

# PORTFOLIO PRESENTATION

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Early Childhood Education  
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## INTRODUCTION

August of 2007 saw me take a new step in my career path with the start of the Early Childhood Education Master's Program at SSU. Until that point my work had been unfocused. An undergraduate in English Literature, I taught at the elementary level for a year following college. Though I realized elementary public school was not for me, working with children still compelled me. After a four-year stint in publishing, I left to have a baby.

When my son was six months old, I opened an in-home childcare, now called Happy Baby Small School. Almost instantly I knew I had found the right career, combining a desire to work with children holistically—from their food and environment to their relationships with each other and their community—with my penchant for organized administrative duties and public outreach. As a life-long learner and persistent taker of classes, the jump to a graduate degree was not far. From the start my goal has been to unite professional interests with expanding my program. In the nearly two and half years since starting at SSU, I have successfully integrated my studies into the daily work of my program, constantly accessing the theoretical basis for much of my practical application. No sooner do I read an interesting study or article or have a fascinating in-class discussion, then I turn and talk to a co-teacher about it and put some part of what I've learned into practice with the group of now twelve toddlers, twos and preschooler in my program, as well as three co-teachers, a music teacher, and an art teacher.

Nearing the end my Master's studies, I see how far I have come on many fronts: intellectually—I can energetically research a new topic, understand it, discuss and apply the findings to my work; professionally—my studies have added to my self-confidence and bolstered my

credibility within my community, Berkeley (a town that highly prizes education) as well as continually adding to my program; personally—I have encountered multiple perspectives and gained insight from my studies, though, importantly, I have expanded my network of colleagues, from other students to the professors with whom I've worked. Before I began at SSU, I felt extremely isolated by the nature of my work as an in-home provider, but over the years I have not only connected to my fellow teachers, but also sought out new staff to work with, people interested in having the same kinds of conversations we have in class, thereby extending my circle of professional connection.

Another key result of my time at Sonoma State has been to learn how to approach project management. As an excruciatingly busy teacher, I have appreciated the opportunity to systematically refine my goals based on my professional needs and interests and to then research, write and reflect on those goals and interests. In my time in the ECE program I have gotten to read much of the major literature about unstructured nature play, documentation, and the Reggio Emilia approach, all of which I have then applied to my teaching or used for parent education.

In the following portfolio, I hope to show the depth of my work in these areas as well as meeting the Master's portfolio criteria.

## ORGANIZATION OF PORTFOLIO

Included are eight projects and papers stemming primarily from my early childhood education coursework. Following each project is a short reflection describing what I think I achieved in the production of the assignment. The descriptions contain references to the portfolio criteria requirements.

**Nature Play:  
Benefits, Challenges  
& The Ideal Play Environment**

Stephanie Agnew

EDEC 531

November 11, 2007

*“And then there is the world of little things, seen all too seldom. Many children, perhaps because they themselves are small and closer to the ground than we, notice and delight in the small and inconspicuous... Some of nature’s most exquisite handiwork is on a miniature scale, as anyone knows who has applied a magnifying glass to a snowflake.”*

Rachel Carson (1965, p.59)

I am seven years old, perched high in the hundred year-old oak tree in our back yard. I stare intently at the crevices in the bark, watching the insects move in the freeways lined with moss. Almost any day would find me in that tree, with its bent limbs propped on the ground with lumber, a tire swing attached to one giant branch. I mastered balance, climbing, and gained upper arm strength in that tree. Sad times could take me to it just to find solitude, a place to listen to the leaves blow through the branches. I remember clearly the rough bark on my bare feet and legs, the feeling of the knots on my fingers as I reached higher and higher. This tree was my playground, offering me an experiential, multi-sensory natural place that fostered a love of the outdoors and brought great happiness. All young children should experience nature in such a way, seeking out its pleasures, and examining its microcosms. As an early childhood educator, I see the shift in children when we move outside. They run, jump, yell, dig, pour, examine, sit, climb, smell, touch and feel. We spend large parts of everyday outdoors, sharing in the discovery of the world we live in, which led me to these questions: Why is outdoor nature play important for young children? What are the challenges to children’s nature play? What does the ideal natural play space involve? The purpose of this study is to examine closely the value of nature play, the reasons modern children have reduced access to nature, what the potential impact might be, and how we can change our spaces to better include nature.

## **Benefits of Nature Play**

What do children get from their time in nature? Why is it so vital that children share in our natural world? Richard Louv (2006) answers it simply, “Children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity.” (p.54). Nature brings us to our senses.

Human beings are a part of the natural world. Being continually sheltered, exposed to mechanized air and artificial light, without the space to move freely is not a natural way for any human being to live, and young children need to have variety in their sensory experiences in order to develop them fully. Moore (1997) writes, “Children live through their senses. Sensory experiences link the child’s exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world.” (p. 205). The sensory experience children receive in nature is elemental. They need the varying temperature of the wind on their faces, the sensation of rain on their heads, the warmth of the sun on their backs. They need to dig in the fresh black soil, examine earthworms inching through their hands. They need to pour water into holes to watch it seep away, in order to develop all of their senses and to build curiosity, often cited as a motivating force in learning. In Kellert’s (2005) study of the effects of nature on children’s development, he writes,

“Experiencing nature during childhood engenders both curiosity and the passion to learn that reflects a willingness to give and receive information, facts, and ideas. By interacting with the natural world, children encounter a matrix of diverse and stimulating opportunities to engage such affective capacities as wonder, imagination, and joy. Children’s experience of nature provides a source of deep and enduring emotional significance throughout people’s lives.” (p.73)

The choices available to children in nature are limitless and lasting. Moore and Wong's (1997) research in the transformation of a Berkeley elementary school play yard in the 1970s reveals this quote from a student, on the potential for return to a traditional asphalt covered yard: "It would just be hot and gray. There wouldn't be any color left. Kids would just sit around and do nothing." (p. 185). Given the choice, a child would often rather be in a world of color and dirt, prompted to learning by their own curiosity.

The earth as a whole benefits from children's exposure to nature. Rivkin (1997) poses the question, "Does not knowing lead to not caring?" (p. 62). Children without experience in the natural world have little call to care for it, leading, perhaps, to further destruction of our already declining environment. Moore and Wong (1997) state, "Without continuous hands-on primary experience, it is impossible for children to acquire a deep intuitive understanding of the natural world that is the foundation of sustainable development." (p.194). If children will become the future stewards of the earth, they need to have first-hand experience with it. Humans need nature, but nature needs humans too.

Malone and Tranter (2003) discuss the cognitive benefits of outdoor play in their research at several different Australian primary schools. They also looked at the effect on social/emotional development as well as physical. They mapped the school yards into zones connected with specific domains: sandpits, gardens, and bush/forested areas were grouped to support cognitive activities; fixed structures, paved areas, and lawns were in support of physical activities; tables and benches were supporting social activities. They did not exclude the domains based on the zones in their

findings. Malone and Tranter found that the school with the most natural setting and variety in its school grounds was also the school with most opportunities for outdoor “informal” curriculum.

School grounds provide access to real-life natural experiences (...living and non-living things, biodiversity, life-cycling, recycling, and food webs) —the possibilities are endless. As well as these connections with the ‘natural’ world a diverse and well-designed play environment provides and opportunity to develop important lessons on cooperation, ownership, belonging, respect and responsibility.” (p. 289)

Two-fifths of the observed play in the Orana School, which had a pine forest on its grounds, were identified as cognitive activities, defined by the researchers as constructing, interacting with nature, exploring the environments, and imaginative play. In contrast, the school with the least amount of vegetation had no cognitive play activities observed. Interestingly, the children at Orana saw the school grounds as an “extension of their overall learning—the boundaries seem transparent.” (p. 298). Moore (1997) also often cites the cognitive benefits of nature play. He writes “Natural settings ... integrate informal play with formal learning in the natural learning cycles and thus help build the cognitive constructs necessary for sustained intellectual development.” (p. 205). Malone and Tranter (2003) point out the benefits of the flexibility of the natural play space, writing,

...[A]n environment that offers the opportunity for the child to climb or hide underneath elements, or contains features that are manipulative or malleable, is perceived, used and transformed in different ways at different stages of the child’s development. Therefore, there is a developmental dimension to the environment, just as there is for the individual child.

(p. 290)

Nature is dynamic, ever changing and shifting. What was true in the fall won't necessarily be true in winter. Textures, temperatures, sights, and sounds all transform as the year cycles. Nature changes as children change. The cyclical aspect of the natural environment makes it perfectly suited to the developing needs of children. This is a profound idea, especially when contrasted with the static environment of a climate controlled classroom or single-use ball area on a paved playground.

The dynamism of the outdoor play environment and what it brings to a child's education should have special meaning to educators. We should appreciate what nature can share with us for the development of our curricula. How wonderful is the moment when we find something small happening outside with a child and savor the moment by observing closely, noting the occurrence, discussing it? By connecting the formal and informal (or hidden) curricula we can expand both the children's world and our own. So often, however, the outside is just seen as a place to "blow off steam" between heavy lessons. Malone and Tranter (2003) discuss this phenomenon:

The 'surplus energy theory' so powerful in play theory has been the most influential model applied to the design of school grounds and the view of the child in relation to the outdoor environment. Indeed, school grounds have typically been seen as areas for play and sport, and not for education and the serious stuff of schooling. (p. 289)

While outdoor play is an excellent place to engage in gross motor play, it is certainly not the only domain well suited for nature. Kellert (2005) writes, "Nature provides young people with diverse and challenging opportunities for affective and cognitive growth. These experiences present many ways for children to cope and adapt, often in contrast to the ambiguity and complexity of their

dealings with adults.” (p. 74). No man made environment could hope to offer the same variety and benefits that nature can.

