Kelly, was a junior in her first semester of early childhood

coursework. Broderick and Hong's (2011) focus was on whether or not a pre-service teacher could learn to use the COI system to create and implement emergent curriculum and whether that process was able to then be scaffolded and evaluated by a mentor. The student first learned to use the form-driven COI system with undergraduate peers in a creative development course and then used it with preschoolers. The mentors then analyzed the COI documentation to scaffold and evaluate the process.

Broderick and Hong (2011) used Kelly's work in each section of the COI system to analyze their results. The Documentation Record Section guides the teacher's observations and reflections of children's play by prompting wonderings about engagement level, interaction, language, etc. The Interpretation of Knowledge and Thinking Section helps the teacher think about and analyze the observation data and wonderings from the previous section. The Developing Research Questions Section moves teachers from thinking about what the children's play means to what can be done next to facilitate further exploration for the children. The Inquiry Implementation Section looks back at all the other sections and prompts teachers to develop a plan of action to facilitate student inquiry into a topic based on observation data. The Inquiry Reflection Section is written after implementation. This leads the teacher through a reflection of the process, the students' experiences, and what will come next.

In their research on this tool, Broderick and Hong (2011) found that the COI system helps teachers move toward adjusting their practice to the needs and interests of the students without external facilitation by a mentor. Although they implement the use of this tool with a mentor, the mentors noted that the tool guides the mentees to

come to these conclusions on their own (Broderick & Hong, 2011). The qualitative nature of this specific study is that it is not generalizable; however, it does show that a novice student can successfully utilize and progress through the system. While Broderick and Hong's (2003, 2005, 2007) COI System sounds like it has a lot of potential for helping educators learn the skills necessary for developing an emergent curriculum, I was not able to find any third party research that examined the effectiveness and practicality of their tool.

In my personal experience, systems such as COI are great for enhancing and guiding preservice and novice teachers' skills. However, as experience develops a teacher's skills, the tool should be modified in ways that work for his/her planning and organizational style. Goulart and Roth (2010) studied emergent curriculum design in practice in a classroom for five-year-olds in Brazil. The researchers observed how teachers and children collaboratively developed a science curriculum. They described the process as a collective practice that grew out of interaction between facilitators and learners, as opposed to a standardized curriculum that the children do not influence. Goulart and Roth (2010) suggest that the process of learning in this collaborative way engages children in interactions in which they are listened to and they listen to others. This is known as participative thinking. Participative thinking is the foundation for collective consciousness, a shared awareness about the world and how it works (Bakhtin, 1993). The context for the investigation was an experimental early childhood education center for children four months to five years old in its first year of operation. The school is on the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte campus in

Brazil. The school had 200 children in attendance, and the classroom used for the study had eighteen five-year-old children from working and middle class families.

The first author had a large role at the school to aid in accomplishing its Political Pedagogical Project by working with all the stakeholders. She also helped the teachers of five year olds reflect on their curriculum and was immersed in the two classrooms for five year olds. It was in this capacity that she developed the research questions for this project. Questions included the following: What do children and their teachers need to be able to collaboratively design curriculum? And how do the teachers facilitate the process? Data collection was accumulated throughout the school year via observation and video. Goulart and Roth (2010) described, in detail, and qualitatively analyzed the processes involved in the organization of the classroom, collective planning, and implementation of the science curriculum around student ideas and experiences.

Here, we understand learning as arising from a dialectic of participation in social contexts, that is, a process that arises in lived experience, a process in which knowing is coming to us. The method of approaching reality and of analyzing the data hand us powerful tools to understand the educational phenomenon under study on a deeper level. Instead of talking about early childhood education in superficial ways we point out the complexity of a social (societal-political) practice that is possible even with the youngest of children. (p.559)

Siry and Kremer (2011) also examined the use of an emergent curriculum in a kindergarten classroom, with the purpose of emphasizing the complexities of young children's evolving thoughts about science and how they talk about those ideas with each other. The specific scientific phenomenon that these children investigated was rainbows. The questions that the authors asked were:

How do these students express their ideas of science phenomena? How does participation within activities emergent from their questions mediate developing understandings of science phenomena? How can we provide instruction that grows from children's interests and perspectives? (p.645)

This study took place in a public school in Luxembourg. The participants were five girls and three boys, 5-6 years old, in a kindergarten classroom where Isabelle (the second author and primary researcher) was a student teacher for a five-week internship. She was a fourth-year student in a teacher education program. This was an exploratory, qualitative study that used interviews, children's pictures, and audio analysis of conversations with the children as data. The idea of investigating rainbows grew from interest the children showed on the topic during free drawing time. Once the topic was determined, data collection began. The initial phase of data collection was semi-structured interviews with children in pairs. Isabelle then facilitated activities that were brought up during the interviews, in response to the children's curiosities. After engaging in those activities, further interviews were conducted. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed. The authors' findings were directly connected with the initial questions they asked. They found that students expressed their ideas about scientific phenomena through guided and open opportunities for discussion. They found that peer interaction during teacher-facilitated activities enhanced the children's scientific understandings. And, they found that being observant and listening to children talk about their curiosities stimulated curriculum development.

Similar to the findings of Goulart and Roth (2010), Siry and Kremer (2011) found that using the children's ideas to initiate inquiry created a learning community that co-constructed knowledge. Not only did the authors find that these strategies encouraged peer-to-peer interaction that supported learning, but they also supported the student teacher's curriculum development. The development of an emergent curriculum is a learned and shared dynamic process. It builds on what children already know and what

they wonder about. It requires connectedness between teachers and students, and students and students. This is an area that has enjoyed a lot of attention in the realm of practitioner literature in which teachers describe and report on their experiences, frustrations, and successes in using an emergent curriculum model for planning classroom experiences. However, research on the topic is limited. There is extensive writing done on this topic, most of which is related to the Reggio Emilia approach and which includes extensive practitioner research (as is the nature of the Reggio Emilia approach). Although this body of literature represents decades of trial and error, constant change and growth, and is experience and observation based, it is valued and recognized as theoretical work, not as research.

Summary of the Key Elements that Contribute to the Development of an Emergent Curriculum

The studies specifically on emergent curricula tend to focus on the qualities of the process and development of understanding the use of this approach. This makes sense because, when one sees an emergent curriculum in action, those types of questions emerge. How are the choices made about the projects to pursue with the children? How do those choices translate into practice? What kinds of questions are asked of children to elicit authentic responses about their wonderings and interests? How are those wonderings and interests explored? Broderick and Hong (2011) address many of these questions in their COI system. The results are about teacher observation, recording, and reflecting the play and exploration of children. However, there is disjointedness in the research on this topic.

Qualitative Case Study Research: Study Design and Rationale

Investigating a skilled teacher using an emergent curriculum approach would lend some insight to this literature base. Looking into how the process matures and develops once a teacher has the preliminary skills mastered should prove valuable. What is out there is mostly introductory information about how to begin thinking about and implementing an inquiry-based curriculum design. I was not able to find anything in research form about seasoned teachers who have been using an emergent curriculum and how the knowledge and understanding of the process, the documentation, re-visiting, reflection, evaluating, and implementation change over time. Also not explored is the area of continued growth that the method promotes, and what that means for teachers who have been using these strategies for several years. Therefore, I investigated the process of emergent curriculum development to shed light on some of these topics not fully explored.

This section aims to provide a theoretical context for the methodology and method I used to stimulate and organize this study. To clarify the distinction between the terms methodology and method, Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that “methods must be fitted to a predetermined methodology” (p.108). The methodology describes why a study is done the way it is done; the method describes how the study is done. My methodology is Constructivist Qualitative Research, and my method is Instrumental Case Study.

The constructivist perspective, as an epistemological theory, is an interpretive methodology with the purpose of describing “individuals’ perspectives, experiences, and meaning making” (Koro-Ljungberg & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009, p.689). Due to the nature of the constructivist assertion that meaning and knowledge are constructed by

human thought (Crotty, 1998), data collection and analysis driven by this theoretical perspective focus on the words, ideas, and thoughts of the person or people being studied. The outcome of this type of research is not aimed at seeking definitive answers, but rather gathering information about others' perspectives to gain insight into their understandings of reality (Creswell, 2014). This viewpoint resonates with how I perceive the world of early childhood education, particularly emergent curriculum development. Qualitative research in and of itself is an inductive style of inquiry that emphasizes the perspective of individual meaning making (Creswell, 2014). In the context of asking questions about emergent curriculum development through a constructivist epistemology, I find qualitative research to be a good match.

As mentioned above, constructivist qualitative research is the methodology for my study and instrumental case study is the method. My methodological perspective, along with the nature of this inquiry, informs my choice of a qualitative case study for this research. Case study, as a method, makes sense because it allows me to deeply examine the details of the context I am studying (Yin, 2012). It is important that the method I chose functions to shed light on my research questions:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?
- How does this teacher describe her reason for using these particular strategies?

These research questions require an in-depth inquiry into a very specific context. As my research questions suggest, my study focuses on the experiences of an early childhood educator developing an emergent curriculum. I will explore a

kindergarten teacher's process of planning for and creating an emergent curriculum in a Reggio Emilia-inspired classroom. This process occurs in the context of a teacher's thoughts, observations, experiences, and actions. It would be impossible to separate the process from the context. While I don't intend to prove a particular hypothesis with this investigation, I do intend to explore the process of emergent curriculum development. Inspired by Lindfors' (1999) description of the inquiry of children, I am going into this project because of a sense of wondering and to seek information. As suggested by Gallas (2003), I asked authentic questions about a real learning community that can be explored through observing life, uninterrupted life manipulated only by the players – the teacher and children in a kindergarten classroom. "Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.9).

Stake (2000) describes three distinctive categories of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are utilized to gain a deep understanding of a specific case, instrumental case studies are used to shed light on a particular issue, and collective case studies explore multiple sites. Because the context of my inquiry is to understand more about the issue of a teacher's process of emergent curriculum development, the instrumental case study is the appropriate design.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this study is to shed some light on the process of developing an emergent curriculum from the perspective of a qualified teacher. This investigation will be guided by these questions: How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum? What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum? What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum? And finally, what does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

Settings and Participants

The aim of this study was to explore an experienced teacher's process of developing and implementing an emergent curriculum. The criteria for selecting this teacher were that she have a passion for teaching and life-long learning, years of experience creating an engaging learning environment, that she use reflective teaching practices to continually review and revise methods, and, specific to the purpose of this inquiry, that she be adept at developing an emergent curriculum. The success of the research largely depended on studying a teacher who exhibited these qualities and was willing to allow me access to her classroom, journals, planning time, and insights. I found these qualities in a local kindergarten teacher whom I will call Jane. During my undergraduate studies, I became interested in alternative curriculum approaches, and I sought out local people and places that were inspired by and practiced alternative methods. In my search, I heard about a teacher who worked in a private school in North Central Florida, Jane. During further studies, I was fortunate enough to be able to interview and observe her, and I spent one inspiring and enlightening school year

working with her in her kindergarten classroom. Jane was trained in the Montessori method and extensively studied the Reggio Emilia Approach. Her approach to curricular development was greatly influenced by both methods.

