

The Importance of Play

It is during infancy and early childhood that children are flooded with new experiences that impact their brain development. The first 3 years of a child's life offer parents an amazing opportunity (and accompanying responsibility) to shape their child's growth and form healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Parents want the best for their children, and the research tells us that it is the "Everyday Experiences" that will give your child the best start. It is the positive connections from the outside world, and the good early experiences that build the foundation for school readiness and life-long success. Parents can ensure a school-ready child by making sure that the early years are filled with rich, healthy, and fulfilling relationships.

Play nourishes every aspect of children's development – it forms the foundation of intellectual, social, physical, and emotional skills necessary for success in school and life. Play "paves the way" for learning.



Emergent Curriculum

What does Emergent mean? Emergent can refer to anything coming into view or existence such as new shoots sprouting from the earth in the spring. During this time of growth we are prompted to water and feed the sprout to ensure its vigour and yield...emergent can therefore also refer to something requiring prompt action such as our attention to the plant. In addition, emergent can also indicate something occurring unexpectedly; perhaps the new sprout grows much taller than we expect or produces more blooms than we imagined.

We can use this analogy to explain what an emergent curriculum looks like. When a child enters a Best Start Centre they have the opportunity to explore a variety of “open-ended” materials, that is, materials that allow the child to determine how they will use them. Emergent Curriculum starts with the child’s interest. This is the shoot sprouting! Now it is up to the educator and parents to ask the questions to further the child’s learning. Essentially, the adults feed the sprout. We may be surprised at the child’s responses and where the questions take us. In the following illustration a child comes into the playroom and is interested in a display of rocks.

He says, “I found a rock on a beach.”

The educator replies, “You did! Tell me about it.”

“Well, it wasn’t actually a rock. It was an arrowhead.”

“Really! Wow! What did you do with it?”

“I was gonna skip it across the water, but my friend said I should keep it ‘cause it was special.”

“An arrowhead is a rare find. So, what did you do then?”

“I took it home and I keep it in a special place ‘cause it’s treasure!”

You can see that this discussion, through further open-ended questioning, could lead in many directions. Perhaps the child will want to explore Native culture, weaponry, or pirates! Or maybe he’ll drop the subject and go on to something else. This short example provides a snapshot of how an emergent curriculum approach is based upon the child’s interests as opposed to a theme determined by the programmer. However, educators and parents play a vital role in the questions they ask, and the resources they provide, to help the children further their learning. The children will be developing lifelong learning skills in a manner that is fun, engaging and interesting to them.

What does an Emergent Curriculum environment look like? When you enter our Best Start Centres you will notice neutral, warm colours with comfortable wood furniture, creative lighting, plants and lots of natural items. The playrooms have been organized into places of learning: a block area, a household area, an infant area, an art area and other areas that effectively combine toys with real tools, utensils and household items. Children’s paintings, sculptures and ongoing projects are on display to reflect their learning experiences. Emergent Curriculum environments are often referred to as “living’ classrooms because they are always changing based on the interests of the children that enter them. In an emerging curriculum environment “everything is developing” as opposed to “everything is predetermined”.

Why Emergent Curriculum? The Emergent Curriculum is not a new idea. Based on the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, the first emergent curriculum classroom is attributed to Malaguzzi who opened a preschool in Reggio Emilia in northern Italy just after World War II. Many preschools and schools have dabbled in the Emergent Curriculum but not so many have fully embraced it. The Ontario Ministry of Education is now promoting, supporting and implementing the Emergent Curriculum in preschools, schools and Early Years Centres and many other settings across the province. It is truly an exciting time in education for parents to know that their child's interests will be at the heart of their learning from birth.

Where does Curriculum fit in? A curriculum, simply put, is a list of what educators intend students to learn. It might seem, when everything is child led, that there will be no intentional learning. However, you can see that an educator or parent could still direct things depending on the questions they ask. Although the adults may sometimes guide and direct a situation, the important aspect is that the children do the thinking throughout the process.