### **The Challenges to Nature Play**

What are the challenges to nature play? Why have children moved inside? Why are they kept on paved yards? Rivkin (1995, 1997, 2000), Louv (2006), Kellert (2005) and Moore (1997) echo many of the same reasons, including the reduction in unstructured playtime and rigidly defined schedules for young children as reasons for the separation from nature. Rivkin (1997) writes,

The institutionalizing of children, beginning with school, and now child care, has been extended to include team sports, lessons, and camps. The hours spent transporting children among institutions also reduce children’s time for outdoor exploration and play. (p. 62)

Moore (1997) also refers to the reduction and elimination of recess. Another often cited reason is urbanization and its effects, such as increased traffic and pollution, and decreased natural space. (Kellert 2005, Moore 1997, Rivkin 1995, 1997, 2000, Louv 2006) Fear is a factor in these reasons too: fear of the sun’s UV rays, fear of crime and drugs, fear of violence, especially directed toward children (Rivkin, 2000). Moore writes about Louv’s concept of the “Bogeyman Syndrome” (Moore, 1997), an idea Louv re-visited 2006. The Syndrome includes the media induced panic about stranger dangers, such as random child abductions by strangers and poisoned Halloween candy. Louv believes that the Bogeyman syndrome has also extended its climate of fear to nature itself, from well-publicized, though rare, bear attacks, and West-Nile virus carrying mosquitoes to serial killers roaming in national parks.

Yet another cause for children's distance from nature play includes the shift in family and neighborhood patterns (Rivkin 1995, 1997, Moore 1997). In earlier times, at least one parent was often home during daytime hours, thus creating "multi-mothered supervision" network (Moore p. 204). With the reduction of available adults dependence on electronic media (television, video games, and computers) has increased, further distracting children from outdoor play, vying for children's limited time (Rivkin 1997, Moore 1997). Moore writes about two other causes that have enclosed children: the first is the prevalence of air-conditioning, creating indoor comfort that did not exist in earlier times. The second is the commercialization of play, likely a reaction to the reduction of play spaces. In many urban areas, the only available playgrounds are in fast-food restaurants. Children have to pay to play in our modern era, tightly scheduled "play-dates", being shuffled into cars and driven to an indoor "bounce-house", or paying to play on a soccer team, often to be stuck on the bench. These are the play opportunities available to children now. Where will it lead us?

Moore (1997) and Rivkin (1995,1997) write about the general culture's pull away from nature. What about school? What are the challenges for children's nature play in school? Malone and Tranter's (2003) research led them to discover that part of what keeps children from nature is the "surplus energy model" discussed above. They also learned that educator opinion is a key component. The idea that formal and informal curriculum do not meet outside is a philosophical prejudice that must be overcome by educators and administrators if children are to experience what nature has to offer. When asked why they didn't consider nature play in their formal curriculum, the staff and administration of the schools where Malone and Tranter researched cited lack of facilities,

but the authors observed that all the schools has at least some area that could be developed for nature play. Malone and Tranter concluded,

Therefore, the school ground design, although instrumental in the potential for extending curricula, is not as vital as having a view of learning that does not distinguish between the outdoor-indoor environments. ...[T]he child's desire to connect with nature in a meaningful way is more overtly circumscribed by the school philosophy than the lack of resources.

(p.299)

What is needed, then, is a fundamental shift in our thinking and in the design of our educational environments. We need to connect indoor and outdoor spaces, and work with teachers and administrators to implement the time and resources to create more natural play spaces that integrate formal and informal curricula. Children also need to feel a part of the curriculum process. Moore and Wong (1997) write, "Children need educational settings that immerse them in a feeling of ownership of their learning process. To be motivated to learn, children must feel that they are discovering their own path ..." (p.196). Unless children feel validated in their own interests and explorations, the drive to learn will not be activated. By allowing children to explore the work they live in, we can connect the informal outdoor curriculum of their interests to the formal curriculum we might be required to teach.

### **Ideal Natural Play Spaces**

What does it look like? How can we adapt our existing play spaces to be more nature friendly and therefore more child-friendly? Rivkin (1997) suggests starting with small-scale projects, such as birdbaths, butterfly gardens, native plantings, and compost piles. The informal learning available

from those few changes is apparent: life cycles, wildlife observations, and local environment awareness. Rivkin (2000) also suggests that low hills, sand areas, trees that change with the seasons and most especially, water, are all necessary for “greening” our play areas. She also asserts the importance of “private spaces”, citing Humphries’ quote, as places available “to get away from our enemies and our friends.” (p.64). One can imagine the desire of a child in almost any school wanting to create a hide-away place, a small cave of solitude, a place to listen and be quiet, to observe and rest, all in wonder of the natural world.

Moore and Wang (1997) are explicit in their design for outdoor nature spaces, including the following features:

- Entrances
- Pathways
- Fences and enclosures
- Carefully selected manufactured play equipment
- Safety precautions
- Landforms
- Trees and other vegetation
- Animal habitats
- Water features
- Play props
- Working, gathering, and social areas
- Performance areas

- Storage
- Multipurpose game areas

Diversity and organization in the play setting is important, leading to for curricular options for play and learning. Malone and Tranter (2003) also discuss the optimal facilities at Orana School when they write, "... the area most valued by children was the forest, which contained trees and loose natural (and some man-made) materials." (p. 300). Something as simple as a stand of trees can lead to the most pleasurable of play. Malone and Tranter also hit upon a valuable concept here, with reference to loose materials, also seen in Moore and Wong's (1997) list above as 'play props'. The theory of 'loose parts' comes from Simon Nicholson's influential 1971 article, stating "In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it." (p.30). This idea is echoed repeatedly in the literature related to children's outdoor nature play. Loose parts in nature include tree branches, sand, dirt, water, stumps, rocks, insects, leaves, plants, fruit, seeds, pinecones and water. To these elemental parts can be added choice man-made materials: shovels, lumber, PVC piping, plastic tubing, pullies, sheets and blankets, magnifying glasses, large and small containers, rope, tools, and many, many, other interesting fittings for young children's play. (Moore 1997, Moore & Wang 1997, Rivkin 1995, 1997, 2000).

Other items commonly included in descriptions of model nature play environments are:

- Children's Gardens, particularly ones they help design and maintain
- Sensory opportunities: smell, textures, beauty
- Presence of wildlife, both captive and free

- Places for gross motor movement: climbing, running, jumping, digging
- Places for exploration and scientific discovery
- Weather protection that still allows outdoor access (Rivkin 1995, 1997, 2000, Moore & Wong 1997, Malone & Tranter 2003, Louv 2006)

## **Conclusion**

Why is nature play important for children? They have an inborn need to be a part of the nature world into which they were born. Children have a right to nature. Educators, administrators and parents need to learn the benefits of nature play, which include physical, emotional, and cognitive, as well as benefits for society and the environment itself. They also need to be made aware of the challenges to nature play, including urbanization, fear, shifting family patterns, decreased play space, and a lack of unstructured time, in order to overcome them. Children must have safe, diverse spaces in which to play, with proper supervision, and, most importantly, the time in which to play in them. Educators must respect the value of the education gained in nature play and find ways to connect the formal and informal curricula. They need to realize that creating inviting outdoor nature spaces is not an overwhelming process, and can be started easily. Those play spaces can be as simple as a stand of trees, a few rocks, water, sand and some 'loose parts'.

Nature (the seemingly infinite universe of plants, animals, soils, precipitation, air movement, skylscapes, temperature, and light) is the best option because by being alive, it offers constantly changing diversity to the broadest range of possible interactions. It is the most open-ended experiential universe possible, supporting all the physical, social, and

psychological dimensions of development. It is the source of dynamic perceptions that stimulate thought and build knowledge. (Moore p.206)

Humans are limitless in their curiosity. By allowing children access to nature, we respect that inborn curiosity and activate it for all its potential. Children feel powerful knowing they are a part of “the seemingly infinite universe”, which helps them find their place in it.

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## REFLECTION

*Nature Play: Benefits, Challenges & the Ideal Play Environment* was the beginning of my research into the benefits of unstructured nature play for children, which has influenced my subsequent work at both Sonoma State and in my toddler program. As a result of this project, I developed the vocabulary for fully articulating the value of nature play, which has in turn made my toddler program very successful.

This was my first major paper as a graduate student. Initially I was most thrilled at the fact I did it and felt like I knew what I was talking about. Rereading it, I still feel good about it, though I can see where I would change parts. For instance, I think I referred too often to outside sources, making it more like a literature review in some ways, but since that time, my first semester, I have grown confident in expressing my own view, bolstered by research, but not always needing to quote from it. This has been a major area of growth for me both personally and professionally, as I have had a tendency to distrust my own opinions. Comparing it to more recent work, such as my action research project, *What We Want to Do Today*, I can see the maturing of my academic writing and research techniques.

*Nature Play* is also a good demonstration of my ability to broadly examine current aspects of educational research. I remember clearly our first semester introduction to graduate level research and my excitement that I would have access to so much material, and then my frustration that eventually I would have to stop researching, finish my project, and move on to the next assignment. Of course, I've never fully left this topic as it is a fundamental part of my program's vision, so much of this project's results will be carried into my future work.

Stephanie Agnew  
Final Project 531  
December 2, 2007  
Part One

*What Do We Mean by Child's Play?*

*"Within the dynamic processes of play and meaning, children demonstrate their power as agents in their own learning."*

(Fromberg, 2007 pg. 5)

Two two-year olds dig in the sand, carefully filling each cup of a muffin tin, and patting down the contents with the flat side of their shovels. Gently setting the tin on the ledge of the sand box, one gathers redwood mulch chips and carefully sprinkles the top. Meanwhile the other collects a handful of small twigs and straw and gently pokes them into each cup. One picks up the concoction and together they carefully weave their way through the other children in the yard towards the teacher, singing "Happy Birthday" to the best of their memories. The whole episode takes about twenty minutes. In that time these children have explored the sensory enriching textures of sand, mulch, and straw, worked together with concepts of volume, exercised balance, used hand-eye coordination, played with sounds and the phonemic awareness necessary for later literacy, showed persistence, and shared their own self-motivated joy with each other and their teacher, enacting a beloved socio-dramatic moment that displays their emotional and social security. This is child's play.