Pilot Study

Before beginning the data collection process for my dissertation research, I engaged in a pilot study of Jane's pre-planning process. The intention of the pilot was to gain some perspective and context, as well as to collect important preplanning data. I hoped this preliminary work would help inform my later study and offer a richer picture in the end.

After being approved through the IRB, we began with a meeting towards the end of the summer. Jane and I met at a coffee shop and she brought her journal and her plan book, which I photographed. I also took anecdotal notes of our conversation. After our initial meeting, I analyzed the information gathered and began thinking about further questions to pose. I also stopped by Jane's classroom as she and her assistant were setting it up during the week before school started. I got to peek around at all the different areas of her room and get more photos of her calendar/plan book. I prepared discussion prompts for a guided interview about her planning, how she organizes it, the evolution of her planning process, implementation of her plans, and reflection. We scheduled another meeting for the second week of school. I transcribed the interview and did a preliminary analysis.

During our initial meeting, I found out that Jane's early planning theme was inspired by an interest students had expressed a couple of years previously, that of tools. It started when they read an article in Ranger Rick about birds using tools. The students were fascinated by the idea of birds using tools, which transformed into a

general interest in investigating all sorts of tools. Then they read *Scarlette Beane*, a book about a unique little girl and her special talent for gardening. The main character uses her magical hands as tools to grow an amazing garden. This led to a discussion about the tools the children's hands could turn into. During the summer, the theme began to take shape with a spark of inspiration when Jane found a book at the Friends of the Library book sale about tools as art. As Jane explained:

Yeah, the art tools book. I saw that at the Friends of the Library, and I thought, "This is something! This is something. I don't know what it is but I'm going to do something with this." So, it took a while. That was just like a seed. And then, um, then I decided on tools and put it together and then after, once that started, I started writing in my journal.

She ruminated on the topic of tools and realized that she was also inspired by the idea of tools of the mind (a Vygotskian approach to early childhood education). In our interview, she spoke more about the theories that influenced her process. As she explained, during the summer she "read again *Authentic Childhood*, which is one of my favorite books by a Canadian, and Alan Pence from England I think, on Reggio... they talk a little bit about Vygotsky. They remind us of, um, the zone. So, I do, I think about that." These theories, and others, influenced her planning process and the organization of her plans.

So, I have a journal that I write in. Which is sort of, it's a planning book written out with all my maps and whatever I do. Then I also do it in my other plan book. The weekly. But I tend to do that now more. I planned it like crazy the first week, left it pretty empty the second week, and now I started to write down what we do as opposed to what we planned.

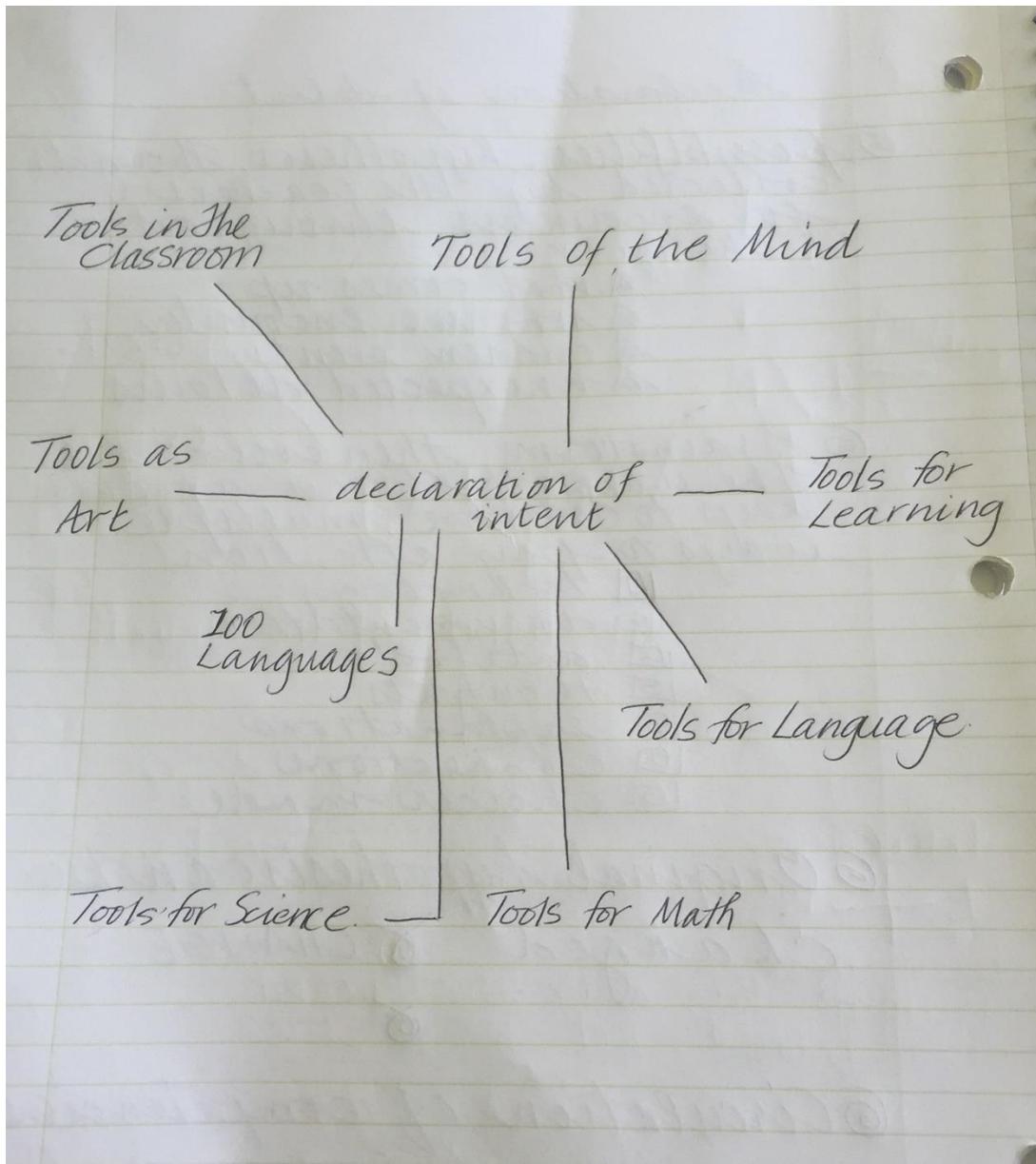


Figure 3-1. Jane's mind map of her declaration of intent in her journal. (Photo taken by author, Daniella Porter.)

In her journal, Jane writes entries about her thoughts and draws webs or maps to organize those thoughts. She makes a web for each subject area that she covers. In her plan book, Jane lists the subjects on the left and fills in ideas throughout the week. The weekly planner entries are color-coded. The black entries are preplanned, and the other colors are added after the fact.

| GRADE OR CLASS | | August 15-19, 2016 | | |
|------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Subject or Section | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY |
| Daily Meeting | "I've Got the Left Hind Leg of a Rabbit..." Skinnamarink... Monday - one day - garden tools. | "When The Daisies Done, I Can Nod my Head..." All Around Maui... - tools of the classroom introduction: organization - I. | "The Eric Canal" ABC Song. - art cart: - introduction of the class | what you no I Am A, Pizz what is mi from the game? "I Can 73 Mouse Vi "school can you mak mould from mirror 2c |
| Reading Language Lang. | "Scarlette Beane" Something Special ABC Kindergarten - touch - Scarlette's Fingers stamping animals on squares. | Ms Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten The Eye Book | Mr Rabbit and the Lovely Present. - create a label of your name on a color of construction paper... From head to toe | "I Can 73 Mouse Vi "school can you mak mould from mirror 2c |
| Writing | our names - in the room - on lists - write our own name (check boards) | - how many letters in my names? - write & count (assess) I create "word bank" yellow box with cards | what color is your name? I Can (Book cover) | Mm ~ practice Book 5, page 5, practice page 4 All About Me sort by s |
| Math | 1 - one ~ day 1 - week 1: - sorting activities - colored square tiles - provocation of creating - apples & stars box sort by color | one . 1 . first making 1 thing taking 1 thing "baking" 1 thing sort by color / size | color patterns provocation with shapes colors sort by size / shape | pattern tool ArB . AB ArC . AC up, down |
| Civics Social St Geo | saying "here." - placing your name/symbol in basket. Showing us you're here. on wall (garden tools - Scarlette) | saying "Good Morning." - Pledge of Allegiance - Finding our names, our spaces. Taking small groups to investigate | saying "hello" - Calendar awareness (small groups) | items the on a "fo saying |
| Science | eye - sense of sight... look! touch - fingers | (mirror) draw your eye. black line drawing | color of your eye - paint - w/ watercolors | eye of eye deto |
| 100 Languages | draw 2 papers. file cutting strips of paper: different lengths, thicknesses, colors, types of paper trays to catch it. | glue as a tool: "cuts" on a construction paper. First observation for pattern. | I can draw provide paint use tools to paint back ground to layered colored paper work. ask them to paint a replica of their picture | listen Mou pic a Ba |

Figure 3-2. An excerpt of Jane's plan book. (Photo taken by author, Daniella Porter.)

I write in my black what I planned, but there's less black now because now I'm getting to know my kids. Now I, and the colors are, so the green are things we actually did, the red, the other colors say, "Ok, this is what we've done." It becomes less and less of preplanned and more and more about I have to wait to see what happened today, what we got accomplished, or, well that didn't work.

This organization has evolved through Jane's years of teaching. As a trained Montessori teacher, she started her teaching career in 1982, but it wasn't until 1996

that her process really began to transform and become her own.

Well, I used to write a planning book, um, and then I would try to make it, follow my plan book, and then I would, um, used to circle all the things I didn't do and put them on another week or day. And then I started noticing that my plan books were lots of circles of things I didn't do, and I was frustrated by that. And when I went to Reggio in the first time in '96 and they talked about "the teacher's book of lies" and the plans we do, the plans we make, and the plans never execute, the ways we never go back to look at what we didn't do. We're just always trying to catch up and keep planning and it's sort of a book of lies we don't want anyone to see because it's not always true. And, what does that make us? It makes us feel fake. And I remember when I heard that in 1996. I'd been teaching at that point since '82, so for 14 years but I was like, "They don't even know me and that's true." And I've always sort of been embarrassed by that, I thought that maybe it was something that other teachers were doing that I wasn't.

This is when Jane's journey into the Reggio Emilia approach began. As mentioned above, the Reggio Emilia approach views the child as a co-constructor in the learning process. In the first week and a half of school, Jane and her students engaged in many activities to get to know each other and to become familiar with the classroom. Going along with the tools theme, Jane posed a question to the students, "What do you do with your hands?" The list that the children came up with was posted in the classroom.

I thought we'd do all these things. I don't know. It just seemed like that is what we'll do, and honor what they – The point I'm trying to make to them too is, "what you tell me is so important I'm going to write it down. And so, it's so important we're going to do it, or we're going to do something because what you said was important." Rather than just make a list and then nothing – the beginning of the year you work so hard to get this idea across to them that what you say is important. I'm going to copy it, I'm going to make a picture of it, I'm going to put it up on the wall, I'm going to connect it with other things, because if I do that now, they begin to connect those things themselves and they begin to say, "Oh! This is connected to that!" or "We should do this because we thought of that," or, you know.

