

Journeys Toward:

Emergent Curriculum

Carrie Melsom

In 2000 I went to my first workshop about Emergent Curriculum. It was put on by the Certification Council and one of the presenters was Carol Anne Wein, author, deep thinker and believer in the synergy that teachers and children thinking together can create. That timeline isn't bad considering the term was popularized in 1994 by Elizabeth Jones and John Nimmo in their book *Emergent Curriculum*. Not bad for me, not bad for Nova Scotia and not surprising either.

In addition to Carol Anne's work with Peter Green Hall and others in Nova Scotia, we have Susan Stacey, author of *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings* and *The Unscripted Classroom*. Susan teaches pre-primary children, offers professional development around the province and most recently began to teach an Emergent Curriculum course to students at the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education. She is joined in that effort by Liz Hicks, another amazing advocate of an emergent approach. It's not surprising that early childhood educators and

ELCC programs are exploring the potential of this approach in their classrooms.

Learning like any change can lead to disequilibrium

“Some hear, put away your plans, in an emergent curriculum the children do what they want.”

and discomfort. The workshops, the conversations we are having in our programs, the excitement, the confusion, the misinformation and the resistance; all are perfectly normal parts of any change process. Any time we journey

together we have those who bound on ahead, eager and early adopters, those who get inspired along the way, those who wonder why we're bothering, and those who dig in their heels

because they are fine where they are. The challenge of being strung out along the path is that different people hear different information. From somewhere along the road comes a garbled message, distorted in a typical *telephone game* fashion. At the front of the path Elizabeth Jones is saying “curriculum emerges from each teacher's *playful interaction* with the individu-

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A Message from the Director

Kia Ora ECE Colleagues:

Kia ora is a Māori language greeting which means literally “be well/healthy” and is translated as an informal “hi”

As some of you know I recently participated in a New Zealand educational study tour titled “*Inspire – Professional Learning for Teachers*” in conjunction with Margie Carter from Harvest Resources. This focused learning opportunity included visits to a number of cutting edge early childhood centres providing provocations for deep thinking. I have not had a chance to organize my thoughts, my journal writings or my 400+ photographs but I would love to offer you a brief “taste” of my adventure. To give you a context, it took 35 hours to get to Auckland, NZ but it was worth every minute of travel. In spite of the fact that this was a working

Inside this issue:

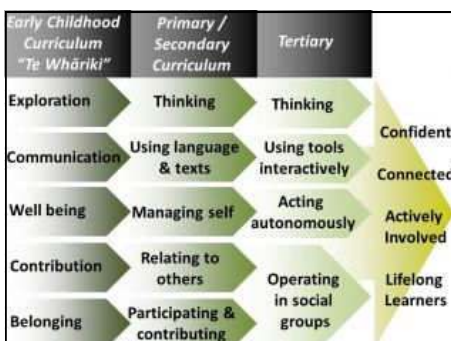
- *Kia Ora Continued*
 - *In the Resource Centre*
 - *Emergent Curriculum Continued*
- A publication informing the early childhood education community of events, services and professional development opportunities offered by the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education*

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Reflections on New Zealand ECE

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A graphic showing the values and learning outcomes that are the foundation of education in New Zealand.

holiday, the sky was blue, the temperature was 25 degrees and the ocean was amazing. I swam every day!

You may be asking yourself – why New Zealand? Margie Carter has been leading this tour for the last 8 years because in 1996 New Zealand adopted a national child care curriculum (Te Whāriki) which serves as the basis for consistent high



An invitation for children. Notice how child portfolios are accessible so children can revisit their learning.

quality early childhood services. Within a socio-cultural context each program is expected to honour New Zealand's bi-cultural population. This year there were 35 participants from Australia, the USA and four of us from Canada.

Everything in New Zealand's culture reflects a high image of children and those who teach them. This curriculum framework is based on the premise that relationships and environments have a direct impact on the learning and development of children. And oh what environments I had

the privilege of seeing! I observed environments that reflected, without words, the core values of the organizations by making the learning visible to all who entered. I also observed teachers who demonstrated a trust and respect for the competence of each child. These ECEs are encouraged to think and create a thinking culture, and are open to multiple ways of doing the work.