*Child's play*, a clichéd phrase meaning a simplistic act, could not be farther from the truth of children's play. Child's play, in action, is far more complex, involving all the domains of learning: cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. A child's inborn curiosity drives them to explore and discover the world around them, making play the most valuable way children learn.

**What is Play?**

Play is typically distinguished from other behaviors by:

- Involving active engagement: Is the child absorbed by what they are doing?
- Being intrinsically motivated: Did they choose their activity without thought to rewards or adult expectations?
- Paying attention to means rather than ends: Is the focus on the process, not the product?
- Freedom from external rules: Are the children creating the rules of the play?
- Involving non-literal behavior: Does it often involve an element of make-believe?

(Monighan-Nouret, P., Scales, B., Van Hoorn, J., 1987 pg. 15)

### **What do children learn from play?**

“Play is self-motivated practice in meaning making; its themes are repeated over and over until the child is satisfied that she’s got this *figured* out. In the process, she is acquiring learning strategies, knowledge, and skills.” (Jones 1992, pg. 10)

Young children learn best by doing. When a child’s whole being —hands, heart, and head— are involved in their activities they are better able to absorb what they are learning and make meaning for themselves. Freed from adult dictation, direct instruction, or overt moralizing— children choose what they need to learn in the moment. Many common goals of early education are impacted through play, which includes socio-dramatic, or pretend play, construction activities, art, music, movement, sand and water play, discovery and exploration, and nature play. (Dodge, Colker, Heroman 2002). The goals include:

- *Social & Emotional Development*

- *Development of a sense of self:* When a child's own motivating interests and efforts are supported and respected, a healthy self-identity blossoms.
  - *Responsibility for one's self & others:* Through play children have the opportunity to work collaboratively in groups or individually and create projects that often require necessary social skills, including negotiation, turn-taking, rule-making, planning, design, and enactment.
  - *Practicing Prosocial Behaviors:* Play allows imagination and creativity to flourish, especially within the framework of socio-dramatic play, where children can explore and act out different emotions through dolls, puppets, story-telling, or plays, allowing them to learn to effectively communicate with their peers and adults. Through play children also develop persistence, empathy, and self-control.
- ***Physical Development***
    - *Gross motor skills:* This is often the most visible aspect of children's play, where they gain mastery over the large muscle groups of the body and where they learn to control and deliberate their movements. Movement with music play is a grand way to build gross motor skills.
    - *Fine Motor Skills:* The development of the fine muscles of the body, necessary for hand-eye coordination and the use of small tools. Play offers endless opportunities for practice.

- *Sensory development:* Children are sensual creatures, and play allows them to connect with the multitude of textures, smells, sights, and sounds in the world, especially through outdoor and natural play.
- *Cognitive Development*
  - *Generalized Skills:* Through play, children experience problem solving, develop symbolic thought, begin to strategize, and develop creative thinking and imagination.
  - *Language and Literacy:* Children's freedom to play with words and sounds in a natural, relevant, and contextualized way allows them to develop the confidence and early skill mastery that leads to literacy, and more importantly, a love of learning. Story telling and dictation leads to narrative structure understanding. Singing and word plays create phonemic awareness and concepts of rhyme and rhythm.
  - *Logical & Mathematical:* Through blocks, construction, climbing, puzzles, experimental cooking, water play, and use of manipulatives, children learn classification, relational concepts, conservation, number symbolism, order and many other cognitive skills.

This is by no means an exhaustive list; other vital areas can be included, such as science, art, and discovery of the world. A child with access to a natural environment—one with trees, dirt, plants, rocks, sand, and water—has access to all she needs to become a budding scientist. Watching water flow and create pressure a child experiments with gravity and dams made of sand, waiting until the sand dissolves under the flow, this is science in action. The cycles of our natural world: day, year, life, all make for fascinating observation material. The spinning of a spider's web, a magnifying glass, and time are all some children need to spend

the better part of a morning completely lost in their own sense of wonder and curiosity.

Given quality playthings made of many materials and primarily open-ended in their actions, which include far more than toys, children can create meaning for themselves and begin to understand the complexities of their lives. Parents, educators, and society at large need to give them the respect, space, understanding, and most importantly *time*, in which to do it. *Child's play* needs a new meaning: doing something complicated, satisfying, creative, and wonderful.

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This paper can be found at [http://happybabydaycare.com/about\\_childs\\_play.php](http://happybabydaycare.com/about_childs_play.php)

The online presentation includes 27 photographs in a slide show presentation, and refers readers to an online survey.

### ***Part 2: Soliciting Feedback***

I chose to present my paper and collect it online, using the Survey Monkey website

([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to add more

content to my website and share what I have been learning with the people who visit my site.

As a student I was allowed a ten-question survey for free, which posed some challenges to the creation of the survey, but I still got some valuable feedback.

Here is the survey as presented:

**A. Clarity of Presentation**

1. How did you find the clarity of the presentation?

Very Clear

Moderately Clear

Not Clear at all

2. What was your opinion of the value of play-based education before reading the information?

I was interested, but didn't know very much

I was a believer

I was more "academically" or "direct-instruction" focused

I didn't have an opinion

3. Did you find the photos helpful for understanding the information?

Yes

No

I didn't look at the photos

Other comments about the photos

4. Do you value play more or less after reading the material?

I value play more

I value play less

I value play the same

Please share comments about the presentation

**B. Tell me about your children. . .**

Thanks for your opinions. I'm interested in the education choices you have made and in the demographic information of your children. Please answer the following questions.

1. What are the ages and genders of your child/children?

0-2

2-4

over 4

Boy

Girl

2. Please tell me what sort of educational environment your child or children are (or were) in (answer as many as necessary):

Co-Op    Play-Based    Montessori    Academic or Direct Instruction    Waldorf    I don't know    Other

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

Other (please specify):

3. How important was the presence of play in choosing the educational environment(s)?

Very Important

Fairly Important

Somewhat Important

Not Important at All

### C. Demographic information

Now I need some general demographic information. Thanks for your help!

1. What is your age and gender?

under  
25      25-29      30-34      35-40      41-45      46-50      over 50

Male

Female

2. What level of education have you completed?

High School

College

Graduate

Post-Graduate

3. What is your annual household income?

Less than \$50,000

\$50,000 to \$80,000

\$80,000 to \$100,000

\$100,000 to \$120,000

\$120,000 to \$150,000

\$150,000 to \$180,000

\$180,000 to \$200,000

Over \$200,000

### *Part 3: Gathering Responses*

I decided to send the link to my daycare program's web page to all of my current and past day care families. They are an interesting, well-educated, and helpful bunch of people, all with young children. From there, they could send it out to whomever they chose. Two of my daycare families have grandmothers that work in early childhood education, both who

responded. One of my former mother's has a doctorate in education, and another is a curriculum specialist who works in Jewish education, and a third is an elite private school teacher. Other professions of my families include: two doctors, a rabbi, a writer, a painter, a professional tuba player, a grant writer, several marketing people, an editor, newspaper reporters and columnists, mortgage broker, television producer, two social workers, a documentarian, a bookseller, researchers, a yoga teacher, a firefighter, and a real-life rocket scientist. Needless to say, it a smart group of people and I was a little intimidated when it came time to present, but over all I think it went well. It was an anonymous survey, and forty-one people responded. Here are the results:

**1. How did you find the clarity of the presentation:**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Very Clear</b>	<b>90.2%</b>	37
Moderately Clear	9.8%	4
Not Clear at all	0.0%	0
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**2. What was your opinion of the value of play-based education before reading the information?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
I was interested, but didn't know very much	36.6%	15
<b>I was a believer</b>	<b>56.1%</b>	23
I was more "academically" or "direct-instruction" focused	2.4%	1
I didn't have an opinion	7.3%	3
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**3. Did you find the photos helpful for understanding the information?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>87.8%</b>	36
No	9.8%	4
I didn't look at the photos	2.4%	1
	Other comments about the photos:	16
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**4. Do you value play more or less after reading the material?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>I value play more</b>	<b>73.2%</b>	30
I value play less	0.0%	0
I value play the same	26.8%	11

Please share comments about the presentation 10

4. Do you value play more or less after reading the material?

answered question

41

skipped question

0

**1. What are the ages and genders of your child/children?**

	<b>0-2</b>	<b>2-4</b>	<b>over 4</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Boy	47.6% (10)	57.1% (12)	9.5% (2)	21
Girl	31.8% (7)	63.6% (14)	9.1% (2)	22
	<b>answered question</b>			<b>38</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>			<b>3</b>

**2. Please tell me what sort of educational environment your child or children are (or were) in (answer as many as necessary):**

	<b>Co-Op</b>	<b>Play-Based</b>	<b>Montessori</b>	<b>Academic or Direct Instruction</b>	<b>Waldorf</b>	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Child 1	13.9% (5)	<b>91.7% (33)</b>	8.3% (3)	2.8% (1)	0.0% (0)	5.6% (2)	5.6% (2)	36
Child 2	10.0% (1)	<b>60.0% (6)</b>	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	30.0% (3)	10
Child 3	0.0% (0)	<b>100.0% (1)</b>	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1
Child 4	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0
	<b>Other (please specify) 6</b>							
	<b>answered question</b>							<b>37</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>							<b>4</b>

**3. How important was the presence of play in choosing the educational environment(s)?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	<b>70.3%</b>	26
Fairly Important	16.2%	6
Somewhat Important	10.8%	4
Not Important at All	2.7%	1
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>4</b>

