What happens when teachers share ownership of the project documentation process with four & five year old children?

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Session purpose & description

Purpose: To explore what happens when shared teacher/child ownership of emergent curriculum is extended to making decisions about documenting project work.

Agenda: We will describe our approach in the 4/5K classroom to Reggio-inspired emergent curriculum at a university laboratory/demonstration preschool. We will share our insights and examples over six years of shared decision-making with children about:

- Collaborating with children
- Documenting process
- Choosing media format(s)
Campus demonstration/model program in the SOE since 1974
- Lab school/research site (@ 900-1000 visitors annually)
- One class each 2’s (12), 3’s (15), 4/5K (28)
- 4 Master teachers, 5 GA’s, 20-25 student TA’s
- NAEYC accredited & state licensed child care
- Primarily campus-affiliated families
- Fully inclusive program
- 4/5K class is multi-age (4-6) with @ third to half of the group that return for second year in class.
ECDC Curriculum (4/5K group)

- Carefully articulated eclectic approach
- Assessment system aligned with SC Early Learning Standards
- Literacy program loosely based on Lucy Caulkins' Writing Workshop
- Extensive use of Montessori materials for math
- Reggio-inspired emergent curriculum

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### Documentation Context

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Documentation as an ‘emergent’ process:

- It never occurred to us NOT to include children in decision-making about documentation – it seemed to fit with our concept of “emergent” curriculum
- Looping class demographic seems to generate “trends”
- Documentation work with children becomes part of the curriculum
Collaborating with children:

Initial ideas come from the children about possible formats

Practical questions
- Time and space to carry out ideas
- Expertise
- Flexible options for participation
- At this point, meeting standards are not a primary consideration
First Attempts

The Village: Dinosaur Island

- Children asked to construct large scaled model in MP room
- Ongoing work [including planning documents] posted in room as documentation.
- “Tours” of the village

The Dinosaur Study

- Natural extension of village project (dinosaur museum)
- Two parallel documentation processes emerge:
  - Insistence on movie, “The Dinosaurs Help”
  - First attempt at using PPT to document
- Created web-based format that proved too cumbersome

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24 foot python project

- Representation of learning entirely decided by children (paper model)
- Driven by interest in measurement & obsession to ‘get it right’ (e.g. 24’)
- Other products generated by children – book of poems
- Other products generated by adults - Photostory

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The finished 24 foot python
The Fancy Dress Project

Part A: pattern making & field work
- Fashion show
- Sketching
- Making patterns
- Storing in closet
- Trip to museum

Pt. B: fashion show/museum exhibit
- Children originally planned a fashion show.
- Field work @ museum produced change of focus & decision to do exhibit w/ opening & saving/display of planning documents, sketches, etc.
- High level of confidence from earlier ‘event-planning’ activities
- Teachers felt need to write book documenting both project and kids’ methods of documenting their work
The Rain Forest/Owl Forest

Spring – Rain Forest
- Kids insisted on forest in the hallway
- Teachers high level of confidence in children’s ability to make decisions
- Continuing themes of “size matters” as represented by perspective & proportion

Fall – returning children
- Almost identical format for representing learning
- Entirely different goals for learning that was represented
- Examples of important details – i.e. black netting to cover trees

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Insights gained

- Trusting children’s instincts
- Adults’ understanding of emergent curriculum informed
- Importance of mentoring and supporting intellectual risk-taking
- Metacognitive: documenting the documentation....

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# Work in Progress: Voices in the Park Project

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