Jane made it clear to the students that their ideas are important and that their ideas influence their investigations.

Jane also pointed out that these provocations are not only used to elicit students' interests, but they are also used for constant assessment of her students.

By watching them initially in these first 9 days we've had them, by asking to draw and color and paint, I'm also assessing everything... We're doing all those things in the beginning of the year to think about assessment, grouping, skill levels, um, for me to get to know them. Both group activities, follow directions, everybody at once. And also, small groups to see, so we can get to know them.

The next step in Jane's curriculum development cycle is documentation. In the Reggio Emilia approach, documentation is a tool for reflection, for communication with families, and for recording the learning process. It is used to make visible the hundred languages of children. This concept is represented in Jane's journal and her plan book.

The Reggio Emilia concept of "the hundred languages" is best represented in this poem by Loris Malaguzzi himself:

No way. The hundred is there.
The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.

The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

(Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 3)

Pilot Summary and Context for Future Data Collection

It was clear that Jane began her curriculum development process with specific goals in mind for her students and a spark of inspiration. Where they went was very interesting to witness. The purpose of my pilot was to collect and analyze some data from this teacher's preplanning process to give an opening context to my dissertation. The data I collected included photographs of Jane's plan book and journal as well as transcriptions of an open-ended, guided interview. I transcribed the interview, analyzed the data for emerging themes, and discussed the themes in a narrative style to

describe her process, a process that has been polished through years of experience and study, a process that was given the room to grow and the inspiration to flourish.

Although preplanning sounds counter-intuitive to the development of an emergent curriculum, it plays an important role. It requires the teacher to map out her overall goals for her student and plan out how to engage, get to know, and inspire her students for the school year to come. Having this information also informs me, the researcher. It allows me some insight into this teacher's thought processes and provides some context to the data I collected later in the school year. The information gathered from my pilot also informed the creation of my dissertation research questions, allowing me to refine them and hone in on how this teacher thinks about her process of curriculum development. The development of the research questions then led to the overall organization for analysis of the data that were collected.

Dissertation Data Collection

Because qualitative research focuses on gaining information about participants' perspectives and making meaning of those thought processes, interviews, observations, and artifacts are the most common sources of data utilized (Patton, 2002). This type of research comes out of the naturalistic phenomenological philosophy, which is the idea that there are multiple perceptions and constructions of reality dependent on the individual (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). "There are times we wish to know not how many or how well, but simply how" (Shulman, 1988, p.7). Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products, and with meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. The primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research is the researcher.

To illuminate the process of a teacher creating an emergent curriculum, my primary source of data included an initial interview of the participant with guiding questions, and a second interview with follow up questions. As the researcher, I had a previously established relationship with the participant and an already established rapport, so the interviews were comfortable and conversational. I also collected anecdotal notes from three observation sessions, each lasting between 1-2 hours, in the teacher's classroom. In addition, I took photographs of her classroom materials and documentation to support the primary source of data. Using these sources, I could tell the story of this teacher's process of emergent curriculum development using her own words, actions, and artifacts with the following research questions guiding my inquiry:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?
- What does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

Interviews

One participant was interviewed for this inquiry. The study's participant was initially interviewed on 4/10/17 and participated in a follow-up interview on 12/14/17. For convenience, the first interview took place at the participant's home, and the second interview took place at a local coffee shop. The first interview lasted one hour and seven minutes. The second interview lasted thirty-seven minutes. With participant approval, I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed them. Both interviews were semi-structured with guiding questions (Figures 3-3 and 3-4). A brief member check

was conducted prior to the follow-up interview on the ideas that surfaced in the initial interview.

Classroom Observations, Photographs, and Journals

I observed in Jane's classroom on three separate occasions – 5/18/2017, 5/23/2017, and 9/5/2017. Each observation session lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. During the observations, I took anecdotal notes of the classroom activities and took photographs. My notes consisted of general observations about each of the day's activities that I was there to witness, specific observations about some children, and quotes from children's and teacher's conversations, questions, and comments. They also included some of my own thoughts about what I observed.

Each observation session started a little before 9 a.m. The students arrived at school between 8:30-9 a.m. and they had a daily class meeting at 9 a.m. On the days that I observed, after the class meeting, the students were given several activities to choose from. Some activities were set up on tables and others were self-selected from the materials on shelves around the room. The students were expected to complete the activities that were set up on the tables, but there was no particular order that the work needed to be done. At 10 a.m., the students left the classroom for special activities, so I was able to briefly meet with Jane and take photographs around the classroom at that time.

In order to gather information that would reveal the process of this teacher's emergent curriculum development, I collected data through three different sources. The primary source of data was guided interviews. To support and add to the information from the interviews, I completed classroom observations and took photographs of materials, artifacts, and activities. To serve as triangulation to establish validity, along

with these transcribed interviews, observation notes, and photographs, I did member checks with Jane to be sure I heard and interpreted her intentions correctly.

After analysis, it was determined that more data was needed to triangulate and establish validity. To enrich the information gathered from the interviews, observations, and photographs, I requested access to Jane's journals. I met with Jane one last time to look at her journals for evidence regarding connections between what she discussed in the interviews and how she builds her curriculum based on the children's interests. During that meeting, I also asked her to provide details about how the items I photographed were significant to her use of an emergent curriculum. And, I was able to obtain photographs of her journals and of her documentation.

Data Analysis

In pursuit of gaining a deeper understanding of this teacher's process of emergent curriculum development, the following research questions were used:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?
- What does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

Qualitative research explores questions with a narrow focus about human behavior, perspectives, and social phenomena and uses data that are descriptive in nature. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details. As emphasized by Merriam (2009), the findings of a study should answer the questions being pursued.

This study sought to gain this knowledge by collecting data in the form of two transcribed interviews (initial interview, 16 pages typed, single spaced), follow-up interview (9 pages, typed, single spaced), three visits worth of handwritten observation notes (19 pages), and photographs of the classroom activities, artifacts, and documentation. Interview questions were crafted based on the research questions, and the interviews served as the main resource for understanding this teacher's perspective. Analysis of the data was ongoing, throughout the duration of the collection phase, as recommended by Merriam (2009).

Using a modified version of Creswell's interactive process of data analysis in qualitative research (2014), I slowly transformed the raw data into meaningful understandings. The act of transcribing the interviews and re-listening to the recordings was the first step in becoming familiar with the data. After the first interview was transcribed, I read through it several times, highlighting ideas and themes that describe Jane's curriculum development process. Then I conducted the classroom observations, taking handwritten notes and photographs. Those notes were also read through several times as I recorded my thoughts about what I saw, and connected those observations with the information in the interview. After collecting the initial interview and observation data, transcribing, reading through, highlighting, and taking notes, I prepared follow-up interview questions based on the ideas that emerged. I then repeated the analysis process with the follow-up interview.

Once all the data had been explored thoroughly, I was able to organize the ideas into broader categories to make meaning of the data. I correlated those broader categories to each of my research questions and structured my findings in that way for

clearer interpretation and explanation. During my limited observations, I found that I was not able to sufficiently witness ample examples of this teacher's process. So, after analysis, to enrich the information gathered from the interviews, observations, and photographs, I requested access to Jane's journals. I met with Jane one last time to look at her journals and asked her to provide details about how the items I photographed were significant to her use of an emergent curriculum. I also collected photographs of her journals and more examples of her documentation.

After extracting the essence of the data and organizing for meaning, I presented the findings in a way that allowed the data to speak for themselves by using a narrative format that was organized by my research questions. During this interpretation progression, meanings emerged that clarified Jane's perceptions and experiences. Using an iterative style, shifting back and forth between narrative text, excerpts of raw data, and explanations that emerged, I was able to tell the story of Jane's perception of her process of curriculum development. Through this synthesis, I aim to reveal a better understanding of Jane's process of developing an emergent curriculum.

Subjectivity Statement

I began my education journey in a somewhat non-traditional educational experience from preschool through eighth grade – I attended what many have dubbed a “hippie school.” It was in this setting that I was first introduced to the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning and the idea of mutual respect among children and adults inside the classroom. As a young child, I was also acutely aware of being a grandchild of Holocaust survivors on both sides, as well as the child of two people who both strongly stand by their own ideas about life's many political, religious, and humanitarian issues. My upbringing certainly shapes how I think about the world.

My interests in working with and studying children began when I was a child myself. I was always drawn to connecting with and caring for young children. It surprised no one in my life that when I went to college, I immediately set off on a path to become an early childhood educator. However, I did not want to be bound by the traditional expectations that many in our field subscribe to. I struggled with deciding whether to take my first job in the stable and secure world of public school or take an opportunity that looked much more fulfilling, but was not financially beneficial. I wavered back and forth, and ended up deciding to go with the latter. I have never regretted my decision.

I worked for a year with the amazing kindergarten teacher who is the subject of this study. She is trained in the Montessori method and inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to curriculum. I gained more in that year than I ever could have imagined. I was able to witness and participate in the process of creating an emergent curriculum. I got more than a glimpse into this teacher's daily work and I was able to be an integral part of her classroom in action. This further fueled my inspiration to delve more deeply into what it takes to craft an emergent curriculum. Despite my prior experience with and perceptions about this teacher, it is my responsibility as a researcher to be aware of my expectations and critically examine my own subjectivity during my study of this phenomenon. At the same time, I decided to go back to graduate school to work toward my Education Specialist in Early Childhood Curriculum, because that was an area about which I wanted to soak up more information. I am continually fascinated by alternative approaches to facilitate young children's growth and learning. During that

time, I focused my studies on dissecting and combining the Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia approaches.

In 2005, I finished my Ed.S. and opened a small play-based, alternative curriculum school – Imagine Learning Center – which I currently own, operate, and in which I guide curriculum development. We started out with infants, 1s, and 2s, added 3s and 4s the following year, and stopped taking infants a couple of years later (sadly). We have a capacity of 40 children and have thrived in this sweet community that Gainesville nourishes.

My philosophy about teaching and learning is based on multiple theorists and curricular approaches. I strongly believe in being open-minded about the changing ideas and theories that influence education. Currently, I have gravitated most heavily towards the influences of the Reggio Emilia approach. To me, one of the most poignant aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is the stress on constant metacognition. This metacognition is used as a tool for growth and change among teachers and students.

The theories developed by Vygotsky and Piaget are also largely influential in how I think about teaching, learning, and curriculum development. I value individuality and promote autonomy of action and thought. I believe that developing an enriching curriculum is all about having a strong understanding of child development and the skills to tap into each child's natural curiosity to learn about the world. I believe that play is an essential component for children's overall development of the skills necessary to function within a community and to live a fulfilled life. I advocate for children to be active participants in learning about the world around them through

creating, expressing, and interpreting their experiences. I view the child as strong and competent, I celebrate childhood as a time for free and active exploration of life and of the world, and I feel that it is critical for teachers, children, and parents to all be partners and collaborators in creating a rich learning community. In *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*, this Loris Malaguzzi quote exemplifies that partnership: “Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993, p. 83).