Demographic information

**1. What is your age and gender?**

	<b>under 25</b>	<b>25-29</b>	<b>30-34</b>	<b>35-40</b>	<b>41-45</b>	<b>46-50</b>	<b>over 50</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Male	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	8.3% (1)	<b>75.0% (9)</b>	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	12
Female	0.0% (0)	3.4% (1)	31.0% (9)	<b>51.7% (15)</b>	10.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	3.4% (1)	29
	<b>answered question</b>							<b>41</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>							<b>0</b>

**2. What level of education have you completed?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
High School	0.0%	0
<b>College</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	16
<b>Graduate</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	16
Post-Graduate	22.0%	9
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

### 3. What is your annual household income?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than \$50,000	12.5%	5
<b>\$50,000 to \$80,000</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>8</b>
\$80,000 to \$100,000	15.0%	6
\$100,000 to \$120,000	15.0%	6
\$120,000 to \$150,000	15.0%	6
\$150,000 to \$180,000	10.0%	4
\$180,000 to \$200,000	5.0%	2
Over \$200,000	7.5%	3
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>1</b>

The typical respondent is college or graduate school educated, with household earnings of \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year, with a two to four year old in a play-based educational environment. Most people found my presentation very clear, the photos helpful, and valued play more after the presentation, though they were mostly already believers in the value of play. The comments provided an interesting variety of viewpoints:

Here are the comments I received for the general remarks:

- The story about the sand cupcakes and birthday song helped me to remember the community aspect in play, of children playing together. I want to create more time for my son to play at our house with other children.
- Some good reminders about the important lessons our kids are learning while playing.
- The presentation articulated and highlighted values that I intuitively appreciated.
- Wonderful photos! They gave me a strong impression of the emotional experience the children were having.
- I already knew the value of child's play and it's wonderful qualities, as I get to experience them every day watching my child.
- My mom is an early childhood specialist and I have a 2 year old so I knew this stuff already. Good to re-read though!

- The material reminded me how important play is to learning.
- Having seen Stephanie's philosophy at work I already believe in the value of play. However, my daughter was in a different play-based environment but she would have been happier in a more academic environment based on her personality.
- Delightful. Those kids are so lucky, I wish I could stay and play all day too!
- It's nice to read something that cites, what I assume to be, peer-reviewed articles/journals/etc.

Here are the comments specifically about the photos:

- After reading about the theoretical background on children's play, it was useful to see some examples of this - made me look at the pictures in a different light than I would have before reading the text (i.e. before = kids are cute; after = kids are learning / creating / etc (and they're still cute).
- An interesting thing I noticed is that, in the photos, the kids are either playing by themselves, focusing on a task/object or playing with each other when they themselves seem to be mutual objects; they don't seem to work together at this age on tasks/objects together very much.
- Though, I enjoyed the photos very much, it would have been nice to have captions that would have tied them back to the essay.
- Nice sequence of events too.
- Great to see the kids engaged with so many different materials and types of play.
- The photos really emphasize play as a process and the emotional involvement of the children as they learn.
- So darn cute
- Yes - but they could use captions
- I wish I lived near you so my daughter could go to Happy Baby!
- I liked how there weren't any captions; and one could draw one's own conclusions.
- The photos went really well with the reading. You could really see your examples in the children's play.
- helpful, but there could be fewer.

- Photos really conveyed concept of play, and also captured lovely fun feel of Happy Baby!
- Shows play can be messy
- Maybe add some captions that tie back to the essay. Very cute, though!

### *An Evaluation of the Experience*

My goals were to concisely and clearly present the value of play in the most straightforward, web-readable way possible. I have only written small pages of information for my website before, and never a larger piece like this. It's harder than it seems! Reading for content on the web is challenging, so I tried to keep it short and use bullet points so people could easily access the material. I didn't feel that my text was very "snappy", though I don't usually consider myself a "snappy" writer, but since I was trying to be so clear and present what I considered to be the basics of the information, inserting my own personality into the text was much harder than usual, and I felt that my words were a little on the dry side. The responses were largely positive, both in personally communication and in the survey results. People really enjoyed the photos too. My husband is a web developer and programmer, and his help was invaluable. He found the gallery we used for the slide show and spent a long time making the code for that work, which I feel benefits the website and the presentation tremendously. As for what I might do differently, I think I would have spent more time editing the text and letting it simmer before posting, but I didn't have the time. In order to leave enough time for readers to respond, I posted on December 2. People still responded until December 10. In that time I had 108 visitors to my website, forty-one who did the survey. Another thing I would change is to spend more time researching and thinking about surveys. I wish that I had asked people if they had children, not just their ages. I also wish that I had found a better way to ask about how people's feelings about play had changed. Many

people came in as believers and that didn't change much, but the implication that they felt the same makes it seem as though they didn't respond to the information positively. I'm still not sure how I could have fixed that. I also wished that I had left more room for comments in general, and asked the people who only found it moderately clear why they thought that.

The whole experience was helpful and clarifying for my work. It has been a challenge to articulate my beliefs about play and the presentation helped. An area that has always been hard for me in my work and life is taking things too personally. As a teacher you have to learn that you can never please everyone, and people will always find a way to criticize you. When you run a small business, that's even more relevant. By forcing myself to post my work in a public way, I feel that I worked more towards the thickening of my skin. I have had to work on it a lot since opening my program, and it gets easier the more you do it, so I am glad for that experience. Sometimes, though, I wish that the people I worked with weren't such smarty-pants! A nice, benign pat on the shoulder is very well received now and then!

## REFLECTION

*What Do We Mean by Child's Play?* was also written in my first semester in the class on play and development as an addition to the Happy Baby web site. In this project I found a more authoritative voice while demonstrating the cognitive value of play for a wider parent audience. This project allowed me to span the breadth on the value of play while keeping the work concise for a time-pressured, web-viewing readers, causing me to clarify my writing in a new way for the broader audience while maintaining a high level of writing proficiency.

Specifically, this artifact shows evidence of what I learned in the early childhood education program, and how I have communicated that understanding to parents and teachers with whom I work. Play is the primary learning vehicle, the “leading source of development” as Vygotsky sees it, and it is the responsibility of preschool teachers and directors to adequately educate parents and teachers on the research-based evidence of playing and learning.

Stephanie Agnew  
Brief Critique  
Edec 538  
April 21, 2008

Mettetal, G., Jordan, C., & Harper, S. (1997, November). Attitudes toward a multiple intelligences curriculum. *Journal of Educational Research*, 91(2), 115-122. Retrieved April 18, 2008, from PsycINFO database.

In a 1997 study, three researchers investigated the effect of one Mid-Western elementary school's shift toward a Multiple Intelligence (MI) curriculum. The investigators studied student, parent, and teacher attitudes toward the MI theory and that school's implementation of an MI curriculum. For students of the cognitive process in young children and the implications that newer theories have on our understanding of those processes, this study is intriguing from a practical perspective: How are theories perceived by the students we teach and their parents? What is the potential impact of a major curriculum shift? This study shows us some of the results of one school's efforts to put theory into practice in the realm of intelligence.

Farmington Elementary School serves 520 students in grades 1-5. The population of the school was almost entirely Caucasian, though economically diverse, from upper-middle class to farm families and mobile-home residents. The year that the data was formally collected (1994-1995), 43% of the school was on the lunch program. The authors, which included the school's principal and one parent of a Farmington student, used observations, surveys, and interviews to collect data.

Overall, 126 students from grades 1-5 were interviewed in small groups, 26 teachers were interviewed in grade-level groups, and six parents were interviewed individually. Of the 400 written surveys sent home for further parent input, only 61 were returned. Of those, 56 were useable. The parent response was said to be typical to other items sent home.

Three major themes emerged from the collected data, as phrased by the authors (pp.117-119). Each theme was related to the primary study questions about the parent, student and teacher attitudes toward MI and toward the use of the curriculum:

- *Acceptance by Everyone of the Concept of Multiple Intelligences*

Though the data from the parent sector was limited, parents liked the concept and felt it was appropriate to teach using the MI theory. Student perceptions were enthusiastic, with gains in self-esteem reported as children were taught to see themselves and others as smart in different ways. The authors noted a shift in teacher perception, “Many teachers said they no longer place children along a continuum of ability levels; rather those teachers now think of children in terms of their MI profiles.” (p. 118) The concerns that arose included a perceived lack of information for families on the practical implications of MI theory.

- *Generally Positive Reactions to the School wide Implementation (Flow, Activity Room, Enrichment Clusters) of the MI implementation*

Farmington Elementary (a pseudonym), shifted from a traditional schedule and formatted school to one that used many elements found in other MI schools,

though there is no single procedural process for transforming to an MI school. Farmington's changes included large blocks of uninterrupted periods for activities outside of class (library, gym, music, and activity time), called "Flow Time". These blocks also facilitated planning time for the teachers. The other changes included an activity room where multi-age groupings of students gathered for MI inspired activities. The final change was the start of "Enrichment Clusters", one-hour special sessions held on topics such as story-telling or folk-dancing. Classroom specific changes also took place in less formalized plans.

In general, the parents and the students were positive toward flow scheduling, though teachers were less positive. Teacher concern arose from the combination of the out of class activities largely because the students *were* out of class, and thus in the care of potentially untrained staff for large periods of time. Parents thought the activity room and enrichment clusters seemed interesting, but had less understanding of how they impacted learning positively. The students, on the other hand enjoyed the clusters and the activity room, notably for the allowance of mixed-age interactions, a second grader remarked, "I liked it. The big kids help you." A fifth grader also said, " You learn how to help others," and "It's good because you get to see how others think." (p.119)

- *Uneven Implementation of an MI Curriculum Across Classrooms*

The final theme that emerged was about the difference in individual teacher implementation of the MI curriculum. Many teachers felt that the creation of MI

curriculum as a huge time commitment, though others were excited about the opportunity presented by the change. The proximity of the teachers who were more actively implementing the curriculum had a bearing on other teachers around them. As the more reluctant teachers saw the theory being modeled, they too began using MI more actively. Students had varying perceptions of the classroom teaching, many not really being aware of its use.