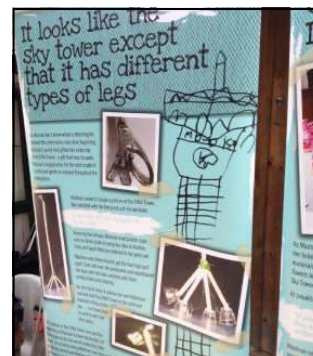
The principles and strands of the Te Whāriki Curriculum weave together to support the child's learning and development. Notice how the Maori language and culture forms part of the mat for all children. For more visit (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies.aspx>)

Woven throughout Te Whāriki is the child's voice, asking us questions as we build relationships:

- Can I trust you?
- Do you know me?
- Is this a fair place for me?
- Do you hear me?
- Do you let me fly?

When we can answer "yes" to all of these questions we are valuing the learner as well as his/her knowledge and skills.

I was pleased to discover that NSCECE is ahead of many other parts of the world in its journey towards deep reflective practice for early childhood education. What began as informal discussion 5 or 6 years ago



An example of how teachers took a child's passion about the Eiffel Tower, one that had been inspired by the gift of a keychain, and honoured her work and explorations through documentation.

amongst several forward thinkers in our province, exploded into action after the 2011 conference with Margie Carter (the leader of this study tour). We as an organization committed at that time to changing our focus from telling teachers how to improve to offering a "thinking lens" to develop teacher's own voices.

Two things became crystal clear during my visit:

- The province of Nova Scotia must develop a Curriculum Framework for early childhood education that supports our work with children and families and makes clear the connections between our work and the rest of the education system.
- We cannot give up on a National Child Care plan.



Children have access to work-in-progress cards. They can save and return to work that is not finished. The message is clear—the children's intentions, play and process are respected and valued.

As you can tell I am very excited and motivated by my experiences in New Zealand and will be creating a presentation to share with the ECE community - TBA.

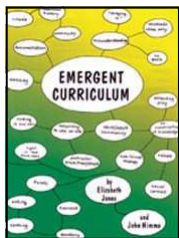
Hei kona ra,

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In the Resource Centre

The Resource Centre has many learning materials and books available to support you in your exploration of emergent curriculum models. You can look for membership information and check out our on-line toy inventory at www.nscece.ca.



Emergent Curriculum (372 J0)

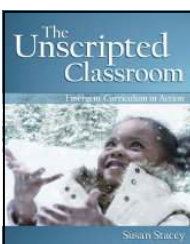
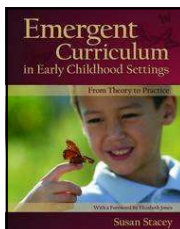
The classic, a year long exploration of an invented centre engaged in the process of exploring and adopting emergent curriculum processes while they try to balance the realities of what it might

mean for teachers, children and families.

Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings: From Theory to Practice (372 ST-E)

How do you capture a process that develops organically, tendrils off and meets up with itself again? This book highlights and explains some

of the skills and tasks that occur during the process of creating curriculum in partnership with children. Teacher stories and children's voices are prominent throughout. Many of the stories shared are from Nova Scotia.



The Unscripted Classroom: Emergent Curriculum in Action (372 ST-U)

The stories continue in Susan Stacey's second book which picks up on the creative nature of the emergent curriculum process. Attention

is paid to documentation, creating curriculum with toddlers and the role of administrators in supporting an emergent approach.

The Play's the Thing: Teachers' Roles in Children's Play (372.2 J)

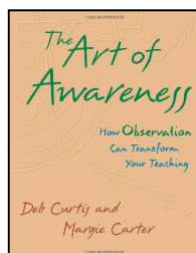
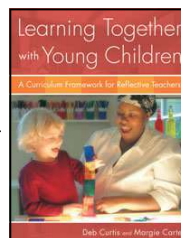
This book provides some answers to questions about the possible roles of early



childhood educators in fostering, provisioning, supporting, planning and communicating about children's play. It puts play front and centre and challenges us to think about our work with children in new ways. Playful curriculums are learning curriculums and teachers have powerful roles in classrooms that embrace play.