My personal background, my interest in alternative approaches to curriculum, my experience in a Reggio Emilia-inspired classroom, and my years of supporting and guiding early childhood educators through the curriculum development process have developed my own understanding and unique perspective. In order to support the use of an emergent curriculum, I feel that shedding some light on the thoughts and perspectives of a master teacher currently implementing the approach in the field is critical to understanding how to apply the method. I hope that the insights revealed through this qualitative study will be of value to the larger education community.

| Research Questions | Data Sources to address research questions | Interview Question(s) with prompts |
|---|---|--|
| How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum? | Interview | Describe the process of designing a curriculum. How do you do this? When does the process start and how do you facilitate it throughout the year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does that look like right now in your classroom? - What are you trying to ultimately accomplish in your work with children? |
| What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum? | Interview | Describe your role as you implement your curriculum with the children. How do you do this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you facilitate moving from ideas to reality? - How did you get to what you're doing right now in your classroom? - What are some thoughts about where the class might take their current inquiries? |
| What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum? | Interview, observation, photographs, journals | Describe some strategies you use as you engage in curriculum design and curriculum implementation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you organize your ideas and the children's ideas? - How have you documented this year's process? |
| What does this teacher describe as her reasoning using particular strategies? | Interview | You've told me your strategies include x, x, x,. Tell me your reasoning for using X strategy. Why do you do that? How have these strategies emerged and grown through your years of experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does theory influence your approach to curriculum design and implementation? If so, how? - Does reflection influence your approach to curriculum design and implementation? If so, how? |
| | | |

Figure 3-3. Guided Interview Prompts – Initial Interview

Professional Development

- What keeps you eager to learn/change/grow?
- What professional development do you participate in?
- What do you look for in professional dev?
- What and how often do you seek out professional dev?
- Do you find that there are barriers to quality professional development? funding? time?

Standards

- What educational standards are imposed on your curriculum? How do you feel about them?
- Do you actively connect your work to educational standards? Do you find your own way to address them? How? Why?

Expert in the field

- What do you think makes someone an expert in the teaching profession?

Critical Thinking

- How do you foster critical thinking in your students? How does this practice contribute to designing your emergent curriculum?

Figure 3-4. Guided Interview Prompts – Follow-up Interview.

- Step 1 – Organizing and preparing data for analysis: I transcribed the initial interview and re-listened to her responses as I transcribed. Observations notes were kept in a notebook and organized as I took them. Photographs were uploaded to my computer and stored.
- Step 2 – Reading through or looking at all the data: I read through the initial interview and my observation notes several times. I highlighted ideas and themes related to the curriculum development process, made notes about the teacher's thoughts that described her process, and pulled out quotes that supported these emerging themes.
- Step 3 – Follow up interview and member check: I created guiding questions for the follow-up interview based on ideas that emerged. I conducted a brief member check at the follow-up interview. Then I repeated steps 1 and 2 with this new data.
- Step 4 – Organizing the findings: I sifted through the ideas that emerged and organized them into broader categories to make meaning of the data. I used my research questions as a guide for shaping the narrative of this teacher's process.
- Step 5 – Interpreting the findings: I used excerpts of the data, embedded into the previously mentioned narrative, to support the findings in the descriptive narrative of this teacher's experiences and her perceptions of her emergent curriculum development process.

Figure 3-5. Data Collection Steps

CHAPTER 4 JANE'S STORY

The purpose of this study was to explore a kindergarten teacher's process of planning for and creating an emergent curriculum in a Reggio Emilia-inspired classroom. My study focuses on the experiences of a particular early childhood educator developing an emergent curriculum in her own kindergarten classroom.

Specific research questions explored included:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?
- What does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

This qualitative case study is an in-depth inquiry into the specific context of a kindergarten teacher's thoughts, observations, experiences, and actions of developing an emergent curriculum. The following participant narrative contains discussions about this teacher's perspective of her process of developing an emergent curriculum, her role in facilitating that process, and strategies she uses to design and implement this curriculum. The narrative begins with an introduction of this teacher's professional evolution and is then organized based on my research questions. It is divided into four sections: 1) about the teacher; 2) the teacher's process; 3) the teacher's role; and 4) guiding strategies.

About the Teacher

Jane is a kindergarten teacher at a private school in north central Florida. She was originally trained as a Montessori teacher in the early 1980s, and has always been

drawn to fine arts. In her early days as a Montessori teacher, she set up an art studio in her classroom, which is not typical for a Montessori environment. Her supervisor questioned her inclusion of an art studio, “How is that Montessori?” And, Jane went home to do some research to justify it. Her first years of teaching involved a lot of this type of research and justification cycle. During her first years teaching, she had insecurities – about her teaching abilities, her classroom management style, her disciplinary skills, her capacity to work with an assistant, and to deal with parents.

And, every year I would think “ok, don’t tell anyone, but I’m not a good teacher this year, but next year I’ll be a really good teacher.” Because every year I’d learn about classroom management, children’s management, managing children’s discipline, disciplining children, managing an assistant, how to manage the parents, all that stuff you don’t learn. And every year I’d tell myself, “Ok, next year I’ll be a really good teacher because I learned this and this and this.” And, I used to actually give myself a little, like a little goal of what was I going to learn this year, which I didn’t know was a declaration of intent until I heard that at Reggio, but I had that little thing each year.

In 1990, Jane moved from her home in Canada to Florida. She found a Montessori school to work at, but it was not a good fit. So, the following year, she found a position at the private school where she is still working today. It is not a Montessori school, and it was with a different age group than she had previously worked with. In the Montessori school she worked in, she taught 3-5 year olds, in a multiage setting. In her new school, she worked with 2 year olds, and initially thought she would do that for a year until something with older children opened up. Jane continued working with 2 year olds for 4 years because she was fascinated with the perspective on teaching and learning this age group gave her.

I always realized I was learning about language development, and all that stuff about language development taught me about reading. All the reading stuff I’d done with kids suddenly clicked with why do kids have language difficulties or why were some kids so good at gifted language?

They were my gifted readers, so I watched those kinds of kids. I stayed there 4 years and really wrote a whole bunch of research that just helped myself – I probably should have done a master's program in it, but I didn't take the time to do that. I just did it for myself. And then I became a 4s teacher because an opening came up and it was time to move up.

Taking a critical look at her own pedagogy continued beyond her early years of teaching. In the mid-1990's, Jane's pursuits of continual professional development led her to discover the Reggio Emilia approach. Her focus quickly changed as her own teaching philosophy resonated with this newly found way of thinking about early childhood education. It began with reading *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993;1998) while away at a conference in Tampa about teaching Caribbean culture. Jane was a 4s teacher until 2002, when she took the kindergarten position she still has today.

I came home from Tampa and said to my husband, "I gotta go to Italy" and he was like "How did you go from the Caribbean to Italy, like what?!" I said, "I read this book, I have to go to Italy." And, by the next year, I was the second person to apply for the first international Reggio Emilia conference in Italy that was in the summer program. So, I went to that in '96 and that's when Reggio Emilia started to become part of my life and part of what I thought.

And, when I got there, I realized in many ways I wasn't doing anything like they were but in lots of ways I was doing lots of things like they were doing. They were using some Vygotsky. They were using an emergent curriculum; they didn't call it that and they still don't call it that, although they're getting closer. A lot of things I had been doing, they had a term for it, they had a process for it, they had a way to think about it, they had vocabulary for it - that's when I knew I was a Reggio Emilian, but I'd been a Reggio Emilian before I knew about Reggio Emilia. And for me it just resonated. I'm a life-long learner. So, I think, that's my, that's where I am now.

This About the Teacher section is not directly related to one of my research questions, but it provides context into this teacher's professional development and her thought processes, as well as some background information on how she was drawn to

the Reggio Emilia approach in the first place. She touched on the early insecurities she felt about her teaching abilities as a new person in the profession. To combat these insecurities, she made goals for herself each year and engaged in a lot of research to justify practices that were not in alignment with the Montessori approach she was trained in. She discussed how her work with toddlers informed her understanding of later development and the personal research she did in her classroom to enhance those understandings. She also told the story about how her continual pursuit of professional development lead her to find the Reggio Emilia approach, which greatly resonated with her personal teaching philosophy and approach. Her perpetual quest for and openness to new learning demonstrates qualities of reflective practice such as recognizing her own mistakes, tolerance of ambiguity, questioning her ideas and expectations, and being flexible to change. The following sections are directly related to each of my research questions.

Teacher's Process

Each summer, Jane reported that she starts thinking about what her personal goals and inquiries for the school year will be. Out of these thoughts, she creates her declaration of intent, which is a term she picked up from the Reggio Emilio approach. Her declaration of intent helps guide the beginning of the year, and, depending on the children's interests, it might become an ongoing line of inquiry in Jane's classroom.

So, what I would say is, every year I start with, um, what I learned at Reggio is called a declaration of intent. So, what is the thing that I am interested in this year, that I want to look at closely for myself? And then, that doesn't always drive the curriculum initially, but in terms of this year, um, I like this book that I bought at the Harn Museum called *Tools as Art* and we've been doing a thing that's come up numerous times in the past years about tools. Kids like tools. There's a book that I've been reading called *Tools of the Mind*, so that, I think that went together with it. So, this year, I used tools as a metaphor to start the curriculum.

Jane indicated that she feels the students out in the beginning of the year by asking questions about what they know about tools, what kinds of tools they are familiar with, what they would like to know about tools, etc. She documents their words and uses their answers as inspiration for the direction of the curriculum.

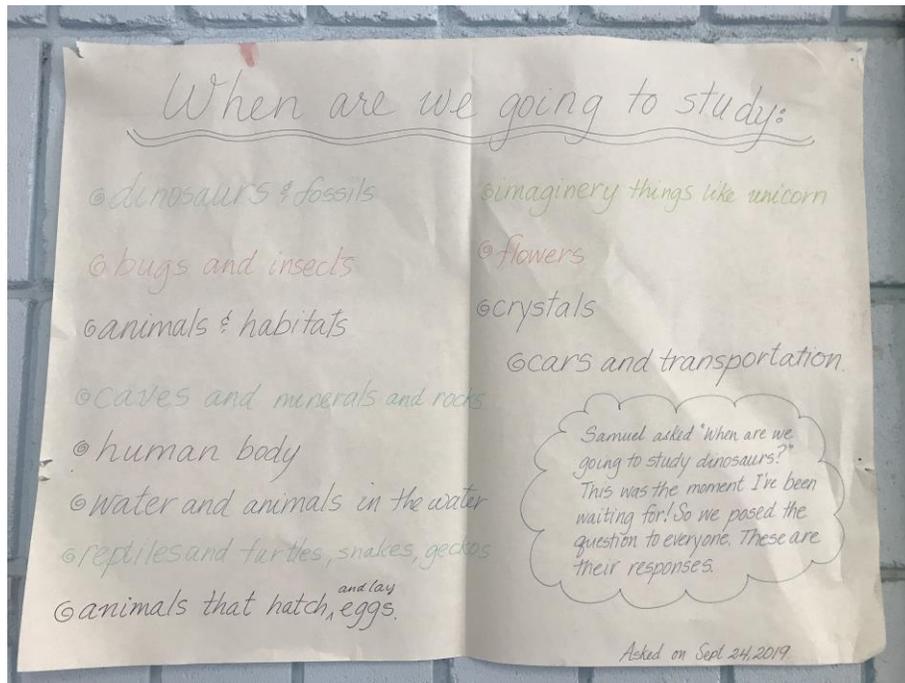


Figure 4-1. This photograph is an example of documentation posted in Jane's classroom. One of her students asked when the class was going to study dinosaurs. She used it as an opportunity to ask the class what topics they would like to study and she recorded their answers. (Photo taken 11/02/2019 by author, Daniella Porter.)