Important implications gleaned from this study include the change in teacher attitude toward intelligence. Many teachers interviewed replied that using a chart of different domains helped in their curriculum planning. Another significant consequence of the study was the students' perceptions of themselves and others, "Students embraced the concept because it celebrated their diverse talents." (p. 120) The authors asserted that teaching children about the concept of MI had enhanced their developmental process and let them feel more confidence in their abilities. This last result may have been largely responsible for the Farmington school's significant standardized test score improvement in the two years following the transition to an MI curriculum.

After reading this article, other educators can consider the effects that sharing educational theory might have on parents and students, especially, though not limited to, MI theory. Educating parents, teachers, and students about the various ability domains and teaching to strengths and weaknesses, as well as talking about the effort, might help everyone involved in the education process.





# Becoming an MI School

Attitudes toward a multiple  
intelligences curriculum,  
by Mettetal, Jordan, & Harper



# Population Sample

- ✦ Farmington Elementary in north central Indiana
- ✦ 520 mostly Caucasian students
- ✦ Varied economic backgrounds
- ✦ 129 Children
- ✦ 26 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> teachers
- ✦ 6 parent interviews
  - 56 questionnaires



## Theme 1: Acceptance of Multiple Intelligences Concept

- ✦ **Parents:** Positive about idea, thought it made sense as an educational approach
- ✦ **Students:** Enthusiastic. Helped children see themselves and others as “smart” in different ways.
- ✦ **Teachers:** Changed perception of intelligence. Shifted from a continuum scale to a more personal ability profile.



# School Wide Changes

- ✿ **“Flow Time” Scheduling:** large blocks of uninterrupted time for library, activity room, gym, music, etc.
- ✿ **Activity Room:** A room devoted to multi-age grouping of students with MI activities available for free use.
- ✿ **Enrichment Clusters:** One-hour periods with special sessions on folk-dancing, story-telling, etc.



## Theme 2: Reactions to School Wide Changes

- ✦ **Parents:** Liked “Flow” schedule; were less enthusiastic about enrichment clusters and activity room.
- ✦ **Students:** Very positive to schedule, activity room, and enrichment. Especially enthusiastic about multi-age grouping in activity room.
- ✦ **Teachers:** Disliked how long students were out of their care during block times, concerned about children being with untrained staff.

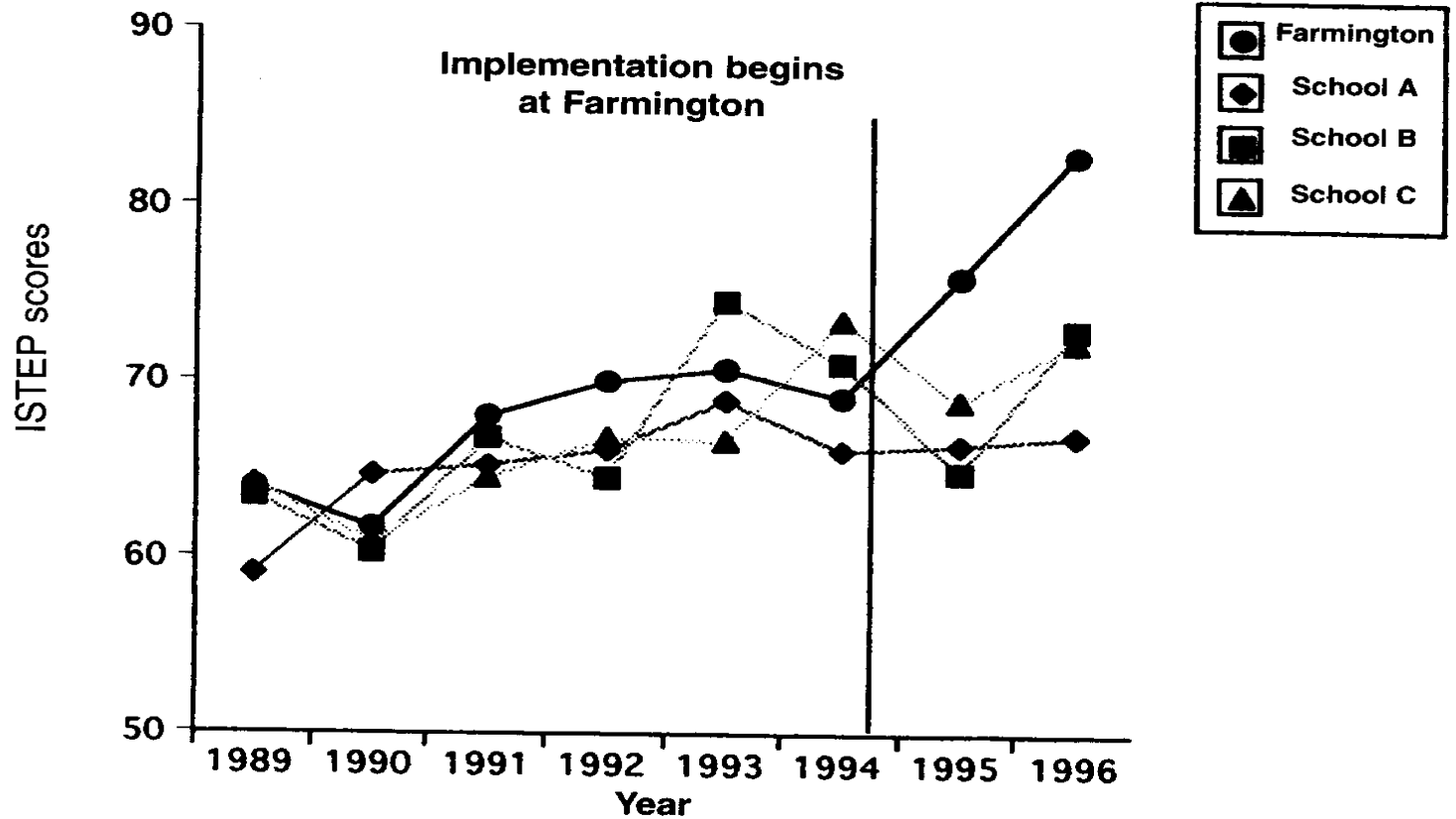


## Theme 3: Uneven classroom MI curriculum implementation

- ✦ **Students:** Not really aware of MI in the classroom
- ✦ **Teachers:** Felt planning was a huge time commitment. Some were not positive, others were eager. Level of implementation based on proximity to excited teachers.

# Effect of MI Implementation on Test Scores

Figure 1. Mean ISTEP Scores of Third Graders From Four Schools





# Educational Implications

- ✦ MI Theory capable of changing how teachers perceive intelligence
- ✦ MI Theory has a positive impact on student perception of themselves and others

## REFLECTION

Spring of 2008 required me to present an article critique in The Development of Language and Thinking in Infancy through Middle Childhood class. Included here is both my written critique of the study I analyzed and the Power Point presentation I made for the class. I include this project because it is a demonstration of my understanding and ability to analyze current educational research and theory. From it I learned that, though small in scale, the study was a worthy look at the transition from a traditional school model to a Multiple Intelligences school in the Garderian model. Parent responses were generally positive, particularly to the concept of “Flow”, but implementation was uneven, though overall students benefited from the enhanced focus on alternate modes of learning. Additionally, the Power Point lecture was an excellent experience in presenting information to my colleagues. One of my goals is to teach community college, so the opportunity to research, digest, and present information that is important to me (I am a huge Gardner fan), was invaluable practice.

Running Head: MAPPING THE JOURNEY

Mapping the Journey:  
Adapting Reggio for a Family Day Care

Stephanie Agnew

May 11, 2008

EDEC 538

Professor Bacigalupa

## Mapping the Journey:

### Adapting Reggio for a Family Day Care

While in my first wave of teacher education, trying to get a multiple subject elementary credential, I attended “The Hundred Languages of Children”, a touring exhibit from Reggio Emilia, at Mills College in Oakland in the summer of 2000. I was enraptured not only by the art of the children, but also by the documentation of the projects, the observations of the teachers, the aesthetic appeal of the schools, and the intriguing role of constructivism in the approach. Since then, my identity as a teacher has undergone many changes, but I have continued being drawn to the beauty and intelligence of the Reggio approach. In January of 2005 I opened a small family day care in my West Berkeley home for four infants, following the birth of my son. For fall 2008 I have plans for 11 toddlers and early preschoolers (18 months to 4.5) to begin, from 16 families, with two teachers, still in my home. As with all educational places, Happy Baby has undergone an evolution in theoretical influences, space arrangement, curriculum frameworks, and community development. This winter and spring I have taken steps towards increasing my knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach through reading, writing, attending workshops, discussions (online and off), and, finally, to implementing strong changes in my program itself, towards adapting the Reggio approach in my home-based, large day care home.

### Adapting Reggio

Adapting Reggio is a daunting process. It is an environment-specific approach and expects much of its practitioners. The practice is reciprocal and collaborative, depending

on the interactions between the school and the community, the children and the teachers, the children and the environment, and the school and the family. As social constructivism, the focus on collaboration is one of the primary limitations for my program's transition. The philosophical and foundational adaptations for embracing the shift to Reggio rest squarely on my shoulders. As I look to hire a new assistant/co-teacher this summer, I am searching for someone willing to engage in the community of practice the transition to Reggio requires. The adjustment to the approach is time-consuming and often overwhelming. Creating structures to help with the transition is also a challenge, since so much information is available. It is a mistake to try to change everything at once, as tempting as it may be to try to overthrow all existing practices and arrangements.