Learning Together With Young Children: A Curriculum Framework for Reflective Teachers (372 CU)

Full of photos and provocations this book encourages teachers to reflect on the practices and principles that are foundations for classroom culture and curriculum development. It is full of stories and visibly grounded in the theory and philosophy of early childhood education.

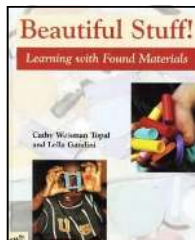


The Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching (371.2 CU)

The first task of any teacher seeking to engage in an emergent curriculum process is to reconnect with the power of observation. This book offers a series of self-study sessions designed to pull teachers back into the joy and wonder of observing children .

Beautiful Stuff! Learning With Found Materials (372 T0)

Peek in on the process of an emerging curriculum that has been beautifully documented by Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini. The roles of the teachers in planning, scaffolding and supporting the curriculum is clear.



Resource Centre Discussion & Support Groups



All Together Now! Inclusion Support Group

We meet 9:00—11:00 AM on the last Thursday of each month at the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education. Join colleagues for facilitated discussion about issues relating to inclusive early learning programs. Share strategies, insights, and challenges as part of a learning community.

The Leading Edge: A Discussion Group for Administrators

A discussion and support group for people who have a leadership role in an early childhood program. This facilitated group meets 10:00—Noon, the second Thursday of each month in the NSCECE Resource Centre.

For more information:

Call Carrie Melsom

423-7114 Ext. 227

Resource Centre services are offered with support from the Department of Community Services, Early Childhood Education Training Initiative.



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NSCECE students get acquainted with the potentials of clay in Curriculum I. They explore its qualities and consider how they might offer it to children.

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Emergent Curriculum Journey

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als comprising a particular group of children ... curriculum emerges from the play of children and the play of teachers. It is *co-constructed* by the children and the adults and the environment itself." (Jones, 2012:67)

Further down the path the message is heard, "Follow the children's lead." Which somewhere along the line turns into "Put away your plans, in emergent curriculums the children do what they want." By the time the message gets to the resisters it has turned into "The children can do whatever they want", a clear recipe for chaos in a group care setting. I don't blame teachers for saying "Not in my room."

In 1977 Elizabeth Jones wrote:

"Curriculum is what happens in an educational environment. It may be prescribed, emergent, or accidental and unidentified. Because preplanned curriculum may be merely arbitrary for the individual child, and because accidental curriculum lends

itself neither to evaluation nor to teacher education, the importance of developing emergent curriculum models has been increasingly recognized." (Cited in Jones, 2012:67)

Emergent curriculum models are process models that put the child in the centre of the curriculum. Here the child takes an active role in determining questions for exploration. Children are supported in this by teacher observations, teacher professional knowledge and teacher planning for learning. When you hear "put away your plans" it means put away the plans you made for that other group of children, put away the plans you saved in a file folder and get engaged with understanding the learning that is happening with or without you, right now. In her book *Emergent Curriculum* (2009:5) Susan Stacey writes, "In its practice, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator, taking what she sees and hears, and bringing to children the opportunity to discover more, dig deeper, and construct further knowledge." In an emergent curric-



Sources of Emergent Curriculum

- Children's interests
- Teacher's interests
- Developmental Tasks
- Things in the physical environment
- People in the social environment
- Serendipity—unexpected events
- Living together: conflict resolution, caregiving and routines
- Values held in the school and community, family and culture

Jones (March 2012:68) *Young Children*, Adapted from Jones & Nimmo (1994:127)

ulum we use children's interests rather than merely follow them—child interests are a possible starting point, not the end point. For more on this idea see, [NQS_PLP_E-Newsletter_NO37.pdf](#) from earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au.