When we first started talking, we were asking them questions about what do they know about tools? What are tools? Do they have any tools? And the thing that kept coming up was their hand, their hand as a tool. So, then we began to, basically I went home and tried to find different things we could use for their hand. And, so from that, then we, I looked on the internet and saw these contoured hand drawings, and so then we began to talk about that. So, we drew our hands, we did some contour hand drawings to make them look real. And then what's happened from that is we've then used those hand drawings over and over again in different ways. So, hands came up, have kept coming up, um, the tools they use in the classroom, you know their eyes, the crayons, the pencils... So, I kind of follow them, I follow key things that keep recurring, is a word. Like, their

hands, they talked a lot about their hand in the beginning, like how much their hands were their first tool.

Then, even some kids were saying, you know, they would say, like, “the cave men only had their hands.” And, um, so we got a few little things about cave people, but they weren’t really interested in that. They were more interested in, um, more hand... what I do is listen to them, what their interests are, and we also do take lots of pictures. We um, we’ve been, at the beginning we recorded conversations, that’s even how we captured a lot of the stuff about hands. You know, I was listening for something else, so I didn’t capture it initially, but when the hands kept coming up then I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, how did I miss that?’

Jane reported that she often pulls ideas for the direction of the curriculum from listening and reflecting on what the children say. She told me that she and her assistant not only ask questions to prompt ideas, but they also pay close attention to the conversations the children have and even their conflicts. Following the children’s ideas and the connections that they make themselves drives Jane’s curriculum. She reported that sometimes she thinks the children will be interested in going in one direction, but their interests take them in a completely different direction. As in the interview excerpt above, she facilitated a provocation about tools, but the children kept coming back to the idea of hands. Jane initially had her own ideas about where the provocation might lead, but she let the children take it in another direction. This is an example of following the children’s ideas, being flexible, and keeping her own expectations in check.

Often, it’s more about something that they’ve said in the day, or something that keeps coming up, like an idea will keep coming up in their play, or sometimes even in conflict. So, it’s – and lots, lots of times I’ll find ideas around what they say. Um, or sometimes we won’t even be thinking about integrating something. We’ll be just doing something, math ... And, when we were doing the counting and different stuff with our hands, um, we were actually starting with some shapes. They were the ones that right away said, ‘Oh, these shapes are tools and our hands are tracing the tools,’ and, ‘Our hands are,’ and they were like ‘These are math tools!’ And, we were just like, oh my god... So, so lots of times it’s what they say.

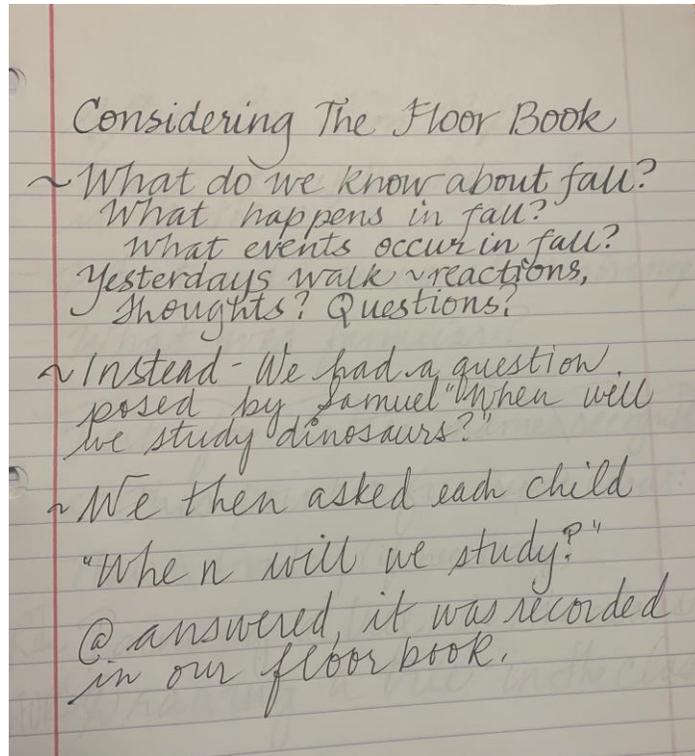


Figure 4-2. This photograph is an excerpt from Jane's journal. It includes questions she plans to pose to engage the students in discussion and notes about the direction the discussion actually took based on student input. (Photo taken 11/02/2019 by author, Daniella Porter.)

Jane explained that her curriculum development process is guided by the goals she has for her students. She said she strives to foster critical thinking. In a classroom observation on 5/23/2017, I witnessed the assistant teacher address a small conflict. One child was upset because another child was "making her flower the same as mine." In this interaction I observed the assistant teacher listen to both children, acknowledge their concerns, and then ask the children, "How should we resolve this?" Jane wants her students to look beyond the surface, to know how to ask questions, to take charge of their learning, and value their own ideas.

I want them to be thinking critically about everything. I want them to look always inside of stuff, that even if they think they're doing math, maybe there's something inside that's scientific. Or, if they're writing about something, there's something in that that's artistic. I just want them to look inside of something more, look always inside, see something interesting in

it. I want them to be thinkers of their own stuff, like, that we value their work, that we value their ideas, that they too have, that they are the ones that generate the knowledge. And, I want them to feel like that about everything – I already know the answer to that, I just haven't thought about it, or, I haven't figured out how to do that, but I have the possibility to do it soon, or, all I have to do is study it to make sure I – so, you know, I just want them to be critical thinkers, I want them to be creative, I want them to be questioners.

She develops the curriculum around the children's ideas and interests because she emphasized that she wants her students to know that their questions and ideas are valid and important. She wants her students to know that they are capable of learning and that their acquisition of knowledge is up to them.

One of the most important things, I want them to know they are capable of learning, that they are the drivers of their learning, that it's up to them ... You have to decide to do it yourself. You're in charge of your learning, you're in charge of yourself, you're the one that decides how you want to learn, how you want to learn it, if you want to learn it. You know, so, I kind of want them to be self, or as Reggio said, "They're already strong, they're already curious, or already capable." and I want them to have that feeling.

She reported that there are also outside influences to her curriculum development process. Her school has specific guidelines, and there are also state standards to keep in mind. Jane said she has mixed feelings about these outside influences, but she recognizes their value. She works with the guidelines and standards to ensure her students are equipped with the expected information for their age.

I feel they're good, but I hate them too. Does that make sense? You know, it's good that we have standards, and I wanted them improved when I first moved here. Um, I think they have limitations because they might tend to make your curriculum follow a standard which would be, I don't know. I have mixed feelings, I like it and I think I want them there for other people, which is sort of arrogant (laughs). But once in a while, and it does happen, that I read something and "Oh shoot, I don't do that very much," so it's helpful to be a basis . . . I usually do it backwards – figure out what I'm doing and then make sure it fits those things. Or, often in retrospective ways, or you know, on teacher workday in January, usually I sort of review

the kind of stuff I thought I was gonna do and then come up and see if I've done any of it.

This section addresses my first research question: How does this teacher describe her process of designing an emergent curriculum? Jane reported that she begins each year by setting personal goals for herself in the classroom. She calls this personal goal setting a declaration of intent, a term used by Reggio Emilia-inspired teachers. Jane's curriculum development process starts with her personal goals, but is also informed by the goals she has for her students. She uses developmentally appropriate guidelines and standards to influence the experiences she provides.

Jane explained that she jumpstarts the year by provoking a line of inquiry that she thinks might be inspiring for the children. After providing an initial spark or idea, she tailors the direction of the inquiry based on the children's interests. By engaging the children in discussion and deepening the dialog through questioning, she records their words, reflects on what they have to say, and uses their answers to guide the experiences she provides for further inquiry and exploration. Sometimes things take a different direction than she expects. Being flexible and questioning her own expectations represents a significant part of Jane's process. During exploration, she reported that she continues to pay attention to and record the children's conversations as well as take photographs of their exploration.

Teacher's Role

When asked about what Jane sees as the teacher's role, she was clear that the teacher should act as both a facilitator of learning and a cheerleader. She said she sees her role as the person who scaffolds instruction by encouraging explorative risk

taking. She accomplishes this by guiding children through learning that they may not have felt confident venturing into without some outside support.

To be both a facilitator, is a nice word, but to be their cheerleader, to be the one that, to be the one that pushes them, you know. Vygotsky said, "they scaffold them," but sometimes to scaffold them you actually have to push them, to make them take a risk and know it's going to be ok.

Jane explained that a big part of her role in the curriculum development process is her outlook on problem solving in the classroom. She looks at problems as opportunities for growth and inquiry. She encourages students to figure out how to find answers, rather than have the teacher provide the answers. For example, in a classroom observation on 5/18/2017 the children were exploring rocks. They touched the rocks, measuring them, weighing them, looking at their details through a microscope, building with them, talking about their qualities, and drawing them. One table had a rock collection that Jane brought in, and she included mirrors, magnifying glasses, and a little rock identification book. The children excitedly shared their knowledge about the rocks with each other and Jane when she stopped by the table. She reminded them, "You know what you can do? You can look it up in this little book." This was a simple example of Jane providing materials to provoke the children's curiosity while encouraging them to find their own answers to the questions they have while exploring.

As Jane explained:

You know, when anything happens problematically in our classroom, I never worry about the problem. I always worry about, so how are we gonna solve it? Yeah, we have that problem, you spilt the water, you broke a glass, you whatever it is, um, you have a problem on your paper. How are we gonna fix it? How are we gonna deal with it? For me, and I always tell them, "It's only a problem until you solve it, but if you don't solve it, it's gonna stay a problem." Or, um, "If you don't know the answer, it's just gonna remain a question until you figure out how to answer it."

And sometimes, lots of times, we always laugh about that – we didn't get an answer, we got more questions. Now they get excited when we ask more questions.