This project attempts to distinguish the first steps that are possible for me, in my specific environment, and to describe both what I have already done, and what I plan to do next. First, I will describe my program and its foundations. Then I will divide basic Reggio principles into two parts: Environment and Routines. Since the Reggio approach is a spiraling, holistic approach, overlap occurs between components and principles. I will define each piece and describe our transition to a more Reggio-styled approach, including steps we have taken and steps still to take. Adaptation is a slow process, and I am attempting to embrace the journey through the clear definition steps to take.

### About Happy Baby

Currently, Happy Baby is primarily a half-day childcare program, open from 8:30-1:30. Nine to twelve children can attend everyday, Monday through Thursday, on a part-time basis, from one to four days per week. I function as the director, administrator,

purchaser, chef, and head teacher. We have one full-time assistant who is present during all open hours, and my husband, who in his spare time is the web master, head gardener and handyman.

We serve snacks and a home-cooked, seasonal and organic lunch. We participate in the Federal Food Program, subsidizing some of the cost of food. All other funds come from monthly tuition fees. We do no fundraising and have not yet received any grants.

The families we serve are generally well educated. The majority has advanced degrees. Typically they tend to be middle and upper middle class Caucasians, most in heterosexual marriages. Most of the families have one child.

### *Original Theoretical Basis and Guiding Principles*

During the planning stages for Happy Baby, I was introduced to Magda Gerber and the RIE philosophy. I was struck by the reverence and respect she promoted for working with infants. The fact that a teacher, or *educarer*, can and should communicate carefully and respectfully during all interactions with a child was radical. I realized I could slow all my actions and make *the communication during the action* the education. The goal was the respectful interaction between child and caregiver. This notion became the foundation for my early program with infants. Later, as the children I worked with aged, I drew from the environmental design of Montessori, and again, the slow presentation of carefully selected materials. As our program has shifted to older toddlers to three year olds, I am constantly looking for new ways to balance our days and create the most supportive social and learning environment possible.

In the spring of 2007, I was introduced to the work of Richard Louv (2005) and the concept of the outdoor classroom. Children interacting in nature became one of the most important parts of my program. As my education has progressed, my program has evolved. I try to embrace the work of Gardner in our intellectual frameworks, and Alfie Kohn in our attempts to be non-judgmental and non-coercive. In my personal interactions with the children, I try to give or share power. Working with two and three year olds means power is an immediate and continual concern. This strategy, which encompasses respect for the child (you can't share power without respect), helps me overcome momentary inclinations to "do" for the child; instead, seeking ways for the child or children to "do" for themselves or others. I believe I can coalesce my varying theoretical interests in the Reggio approach.

### *Physical Environment*

Happy Baby is housed, literally, in a 1000 square foot single-family residence in sunny west Berkeley, built in 1942. We have two-bedrooms, a mid-sized living room, an eat-in kitchen, and a 200 square foot converted garage that serves as "The Playroom". Our living room has a simple couch in front on three windows, two lightweight chairs, and several tall bookshelves filled with books (the low ones have a rotating supply of children's books and magazines) and a stereo. Along the entrance wall is a bench that serves as a place to remove shoes upon entering. The other wall has a child-height coat and bag rack with cubby slots. My husband, three-year old son, a very old cat, and I live in the space as well.

Our kitchen has a regular sized kitchen table and three chairs, which are pushed into the corner during program hours, and a four-foot round children's table with chairs stacked in the corner when not in use. An open shelf holds all the children's kitchen and eating supplies.

The Playroom has high ceilings, three windows and a skylight. It is painted two shades of lively green. We have open shelving on two walls, a mirrored dress up area, and a small wooden play kitchen. The floors are oak plank, with two natural fiber rugs. One wall has a storage unit and counter that functions as an adult desk space for administrative duties. High shelves hold boxes of overflow materials and outdated toys. The walls have children's portraits and paintings, photos and interesting natural objects. The materials on the shelves and in baskets on the floor include blocks of different materials, dolls and doll beds, cars and trucks. In the kitchen and house area play items, such as play food, real utensils; bowls, and a child's tea set are available. Other items include baskets of plastic animals and bugs and musical instruments. Purses, hats, gloves, shoes, masks, and scarves are in the dress-up area. A small tucked away corner of the room has a pillow pile and display bookshelf, called the "Cozy Corner", for quiet reading and snuggling. Throughout the morning, the children are all over the house. They are especially drawn to the small hallway, which has a shutting door and gets very dark. The Playroom is regularly rearranged, since most of the pieces are lightweight and mobile. Baskets containing play items are typically brought into the living room and kitchen in the mornings, encouraging the children to embrace the space.

### *The Yard*

After a tumbling stroll through the flower garden and lawn, the children bounce over a simple bridge to the backyard, where they are greeted by a four-foot by eight-foot sand box. A jumble of rope hangs overhead, holding white and blue canopies made from sheets and sheer drapes. Our yard is south facing, with few small trees, so very little shade is offered throughout the day, thus the canopies serve as protection from the elements. Even in the rain we go outside under the canopies.

We have a cement patio that has cracks running through it. To make the best of the cracks, we expanded them and planted a variety of herbs to grow through the cement. We have a very large child-height table, three feet by seven feet, with benches on either side. Six bordered garden beds run through the yard, filled with fruits and vegetables. The back of the yard is left “wild”. The largest tree is a mid-sized loquat that is the perfect size for two-year olds climbers. The very back point of the yard has a screen of sucker-growth plums that is maintained as “The Little Forest”, and left as a private space for the children’s imaginative play.

## Environment

### *Reggio Environment*

By all accounts, the schools of Reggio are light filled, welcoming spaces of wonder and discovery. The school’s social constructivist theory informs the teachers as they organize the space, structures, materials and displays, creating “an open invitation to explore” (Gandini, 1998). Materials are open-ended, loose parts, often from a recycling

program connected with the schools. They are carefully displayed on open shelves, ready to be explored. Gandini describes the connection between the environment and the development of thought processes:

Through shared activity, communication, and even conflict, children co-construct their knowledge of the world, using one child's idea to develop another's, or to explore a path yet unexplored. Because social development is seen as an intrinsic part of cognitive development, the space is planned and set up to facilitate encounters, interactions, and exchanges among children. (Gandini, 1998 p.170)

The presence of art materials and their mastery is a key component in the Reggio approach. Children have frequent, ongoing access in well-organized *ateliers*, as well as the presence of a trained art-teacher. The move toward symbolic representation and graphic expression is a benchmark. Malaguzzi (1998) explains,

As they go from one symbolic language to another, the children find that each transformation generates something new. This complicates the situation and advances them. As they construct their ideas, they also construct the symbols and plurality of codes. Therefore, when they draw, they are not only making a graphic intervention, but they are selecting ideas and getting rid of excessive, superfluous, or misleading ones. (p.93)

Our environmental efforts started with space transformation and use, and access to materials.

### *Adapting Our Environment*

From the description above, it is clear that Happy Baby's space must be used intensively. Since our school is also our home, projects can rarely be left out for long periods, as is part of the Reggio approach. We also have to be more careful with materials than if we were in a dedicated space. As much as I would like to let the children have free reign with markers and paint, I need to maintain a private home space that is comfortable, which means certain constraints imposed upon the children's freedom to explore. On the other hand, the children are in a familiar home setting, which creates continuity with their family life that can foster their comfort and allows them to quickly relax. A child who is a bit more reserved when joining a group care and education setting, can find solace on the couch with a book and begin to feel at ease. The changes to the environment are initially the most exciting because they have such an immediate effect.

#### *What has changed.*

Over the past six months, we have added our large outside table, which functions as work space, as well as our lunch table. With twenty-one square feet of space, fifteen inches off the ground, the table is truly open ended. We can do large clay work, murals, group paintings, and other art explorations. The children use the table to dump sand and mulch, collect plant bits, put the baby dolls to bed, sit and read, talk, rest, get a cuddle, and eat. They also spontaneously get on top and do a stomping dance while shouting "Tonga Tonga Tonga". The origination of this ritual is unknown.

More recently, I have been working to create an outdoor *atelier*, or art studio, a square of the patio that is bordered by a low bench with open access to art materials and

an easel. This is still a work in progress as I discover what materials are most suitable to free access and can withstand the exposure to the elements. For two year olds, the movement to symbolic representation is in its exploratory phase. When confronted with a basket of markers, all two year olds still tend to draw on their bodies. With repeated exposure, they will move to using them on paper or other surfaces. This is a major challenge when embracing the Reggio philosophy, adapting “The Hundred Languages” to maximize the toddlers’ sense of empowerment, creativity, competence and potential, while still needing to continuously scaffold the use of supplies. We are still working on changing our routines to better suit our evolving environment, as I will discuss below.

A lovely aspect of our outdoor classroom is the intertwining of nature into all the projects and activities. We have recently added a large dirt pile that is used for truck play and gardening. Our space has been rearranged to include an outdoor living room, with a couch, cushions, blankets, a rug, and a large umbrella. Everyday a basket of books and dolls comes outside with the children, allowing a place to rest from the busy-ness of sand, water, and dirt work. Our sand box has many crates of materials near it, including containers, shovels, plastic tubing, funnels, trucks, and many dinosaurs. These items are for all-over use. The children always have access to hoses and water tables.

Inside the house, where we spend less time when the weather is pleasant, fewer changes have made. I have reduced the offerings on the shelves, instead encouraging deeper explorations with the more open-ended materials we have. I have been shifting away from manufactured toys, even the high quality, open-ended toys, in favor of recycled parts. Our shelf displays are simpler too, with more common container

groupings: jar lids in a metal pan, empty plastic bottles in another, a third holding thick blue rubber bands. We have light colored baskets that contain the other objects. Dolls, cars, animals, and blocks are the toys that are still in rotation, as well as the play food and household items.

The walls now better represent the presence of the children and their families. For much of the year we have had a changing display of photos of the children with their families. Currently we have a display up of close-up, black and white photos of the children. Laminated copies of the same photos are available in a basket next to mirrors. We have been exploring identity and empathy through these photos. Initially, the children were interested in wearing each other's hats and the teachers' glasses, and pretending to be each other. I decided to expand this with the photo masks. Soon I will be introducing the masks with the eyes cut out, making them more like the other masks with which they are familiar. I intend to document the children wearing each other's faces and include it with the original photo display.

Other recent environmental changes include more "provocations" for projects, more of the children's dictation, and the very recent introduction of an overhead projector to explore light, shadow, and translucence.

*What is to come.*

The shift to "materials" from toys has had profound effects. The children are instantly more creative with the materials, and with fewer arguments over the materials than we had over the toys, including far less grabbing. The play is allowed extend longer

and thus go deeper, as the children engage in more self-talk while playing. Opportunities for conflict and social guidance are still available, but are then about something deeper than a toy injustice, which makes the environment richer for the adults who are called upon to mediate.

As a result of these changes, I would like to expand our selection of materials through visits to other recycling centers and to solicit parents and the community for more donations to our program. I want to add more outside large-scale construction materials, such as logs and weather resistant large blocks. Our garden is expanding daily, thanks to my husband's hard work, and the children continue to revel in the presence of ladybugs, butterflies, and bees, as well as the ongoing hunt for ripe strawberries.

Other projects include a reorganization of the playroom to more completely reflect the creative environment. Our art area is still changing, and with time and dedication I think it will become a pavilion for exploration.

## Routines

As I wrote about in my last paper, the Reggio approach includes a spiraling approach to its structure. Ideas are brainstormed, collaborated upon, extended, represented, documented and revisited. These routines activate and construct the learning within the environment. Time is a shared commodity in the Reggio schools, which are still rich in the agrarian traditions of the Italian countryside (Edwards, 1998 p. 183). Days, months, seasons, and years are cycled through in organic and rhythmic ways,

that same rhythm is brought to the flow of the interactions with children. Routines, then, for the purpose of this project, include the organization of the day and the routine of interactions with the children.

### *Reggio Routines*

In a transcribed interview with Malaguzzi, Rankin (2004) reports, [T]ry to work together to produce interactions that are constructive, not only for socializing, but also for constructing language, for constructing the forms and meaning of language. This helps to give order to communication which needs order , and which requires children to find the right word.” (pp. 84-85)

The routines in Reggio are based on interaction and communication. Teacher Carlina Rinaldi describes the educational experience as placed in its context, socially and culturally, with the emphasis not on a single child, but on the relation of each child to its community and extended culture. She states, “Relationships, communications, and interactions sustain our educational approach in its complexity; they are powerful terms characterized by two important elements: action and group socialization.” (Rinaldi, 1998 p.115). The routine of communication is vital to the creation of curriculum. The teachers are called upon to observe, record, document and interact in order to discover, motivate, and extend the children’s learning. On this process, Rinaldi states, “There are no preconstituted paths, and consequently no set timetables or tests. Instead relying on strategies means predicting and activating sequences that are based not only on our initial hypotheses, but also on the work as it develops and unfolds.” (p. 119). The daily schedule in Reggio usually begins, after greetings, with a group meeting, while eating

fruit, which includes discussion about the plans for the day. The children are then in charge of their activities, moving in and out at will, working on their projects or playing in the dress-up area, block center, or outside. Lunch happens collaboratively at mid-day (Wurm, 2005).

Kantor & Whaley (1998) describe adapting Reggio routines in their American school after extended study in Italy. In their two classrooms, they realize that a new routine needs to develop surrounding collage making and its separate steps, “We had previously thought of activities such as collage as whole experiences, but we had not thought of them as languages with distinct components to be mastered.” (p. 327). After the teachers observe children exploring glue, they realized that many still had questions about the properties of glue. In collaboration, they proceeded to break the process into steps, charted below:

1. Children are given glue alone to explore (*exploration of properties*)
2. Tools are introduced: brushes, sticks, Q-tips (*furthering knowledge*)
3. Bowls of glue and bowls of powdered paint are introduced for mixing and application to various background (*constructing understanding of materials working together*)
4. Materials such as glitter and beads were presented in the bowls of glue (*suggestion of adhesive nature of glue*)
5. Offered glue and collage materials in separate containers, as in more traditional collage presentations (*group and individual mastery of components*)

The teachers documented the process and drew new conclusions about how the children interacted and communicated with and about glue and collage. This project, specifically about toddlers, is fully in line with Bruner's (1960) ideas about creating learning:

“...[I]n order for a person to be able to recognize the applicability or inapplicability of an idea to a new situation and to broaden his learning thereby, he must have in mind the general nature of the phenomenon with which he is dealing.” (pg.18)

The routines of Reggio include the time spent on observation, documentation, conversation, and collaboration. The routines also include the development of culture, as it is constructed in the classroom, and as it brought in from the community and families surrounding it. The Reggio approach seeks to continually redefine, re-assess, and construct those routines based on the emerging needs and interests of the children, as collaboratively designed by the culture.

### *Adapting Our Routines*

Given the constraints we face from limited staffing and space issues, a new framework for our routines with children can make a big difference in our work and the children's learning. With limited time for collaboration, though, we need to be creative on our approach.

#### *What has changed.*

The biggest change we have made is in seeing the children where they are, not as we would have them. Two year olds dump and spill, push and cry. They are in a constant state of negotiation: with each other, with themselves, with their parents, with their

teachers, with the space all around them. Our challenge is to see how we can help them to get the most benefit from those negotiations. Watercolors spilled on a tabletop? Let's notice and discuss the way the colors run together and are soaked into the paper. Someone took a toy? What can you do? Every situation calls for a routine that includes observing the scene, and choosing the best strategy to help create meaning and understanding for the child.

Our schedule was already freely flowing, with snack of fruit and cereal together at the table and then freedom to play. We recently shifted from going outside as a group to children choosing to go outside after snack, until all the children were outside. We eat lunch together in the yard everyday, of our shared home-cooked meal. The children then continue playing outside until their parents pick them up.

*What is to come.*

Change needs to happen in the formalizing of our approach to activities. Just as Kantor & Whaley broke down the steps for the gluing and collage activity, so do we need to see how to approach our curriculum in a similar way. We are still driven to move too quickly through the parts of the activities. Perhaps it is a result of a product driven culture, but we never seem to spend enough time understanding the individual properties and discovering their applicability. We also will continue working on efforts to collaborate on observations and documentations, leading to more revisiting of past projects and activities with the children. Our new fall schedule is designed to include time for meeting, and I intend to create an online form for our collective observations.

Documentation is still going to be the biggest challenge, though I'm willing to accept that we might just be looking at pictures together with the children and talking out loud about what we did during a project.

Fortunately, as a private program, I am afforded the time to adapt new routines, allowing our days to flow in and out of doors, in and out of projects, and for we as a school to create the culture from we co-construct. We can easily incorporate a Reggio style morning meeting at our snack. Previously, I used that time to prepare an outside activity or clean up from before snack play, but I can see the value in the group discussion of our outside activity, rather than my arbitrarily choosing it for the children. Instead, we can also try to began recording and transcribing those meetings as they become more familiar.

Another goal is creating new ways to involve families in the learning process, so they can better understand ways that learning takes place at Happy Baby. I intend to create questionnaires for the incoming families, asking them to define their values and vision of their family and children, and then use that information to begin a dialogue that might lead to parent meetings or discussion groups about strategies and issues regarding the children.

Overall, our routines will change as we embrace the new roles afforded to us as co-teachers, observers, documenters, learners, and co-constructers. Our aim will be to recognize our need to flow with the changes.

## Conclusion

As we discuss and share reflections, we create culture. We consider what has happened and we search for its interpretation; we negotiate to construct a collective understanding. Without these reciprocal relationships and processes of sharing, each one would remain fragmented. (Filippini, 1998 p.133)

Happy Baby is in a position to “construct a collective understanding”, but only with great effort in organizing ideas and sharing reflections. Given the isolated environment of a home provider, the opportunity to create and articulate some basic principles of the Reggio approach and to reflect on the steps already take is a rare and wonderful one. Clearly, the approach is rich and full of possibilities, making it is easy to get overwhelmed and fragmented. What I have learned comes down to these beginning steps, all of which support the cognitive understanding of our students:

1. Define our image of the child
2. Reflect on why and how we engage in our routines
3. Expand the opportunity for open ended interactions
4. Take the time to observe the children
5. Document what we know and learn together
6. Create the culture together , teachers, children, and families

In my personal efforts toward adaptation and transformation, I must always remember the words of Carlina Rinaldi (1998 p. 119), “I like to use the metaphor of taking a journey, where one finds the way using a compass rather than taking a train with its fixed routes and schedules.” It is very tempting to see each principle and value of the Reggio approach

as a stop along the route, and becoming a thoughtful, creative, excellent school as a terminus, but the reality is a more roundabout journey, lead by a compass, your wits, and the collaborative efforts of the people around you, big and small. The journey to becoming a Reggio inspired school will spiral and meander through the best-laid trails, causing the participants to continually reassess their goals to better align to the path taken. The best tactic for Happy Baby and me is to enjoy the journey.