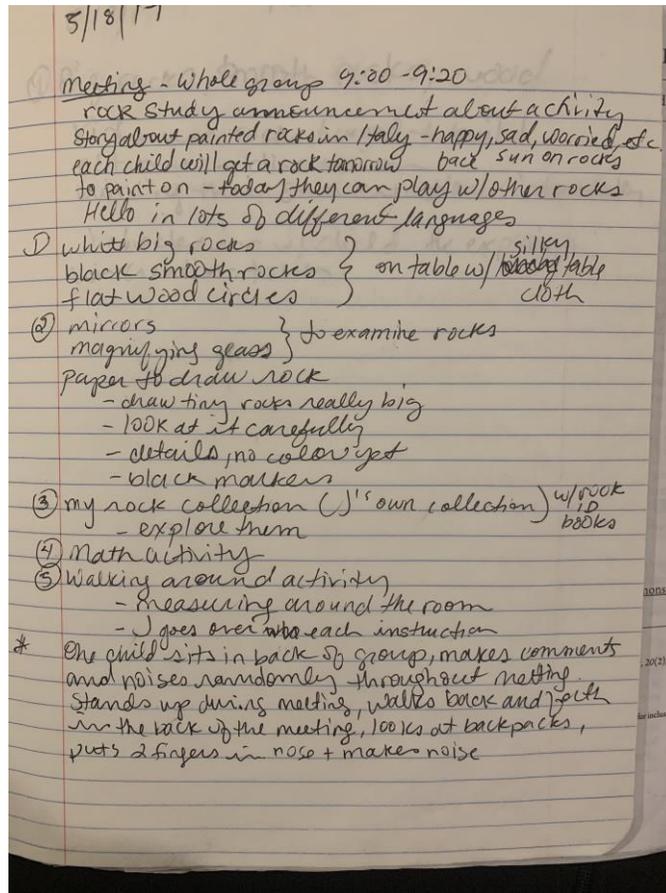


Figure 4-3. This photograph is an excerpt from my observation notes. (Photo taken 11/02/2019 by author, Daniella Porter.)

A key tool that Jane mentioned she used to facilitate learning and inquiry during the curriculum development process is asking questions and motivating her students to ask their own questions. Jane reported that she uses questioning to provoke ideas. Her role as questioner and provoker is less about finding the answers and more about the inquiry process that the questions stimulate.

They hadn't thought of other things that could be tools. And, um, so then, when we asked a bunch of questions about what kinds of tools would you use to open things? What kind of tools would you use to close things? What kind of tools would you . . . we asked those kind of questions. Kind

of to provoke, um, more interesting ideas about tools. They came up with a huge list of stuff. You know, it's funny, so many of the questions, we often keep asking them. I'm often saying, "How did you think about that?" "How did you come to that thinking?" or "Why did you make that decision?" "What is . . ." and I'm asking them questions.

Part of it is learning from Amelia Gambetti about asking questions instead of being satisfied with an answer. I used to be satisfied with an answer and write it down. Now I understand that I have to keep asking the questions and getting further into those questions. One of the things we do is when someone asks a question, we often say "Oh, that's a really good question," and we write it down on the clipboard and then we have to find a way to have that child answer that question from everybody . . . it makes them think that questions are more important. So, we just mostly ask more questions.

Being prepared with materials, resources, and knowledge to enhance the learning process is another one of the roles that Jane emphasized as a priority. Facilitating curiosity and inquiry requires preparation. Jane tries to be ready with the materials that are essential for the type of exploration roused in an emergent curriculum. From observing in Jane's classroom, I was able to see that it is intentionally organized for self-directed exploration. Besides the provocations that she sets out daily, the shelves in the classroom are filled with materials and supplies that are readily available for children to select independently. She has spent her career collecting materials. Her experience and education have given her the resources and knowledge to determine what materials might provoke inquiry and enhance curricular development.

What kind of literature can I find that will address some of the questions or some of the – or I, you know I have a huge library of books. So I, often it's pretty easy for me to think, "Oh I have this really good book with this in it." Or I got this, um, I've got a huge room full of stuff that I've accumulated – bones and artifacts and books and just teacher materials that I've accumulated. I don't use them all every year, but I then begin to come into my room and start looking at, OK what kind of materials do I have in the room in my home artifact room? What can I present in front of them that would maybe make them look inside of these ideas?

Ultimately, Jane reported that she sees that her role is to promote independence. This independence engenders students to ask their own questions, think critically, take risks in their exploration, and take ownership of their learning. During a class meeting on 9/5/2017, Jane reminded the students before dismissing them to do their classroom work that “you are all scientists.” Their questions and their discovery were what guided the curriculum development.

I also find asking them what do we need, what tools do we need? So that they're not thinking of just answering questions, but what tools do they need to do that project, or what tools do they need to make one little thing they want to make. I need some string, I need scissors, what do you need to keep it together? Oh, I need some glue, I need, how are you going to put your name on it? Oh I need a marker. So that we're trying to get them to get all the tools they need, so it kind of makes them more in the classroom.

But, I think I'm always saying that to them – what do you need, where can you get it, you know. Pushing them to think for themselves.

This section addresses my second research question: What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum? She believes the teacher should act as both a facilitator of learning and a cheerleader. She sees her role as the person who scaffolds instruction by encouraging a safe environment for explorative risk taking as well as problem solving. Before, during, and after exploration, Jane reported that she uses questioning to provoke ideas. Her role as questioner and provoker is less about finding the answers and more about the inquiry process that the questions stimulate. Another significant role as the teacher is preparing materials, resources, and knowledge to enhance the learning process. Ultimately, Jane sees it as her responsibility to promote independence.

Guiding Strategies

Jane reported the use of multiple organizational strategies to guide the development of her curriculum. Mind maps are one way that she keeps track of what her class has done and how each activity integrates into the curriculum. The mind maps are written after the fact, so they serve as documentation of what has already happened.

Yeah, I'm a mind map kind of person, so I usually make a word in the middle of a piece of paper and make a mind map about it. I never think, ok, what's a science activity, what's an art activity, you know? What I usually do is I find different activities and then I begin to say, "Oh my gosh, that's a really good writing activity," but we've done it first.

Another organizational strategy that Jane uses is a planning book. She uses a planning book for preplanning, but edits it along the way to reflect what was actually done and how experiences are connected. She organizes her planning book by subject.

And then in my planning book, I will write that down. I think I've got writing, class meeting, writing, reading, science, math, social studies, geography, a hundred languages. So, I put that in my plan books, but then my plan books have these arrows all over them because, I think of something as, oh this is a science activity, but then I realize, no that probably goes more with geography, so I fill those spaces in afterwards.

Jane uses her plan book for her general planning. She puts in it where she thinks the class instruction might go. But, she uses her journals to record what actually happens in the classroom (Figures 4-2 and 4-4). Her journal reflects what actually occurs during the year. It includes mind maps, ideas, reflections, material selections, etc.

J: OK, so yeah. The journals, so the plan book is more a structural plan book that's a generic plan book that teachers buy. Um, but the difference is, what I heard Amelia Gambetti say one time is, the teacher's book of lies to a book of truth. I don't worry about it now not being exactly

followed, but it's more a structure, it's a grid, you know, that I try to fill in. . . . I don't stop, but it's more sporadic at the end of the year. But, my actual journal is more the mind map or things that I think about and so it can be just random thoughts about stuff; it can be things I need to remember to pick up.

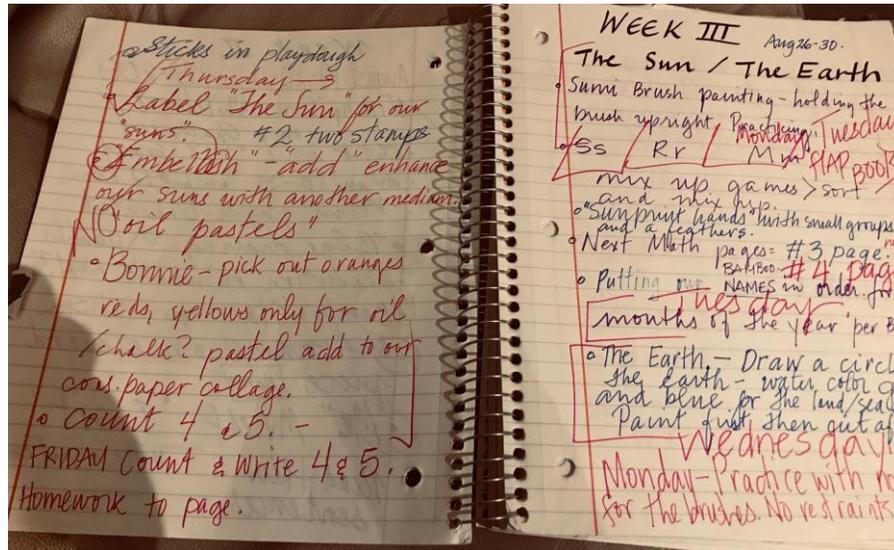


Figure 4-4. This photograph is an excerpt from Jane's Journal. In this particular entry, the black indicates a proposed idea for the week, the purple was the initial idea, the blue indicates something added, and the pink are real time notes. Jane said that she leaves the left-hand side blank so that she can add real time plots and things that were added. She said that she is not rigid with the color coding, but usually makes sure that the different timelines and parts of the process are represented with different colors or symbols. (Photo taken 11/02/2019 by author, Daniella Porter.)

Choosing different materials to present to the students is a strategy that Jane uses to develop her emergent curriculum. She chooses materials that might provoke exploration and inquiry. Specifically, Jane mentioned the Montessori materials that she has accumulated over the years. She adds new items to the classroom and takes others away throughout the year (Figure 4-5).

Um, at the same time, I have also a Montessori background, so there's a lot of Montessori materials I have, Montessori ideas that I have that often support the things that are going on in the classroom . . . provoke self learning and there's no, you experience the material but there's no paper or pencil involved afterwards. So I put a lot of those things in the classroom as provocations or a new material. Sometimes I introduce them

in small groups, sometimes I introduce it in the big classroom and now it's on the shelf and they can use it. When I take things out of the class and put them in, it's an average of once a month. So, I take things out that I'm not using, or I haven't seen them play with for a while, if it's mine, I take it out and bring it home.



Figure 4-5. Both of these photos represent some of the Montessori materials that Jane has in her classroom. A) is a collection of animal puzzles. B) is of a screw board and a bolt board. (Photo taken on 5/18/2019 by author Daniella Porter.)

In Jane's classroom, she reported that curricular planning sometimes happens in real time. Over the years, she has developed skills of thinking on her feet and making changes as needed. Following the students' leads requires Jane to be flexible.

And sometimes I do it off the fly. I come in thinking I'm going to do one thing and it's not going to work. For whatever reason, it's not going to work. Sometimes it's a time thing, sometimes it's about, oh I didn't, I set up this one way and they start doing it another way and that's a more interesting way, so then we begin to change it. I might have written down one thing in my plan book of what I thought we were going to do, but then the kids have taken it somewhere else. So, I'm really flexible.

Documentation of the work that has been done is a significant strategy Jane uses to organize her curriculum. Documentation also communicates the learning

process to families. Along with the mind maps, documentation is completed after the fact.

So our bulletin boards sometimes have just artwork on them, but I almost can't just do that. I usually have to put some sort of explanation about what we were doing with this art thing. So, documentation can be, it's usually on the bulletin boards, as we do something I just pin up an example or I photocopy a piece of a child's work or I put up whatever happened, or the weekly reader just gets poked up on the wall. And so it's more of a chronological week as opposed to broken up into subjects. Because my room is sort of full of stuff, they can see what art we're working on or what projects we're working on because it's still there, it's still out in the environment.

When I asked Jane if there was anything that she thinks is essential to her curriculum development process that we didn't talk about, she said that it was important to come visit her classroom because it is a physical manifestation of her process. I visited her classroom on three occasions. I observed most of the morning routine each time and took photographs of her materials and documentation. In my observations, I was able to witness examples of questioning, discussion, exploration, and the general running of the classroom.

As Jane explains, her classroom is representative of the concrete processes she uses in her teaching:

I think what I'd like to show you is my room. Because I think that it's, it's all materials, it's the part that's not in my mind, it's not the part that's written down. It's the hands-on materials that have stayed with me that I use over and over again. The literature I've acquired were stories that I can find a way to put them in that resonate and keep coming through the literature. And, like I said, it's the concrete part of my brain in a manifestation of a curriculum in a room.



Figure 4-6. These three photographs represent some examples of the documentation that Jane displays in her classroom. A) is a photograph and description of self-directed design-making that a child did. B) and C) are bulletin board displays of a painting experience and a drawing activity that the class participated in. B) is a still life bamboo painting activity with calligraphy brushed and stones inspired by a book read in class. C) is a drawing activity of a dragon inspired by a chapter book read aloud in class. (Photo taken on 5/18/2019 by author Daniella Porter.)



Figure 4-9. This photograph is of the birdhouse outside a window in Jane's classroom and letters that the children wrote to the birds. The letter writing was a child-initiated experience. On the windowsill are her student's classroom mailboxes. (Photo taken on 5/18/2019 by author Daniella Porter.)



Figure 4-10. This photograph depicts several examples of provocations that Jane provides for her students to choose to explore. There is a basket of Florida artifacts, a basket of stones and bones, a snake basket, a tray with sink and float items, a tray with land, air, and water items, a pouring tray, and a Florida peninsula tray. (Photo taken on 5/18/2019 by author Daniella Porter.)

This section addresses my third research question: What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum? And, what does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies? Jane describes multiple organizational strategies that she uses to guide the development of her curriculum. She uses a planning book for preplanning but edits it along the way to reflect what was actually done and how experiences are connected. She also uses her journals to record what actually happens in the classroom. They include mind maps, ideas, reflections, material selections, etc. Mind maps are one way that she keeps track of what her class has done and how each activity integrates into the curriculum.

Being flexible and thinking on her feet are two skills Jane has developed to help follow the students' leads in the curriculum development process. Documentation of the work that has been done is a strategy she uses to organize her curriculum, keep track of what has been done, and communicate the learning process to families. Along with the mind maps, documentation is completed after the fact. Choosing different materials to present to the students is another strategy that Jane uses to develop her emergent curriculum. She provides materials that might provoke exploration and inquiry. The experiences she provides, the materials she chooses, and her classroom environment as a whole are physical manifestations of her curriculum development process.

Figure 4-11 below is a summary of ideas from the findings, broken down into the main categories, minus the About the Teacher category because it was not one of my research questions. I left that category out of the figure because it did not serve to

| Process | Role | Strategies |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration of intent • Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What we know ○ What we want to know • Listen to children’s words • Reflect on children’s words • Using conflict as inspiration • Follow children’s ideas and connections • Foster critical thinking through questions, materials, and exploration • Guided by her goals for students • Flexibility of curricular direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scaffold by encouraging explorative risk taking ○ Problems as opportunities ○ Help students find answers rather than teachers providing answers ○ Ask questions ○ Motivate students to ask their own questions ○ Provoke ideas with questions ○ Prepare materials and resources to enhance learning ○ Promote independence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning book ○ Personal Journal ○ Choosing materials to provoke inquiry • During <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Personal Journal ○ Choosing materials to provoke inquiry ○ Adding new materials ○ Thinking on your feet, real time planning ○ Flexibility • After <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mind maps ○ Documentation |

Figure 4-11. Pieces of Jane’s Process Related to Corresponding Research Questions

clarify the main line of inquiry – this teacher’s process toward developing an emergent curriculum. Items that came to light about her process are that she identifies a declaration of intent in the beginning of the year, she uses questions to guide the direction of a potential inquiry, and she listens and reflects on the children’s words. In addition, she uses conflicts as inspiration, follows the children’s ideas and connections, fosters critical thinking through questions, materials, and exploration, and she is flexible with her expectations about the direction of her curriculum. Jane sees her role in the curriculum process as a facilitator. She facilitates by scaffolding, seeing problems as opportunities, helping students find their own answers rather than providing them, asking questions, motivating students to ask their own questions, provoking ideas with questions, and promoting independence. Strategies that Jane employs to develop her

emergent curriculum are further broken down into strategies that she uses before, during, and after class time. Before class meetings, Jane uses her plan book to organize ideas, she journals about potential directions, and she chooses materials to provoke inquiry. During class, Jane might add ideas to her journal for later reflection, choose materials to provoke inquiry, add new materials, and think on her feet to engage in real time planning and adaptations. After class meetings, Jane uses mind maps and creates documentation artifacts to visually represent the direction the inquiry took.

Summary

The narrative discussed this teacher's background, her perspective about her process of developing an emergent curriculum, her role in facilitating that process, and strategies she uses to design and implement this curriculum. Each component contributes to the foundation of the unique curriculum she creates each year with her class. The next section of this dissertation will weave together these ideas with the existing literature on the topic and discuss the implications of my findings.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter describes the insights gained from an investigation into a teacher's process of developing an emergent curriculum. As discussed in the previous chapters, I examined the approach of a teacher, experienced in creating an emergent curriculum, through interviews, classroom observations, photographs, and her journals, in an effort to gain a better understanding of this process and practice. This approach, as reviewed in Chapter 2, requires skillful, observant, and reflective teaching practices. In order to explore this issue, these guiding research questions led my inquiry:

- How does this teacher describe her process of designing an emergent curriculum?
- What is this teacher's perspective of her role in facilitating an emergent curriculum?
- What are some strategies this teacher engages in to guide the process of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum?
- What does this teacher describe as her reasoning for using particular strategies?

The following discussion delves into the knowledge gained from this inquiry, including conclusions that may be drawn from findings described in Chapter Four and their implications in terms of theory, practice, and research.

Discussion

Emergent curriculum is an approach to curricular development in which teachers and students engage in a reciprocal interaction of inquiry and discovery. The approach involves listening and questioning, observing and facilitating. Through these behaviors, the curriculum is formed from the interests of the children in the classroom (Wien, 2006). "Once teachers select a focus, they plan provocations or interesting events that

stimulate children's thinking and activity. Teachers document children's responses and think carefully about the next step." (Wien, 2006, p.1) This type of curricular development requires the teacher to think on her feet in a different way than with a preplanned curriculum. It means taking time for intentional observation, allowing for flexibility, and being ready for some ideas to take off and others to fizzle out.

One of the hindrances to utilizing an emergent curriculum is a teacher's lack of understanding about how it is developed and implemented. Hence, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the process by which a seasoned teacher, immersed in the ideas of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and emergent curriculum, facilitates the phenomenon. I investigated the context of this teacher's work and her perspective of designing and implementing an emergent curriculum to gain a better understanding of her process. I have an ongoing interest in the impact this type of curriculum development has in the classroom, including wider implications for teachers and children, and how to guide educators who wish to utilize this process. This section provides a summary of the deeper understandings gained through my inquiry and ties it to the literature.

Jane, originally trained in the Montessori method, is currently a kindergarten teacher at a private school in North Central Florida, where she has been teaching since the 1990s. Her school is not a Montessori school, but she does incorporate some Montessori materials and methods in her teaching. She became inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy in the mid-1990s through her continual pursuit of professional development. As is the nature of the Reggio Emilia approach, Jane utilized an emergent curriculum. She has spent the last couple of decades learning about the

Reggio Emilia approach and honing her craft. Jane sought out a college degree to begin her career, a relatively traditional mode of teacher preparation. But since then, she has followed up her professional development with more alternative routes that have been very influential in enhancing her skills. As Early, et al. (2007) found, there are no convincing associations between early childhood teachers' education level, classroom quality, and/or student academic gains. However, the researchers are quick to point out that these results do not negate the importance of teacher education or teacher quality. Similar to the indications from the study by Howes, et al. (2003), these results imply that there are alternative routes to produce quality teachers. The examination on teacher quality by Early, et al. (2007) was restricted to analysis based on teacher education level. Howes et al. (2003) opens up the discussion to include alternative pathways that produce quality teachers. The implications from both of these investigations indicate that more research needs to be done to examine a broad range of professional development and support. The alternative pathways that Jane has pursued to develop her skills as a teacher have led her to the Reggio Emilia Approach and emergent curriculum.

Each year, Jane reported that she begins the process of curricular planning in the summer, before the school year starts, by setting what the Reggio Emilia approach calls a declaration of intent. Her declaration helps to guide the beginning of the school year and, depending on the student's interests, might become an ongoing line of inquiry in her classroom. When the students enter her classroom, Jane explained that she assesses their knowledge and interests by asking questions and provoking discussions. Jane reported that she spends a lot of time reflecting on the students'

answers to her questions and listening to independent conversations as well. The student's words, thoughts, and questions lead the direction of inquiry.

A major goal of an emergent curriculum is to respond to each child's interests while encouraging open-ended and self-directed experiences (Wien, 2008). Rinaldi (2001) expresses the importance that the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education places on the image of the child. In this approach, children are seen as strong, capable, and critical to the learning process. The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on education resulting in children who can think and act for themselves. Because of this focus, children are treated seriously, and their ideas are respected. The philosophy views every child as a partner in the construction of knowledge and a motivated investigator who has a need to interact and communicate with others.

As explained previously, the image of the child is a guiding principle of the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). In the world of Reggio Emilia early childhood education, the common term for this particular view of children is known as "the child as protagonist" (Gandini, 1993). Along with teachers and parents, children are seen as vital contributors to the educational process. The child is viewed as a collaborator in the educational community, as well as in the child's family, peer group, and larger community (Gandini, 1993). Children are seen as having the right and ability to make their thinking visible through many modalities, including but not limited to words, drawing, building, music, and play (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). Other key components of the Reggio Emilia approach include a classroom designed to be utilized as a space for exploration, communication and learning, and extensive documentation to make children's experiences and growth transparent. The role of the

parent as a partner in the educational process, and the role of the teacher as a partner in learning, as a nurturer, a facilitator, and a researcher, are also important elements (Gandini, 1993).

Utilizing the tenets of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, Jane emphasized that she strives to foster critical thinking, inquisitiveness, exploration, and student's valuing their own ideas and interests. Her curriculum is also driven by the goals she has for her students – including promoting independence and critical thinking, eliciting connection- and meaning-making, being questioners, explorers, and inquisitors. She does have some outside influences for the direction of the learning in her classroom as well; her school has expectations that she incorporates into her curriculum. The NAEYC DAP position statement (2009) advocates for standards that are comprehensive, including and emphasizing the importance of all the developmental domains, and for the focus of curriculum implemented based on those standards to be equitable across the domains. It states that some schools and teachers are using a comprehensive approach to meet standards, but many are narrowing the curriculum to focus on meeting primarily the cognitive-based standards. In congruence with the Reggio Emilia approach, Jane described her role in the classroom as a facilitator. Developing meaningful curriculum for young children requires not only a thorough understanding of how children develop and learn, which includes established standards and the teacher's own goals for students, but an awareness of appropriate subject matter and a strong grasp of different strategies used to deliver that content (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2019).

A facilitator who has a strong understanding of child development and children's intrinsic motivation for co-constructed learning are vital to the process of developing an

emergent curriculum, but a play-based environment is where this type of practice thrives. This is due to the nature of setting up space for play in a classroom, which in and of itself encourages inquiry, independence, and engagement. Recently, a balanced curricular approach was being advocated for a system known as guided play (Yue Yu et al., 2018; Weisberg et al., 2016; & Weisberg et al., 2013). Guided play is a child-centered approach that involves adult scaffolding in the design of the setting and/or as observation and discussion during child-directed activities. With the organization of her classroom, the materials and experiences that Jane provides, she encourages exploration and creative risk taking through play. “Emergent curriculum is sensible but not predictable. It requires of its practitioners trust in the power of play – trust in spontaneous choice making among many possibilities. Good programs for young children encourage children to become competent players” (Jones & Nimmo, 1994, p.1).

Jane mentioned that she helps students view problems as opportunities for learning and growing. And, she adds that she provokes that learning by asking questions and motivating her student to ask their own questions. Jane’s preparation of the environment and the materials she provides provoke inquiry, enhance curricular development, and promote students’ independence and ownership of their learning.

Behind the scenes, Jane cited several organizational strategies that she uses to guide the development of her emergent curriculum. She uses her traditional teacher plan book to organize ideas around subjects, topics of inquiry, and outside expectations. For decades, she has also kept personal journals that outline information about potential directions of inquiry, student ideas and questions, and her own

reflections. Jane also organizes her classroom and strategically chooses materials to stimulate exploration and inquiry. This exploration provokes conversations and questions that guide the direction of the curriculum. Through her decades of experience and professional development, Jane has honed the skills necessary to be flexible, add materials on the go, and change directions based on the students' interest, or lack of interest, in a particular topic.

Another important organizational strategy that Jane uses is the documentation she creates to visually represent the turns that the inquiry and exploration take throughout the year. The Reggio Emilia approach uses documentation to make children's thinking and learning visible (Gandini, 1993). Goldhaber (2009) discusses documentation as the records collected during teaching and learning, and also as the process of collecting those records. Jane posts mind maps to outline topics and connections. And, she uses displays of the children's work artifacts to document the learning process. Her curriculum emerges from the children and the teachers (Jones & Nimmo 1994).

The process of developing the curriculum relies on the facilitator paying attention to the children's interests and inquiries. The facilitator then helps expand those investigations by asking questions and setting up provocations. During the whole process, the facilitator thoughtfully documents the children's discussions, ideas and other visible indications of the learning process, expanding discussions, and provoking new experiences. Gandini and Goldhaber (2001) called this process of documentation, analysis, and refer to it as an exploration of the cycle of inquiry. Out of this came the development of Broderick and Hong's (2003, 2005, 2007) Cycle of Inquiry (COI)

System – a tool for organizing the process of developing an emergent curriculum for teachers learning to implement the approach. Jane has developed her own version of this cycle of inquiry.

Jones and Nimmo (1994) identify several sources that contribute to the design of emergent curricula. Children's interests make a significant contribution, but so do teachers' interests, developmental tasks, the space and items in the physical environment, the people in social environments, available curriculum resource materials, unexpected events, conflicts and conflict resolution, and routines. The values and influence of the school, the larger community, the families, the culture and society are significant as well. This incredibly thoughtful method requires that teachers be exceptionally in tune, reflective, and present with young children. It requires a “pedagogy of listening” (Rinaldi, 2006), that is a process of the teacher noticing, studying, and understanding the thoughts and curiosities of young children, while tapping into that drive for knowledge by facilitating exploration influenced by the children’s own ideas (Chaillé, 2008). The documentation collected through this process is used to shape the motivation and validation for the emergent curriculum (Chaillé, 2008; Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001; Hendrick, 1997). Similar to Goulart and Roth’s (2010) findings, Siry and Kremer (2011) found that using the children’s ideas to initiate inquiry created a learning community that co-constructed knowledge. The development of an emergent curriculum is a learned and shared dynamic process. It builds on what children already know and what they wonder about. It requires connectedness between teachers and students, and students and students.

Limitations

The observation data in this study was limited. The data collection process used in this study could be used to guide future researchers interested in this area, but the richness of the data could be enhanced by more deliberately pointed observations. It would also be more useful and authentic if it was conducted by a person who was in the environment more often. Being able to capture the inquiry process in action, the “magic,” can only be done in the moment. Spending each day for several weeks, throughout the school year, would provide for more intentional and higher quality observation data. Lastly, having more eyes on the data could help to clarify ideas and decrease personal bias.

Implications

This study investigated a teacher’s background, her perspective on her process of developing an emergent curriculum, her role in facilitating that process, and strategies she uses to design and implement this curriculum. A case study looking into the teacher’s perspective of her process for developing an emergent curriculum for young children, served to provide the early childhood education community a window into important understandings about the creation and implementation of this practice. Creating developmentally appropriate curricula for young children is a process that involves a thorough understanding of child development and thoughtful planning.

Items that came to light about this teacher’s process are that she identifies a declaration of intent in the beginning of the year, she uses questions to guide the direction of a potential inquiry, listens and reflects on the children’s words, uses conflicts as inspiration, follows the children’s ideas and connections, and fosters critical thinking through questions, materials, and exploration. Jane sees her role in the

curriculum process as a facilitator. She facilitates by scaffolding, seeing problems as opportunities, helping students find their own answers rather than providing them, asking questions, motivating students to ask their own questions, provoking ideas with questions, and promoting independence.

Strategies that Jane uses to develop her emergent curriculum are further broken down into strategies that she uses before, during, and after class time. Before class meetings, Jane uses her plan book to organize ideas. She journals about potential directions, and she chooses materials to provoke inquiry. During class, Jane might add ideas to her journal for later reflection, choose materials to provoke inquiry, add new materials, and think on her feet to engage in real time planning and adaptations. After class meetings, Jane uses mind maps and creates documentation artifacts to visually represent the direction the inquiry took. The following sections discuss implications for practice for those interested in implementing an emergent curriculum as well as implications for future research for those who seek to further their understandings of this practice.

Implications for Practice and Research

The findings of this study in the context of a teacher's work and her perspective on designing and implementing an emergent curriculum help to provide a better understanding of the thought processes, planning, and actions involved in developing an emergent curriculum. This type of thoughtful curriculum development can promote and inform child-focused, comprehensive, developmentally appropriate experiences in schools. A teacher who wishes to implement an emergent curriculum model in her classroom would benefit from looking into Jane's perception of her process, how she

thinks about her role in the classroom, and the strategies she uses to organize and guide her curriculum development.

The first step for a teacher to be able to curate an emergent curriculum successfully is to build a strong knowledge base of child development through education, experience, and a consistent pursuit of professional development. The teacher in this study has exemplified that practice throughout her teaching career. Using that strong knowledge of child development, she starts her process by beginning each school year with intentional, developmentally appropriate goals – both professional and student oriented. Those goals create a foundation, and they are then followed up by the teacher inquiring about what the children already know and what they want to learn. This process involves actively listening to the children's words, recording them, and reflecting on them. This reflective process also requires the teacher to be open to new ideas, to recognize and keep her own expectations about the direction she thinks inquiries should take in check, and to be tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty. These reflections are used to inspire and create opportunities for exploration and critical thinking based on the children's ideas.

Through the teacher's role as facilitator, she provides these opportunities for explorative risk taking, problem solving, and independence. She does this by preparing materials and making resources available, continually asking questions, and motivating students to ask their own questions and find their own answers. These processes are informative and are strategies this teacher uses to organize and develop her emergent curriculum that can be adopted and adapted by others wanting to follow this path.

However, Jane's planning book, though it may look like a traditional teacher planning book, is used in a manner that is very unique to her own process. Her personal journals and mind maps are also uniquely her own. These organizational strategies can be used as guides for teachers to develop their own strategies, but they are not directly transferable from her to another teacher. For example, in the preschool that I own and operate, one preschool teacher has developed a personal style of organizing and documenting the learning process by utilizing Internet blogging and Instagram. This is also a way that she can make her classroom transparent, make learning visible, and connect families and the wider education community.

While some strategies are unique to the individual teacher, the strategies Jane uses for selecting materials to provoke inquiry can be learned. More research in this area is needed to give adequate guidance to teachers on how to develop the skill. Other important skills Jane has honed through her years of teaching that contribute to her ability to develop a rich emergent curriculum include reflecting on her own curricular expectations, an openness to noticing her mistakes, being flexible, and planning in real time. Inquiries don't often go as expected and it is the teacher's job to notice what is working and what is not working, where the children's interests are going, and adjust in the moment. These are vital skills and strategies that develop with intentionality, experience, and professional development.

Lastly, Jane's use of documentation to make learning visible in her classroom is critical to her process of curricular development. It is a key component in the Reggio Emilia approach and can be utilized in any classroom, regardless of the approach to learning that is implemented. Documentation is used to communicate what happens in

the classroom to families, to represent children's work, as a reflective tool for teachers, and to connect with the education community at large.

During the interviews, Jane provided a wealth of information about her thought processes for developing an emergent curriculum. She also showed vulnerability by exposing her insecurities about teaching in her early years, her struggles about where to go and when she got it wrong, and she also revealed that she recognized when she missed opportunities. These are qualities that are relatable and human, and might be surprising for other teachers to see her expose. She described her evolution as a teacher, and she takes a critical look at her own pedagogy. She is truly on a life-long pursuit of professional development. That journey for and openness to new learning shows qualities of reflective practice such as recognizing her own mistakes, tolerance of ambiguity, questioning her ideas and expectations, and being flexible to change.

Practitioner research is another fundamental element among Reggio Emilia educators. The concept of the lifelong learner is embraced, and the idea that there is always something new to learn from and about children, teaching, and learning is essential to the approach. Being able to capitalize on this already occurring practice could provide researchers with the context necessary for a deeper understanding of emergent curriculum development. Research done by teachers or individuals who are already part of the classroom's daily activities would create more opportunities for capturing relevant data. Although I attempted to collect and use classroom observations as supporting data, I wish I had been able to witness the dynamic evolution of a project in action. Being able to watch and record the process as it unfolds would allow the researcher to paint a richer picture of the developing

curriculum as well as add to the information gathered through interviews. Asking the teacher to report back as a project emerges and having the flexibility to adjust data collection times to capture the phenomenon could be another way to gather this relevant data. Or, perhaps, the researcher could provide the teacher with guided questions to record their own field notes throughout the school year. Additionally, seeking out more teachers to interview and observe, who successfully implement an emergent curriculum model, would enable the researcher to look into differences and similarities of the process each teacher uses.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daniella attended the University of Florida where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in special education in 2001, a Master of Education degree in early childhood education in 2002, and a Specialist in Education degree in curriculum and instruction in 2005. She taught kindergarten at a Gainesville private school and was an administrator of a local summer camp. In 2005, Daniella opened a small, local preschool in the area. She was then accepted to the doctoral program in special education at the University of Florida, which she began in 2010.