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## REFLECTION

Recurring topics in my program of study are the philosophies of the schools of Reggio Emilia. As a toddler teacher in my own program, I have long been drawn to the respectful, life affirming, and aesthetically pleasing way of the Italian schools. To that end, a professional goal has been to integrate the theory of Reggio into the practice in my program. *Mapping the Journey: Adapting Reggio for a Family Day Care* demonstrates my assimilation of that theoretical framework. This project alternates the dominant principles of Reggio with how I applied them to my program. I focused on the role of the teacher and of the environment, researching the historical perspective of the Reggio approach in the seminal writings of the philosophy. I continued to use this research as the foundation for several other projects, choosing to deeply explore the writings of Malaguzzi, his influences (Bruner, Dewey, Gardner) and of the other prominent Reggio writers, Forman, Cadwell, Goldhaber, and Gandini. For a special education class I looked at the Reggio inclusion of children with “special rights”, as they are known, focusing on the approaches underlying belief in every child’s competence and how it guides the curriculum development. In another work, I concentrated on the collaborative atmosphere of the schools, reflecting Bruner’s concept of schools as a place of “negotiated culture”. Another work, included here, looks more specifically at the idea of culture development in young children, an idea that fascinates me and guides my work. Other subjects related to my Reggio studies include examining documentation and creating a literature review that I plan to include portions from in my thesis.

Running head: WHAT WE WANT TO DO

What We Want to Do Today:

Making Visible the Culture of Childhood

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*In early childhood education, when we document, we make the deliberate choice to observe and record what happens in our environment in order to reflect and communicate the surprising discoveries in children's everyday lives and the extraordinary events and happenings in places where children are cared for. (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, p.125)*

Teachers have long collected and shown the work of children. Parents dutifully take home stacks of paintings without know the circumstances of their creation, how the child chose the colors, or how the child came to be painting in the first place. When a school instead chooses to work reciprocally and then document that practice through anecdotal observations, formal panels, video and audio recording, or photographs, the culture of the school is revealed. From art projects to conflict resolution, much of the thought, emotion, and industry involved in a child's day at school are revealed through documentation. That archive stands as testimony to the child's competence.

Documentation in an early childhood educational environment uncovers patterns of interaction and participation for both children and teachers, revealing the relational nature of the learning environment. Used as a tool to further understanding, it not only helps facilitate flexible planning within a school, but also increases a sense of community and the creation of peer culture. Reciprocal in nature and collaborative in practice, documentation intertwines daily activity and the communication between all parts of the school community: students, teachers and families, extending and deepening the social culture.

Documentation, dependant on interaction and contact at every level, is a true foundation to better understanding and supporting children's social development. With this knowledge, I wondered about the effects that implementing a system of documentation would have on the

community culture of our toddler and early preschool aged classroom. How is the classroom culture, made up of relationships, communication, and activity, impacted by documentation? What forms of documentation are the most successful for connecting that culture to the toddlers and early preschoolers and their families?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Benefits for Teachers***

Embracing an emergent curriculum style of planning means practicing flexibility in your methods. In the Reggio Emilia approach the term *progettazione* refers to the flexible planning method used by the teachers and school community (Rinaldi, 1998; Moran, Desrochers, & Cavicchi, 2007; Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). Through the systematic use and study of documentation, teachers can better implement *progettazione*, as well as better understand their students and the social relationships that develop. In a 2006 study, Katz and Galbraith looked at the effects of implementing documentation in inclusive classrooms, seeking an answer to the nature of social interactions between both typically developing students and with peer interactions with those students diagnosed with disabilities. Katz and Galbraith explored how the use of documentation supported the teachers as an educational research tool, looking at which routines and activities resulted in positive social interactions. They learned that through documentation, teachers were able to assess parts of children's development, both typical and not, through analyzing the children's interactions, roles, skills, and materials used. These kinds of results also offer ample authentic assessment opportunities (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). These findings are echoed in Moran et al.,

2007, when they described their school's changing use of documentation and its effect on teacher planning and how it allowed them to slow and deepen their work with students and create activities based more specifically on children's interests and abilities. Staff also experience continuous professional development through the reflective nature of documentation, or "the cycle of inquiry" (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001).

### ***Benefits for Students***

Clearly, children benefit through the reciprocal nature of documentation. The teachers learn from and about the students, who in turn gain from that greater understanding. Documentation offers children the opportunity to reflect and revisit what they have experienced (Rinaldi, 1998), giving them a sense of belonging while simultaneously valuing their work (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). It can help serve as a basis for communication between children and each other, with staff, and with parents or the larger community (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). Rinaldi (1998) writes, with regard to children and documentation, "... it invites self-evaluation and group evaluation, conflict of ideas, and discussion." (p. 122). By providing the visual examples of time spent together, children are able to make more concrete their experiences with one another and their learning community at large.

### ***Documentation in the Classroom***

Introducing documentation into the classroom needs the same flexibility as planning. Some schools start with formal teacher created panels representing the outcomes of specific activities and

move toward more relaxed, informal documentation techniques (Moran et al., 2007), while others use a variety at the beginning, such as videos, photos, notes and artifacts, (Katz & Galbraith, 2006). The literature is varied on methods for actually creating documentation, though many other specific works offer advice on creating it. The literature here references some of that work (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001), while others discuss the more informal, theoretical practice of creating documentation. All sources cite the need for a systematic approach to creating documentation. Whether done in teacher meetings (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, Rinaldi, 1998), as part of formal research (Katz & Galbraith, 2006), or in an evolving system, (Moran et al., 2007), documentation is a time-consuming and thoughtful process that requires disciplined effort on the part of the teachers who choose to implement it.

### ***Methods for Including and Creating Documentation***

Based on the literature, the following list, by no means exhaustive, offered ways to begin including documentation in our toddler and preschool program to support social development and help strengthen our community.

#### *Teacher Created Documentation*

- Photographs of peer free play social interactions, regularly shared and discussed (Katz & Galbraith, 2006)
- Photo albums and displays (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, Moran et al., 2007)

- Formal panels of larger projects with teacher commentary about children's learning, communication, and interactions (Rinaldi, 1998, Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, Moran et al., 2007)
- Informal notes and observations shared with families, teachers, and students (Katz & Galbraith, 2006, Moran et al., 2007)
- Portfolios and artifact collections, for both teachers and students (Moran et al., 2007)
- Journals (Moran et al., 2007)
- Audio recordings (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001)

*Student Created Documentation*

- Student taken photos (Moran et al, 2007)
- Student created panels (Moran et al., 2007)
- Artifact collections and displays (Rinaldi, 1998)
- Children's drawings and reflections (Rinaldi, 1998)
- Communication center (Moran et al., 2007)

From this list the possibilities for including documentation in a classroom's repertoire of planning tools are evident. New ideas come forth for other ways to systematically include documentation as a part of an early childhood program. The only limitation is time and energy.

As a form of visual validation of the social learning of children, documentation impacts teacher planning and understanding, acting as a form of advocacy for the persistence of children (Moran et al., 2007; Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). Moving forward, this review inspired many ideas

for beginning the documentation process in my classroom in an effort to answer the question for how our social culture is supported through that process.

## **Methods**

### ***Research Setting***

The research was conducted in my in-home toddler program. Situated in a 1000 square foot house with a very large yard in a mid-sized urban environment, the home has a dedicated 200 square foot playroom, and uses the shared living room, hallway, and kitchen during operating hours, from 8:30 until 1:00. Most of the play happens outside, though the children have indoor and access all day long. We have a concrete patio with a large storage table holding art materials with a four-person easel nearby. A plywood platform which functions as a stage and block area is in the middle of the patio, as well as a seven by three foot table at the children's height for doing art projects and eating meals. Off the patio is a large sandbox with many open-ended materials: funnels and tubing, shovels and buckets, pots and pans. We also have a large garden with six planter boxes of vegetables, berries, herbs, and flowers that the children interact with and tend. A small fig tree that contributes fruit from September through November each year is next to the compost boxes that the children scrape their leftovers into daily.

We have an open play area space that changes throughout the year, housing a large bamboo teepee where beans grow in the summer, or a place with several bales of straw for jumping from in winter. Often a large pile of plain dirt for use with trucks and other materials is available. A mid-sized loquat tree, appropriate for climbing, grows nearby. In the back a playhouse and an outdoor

couch for quiet reading, jumping from, or resting on, are in front of a stand of small plum trees, known as “The Little Forest”. The very back fence of the yard has an assortment of metal and wood items attached to it, known as “The Noisy Wall”.

### ***Participants***

The program serves eleven children per day from a group of sixteen different children, aged two to four years old. We typically have two or three more boys than girls on any given day. Since the project looked at the effect of documentation on the classroom culture, all of the children participated, as well as the staff.

Our staff consists of three teachers daily. Our typical ratio is 1:3.5. Three of the teachers have at least a Bachelors Degree, one has some Early Childhood units, and one has a PhD in an unrelated field. I am the administrator, director, marketer, head teacher, and *pedagogista* for my program, which is inspired by the philosophy of the Reggio-Emilia schools in northern Italy.

### ***Data Collection***

Initially, I sought to integrate many forms of documentation into my classroom. Using the list generated by the literature review, I tried creating formal documentation, a panel with photographs, descriptive text and artifacts. This effort, though educational, went largely ignored by parents and students alike. Much of the literature about starting documentation connects to older, more verbal children. Next, photographs of various activities in our program were introduced and reviewed with the children. Using a marker and paper, I wrote down their reflections of the

photographs and included them in binder form for the children to read and kept them available to the parents. I also video and audio recorded activities, transcribed reflections on art projects, and did direct observations. Many of these efforts did not produce consistent results, though the effort was rewarding because it clarified my expectations for toddler reactions to documentation. My research questions shifted slightly from looking at all documentation as it impacts the social culture of the school, to looking for the best form of documentation that suits my setting as a starting point for use in my program. I will focus this paper on that finding.

Rinaldi (1998), discussed flexibility in planning, stating the need to “formulate objectives that are flexible and adapted to the needs and interests of the children.” (p. 113) From this perspective I decided to document our morning meeting, through what came to be known as “The Daily Board”. Over the course of two months it has evolved from a categorizing activity to a fairly accurate representation of each day’s events, mostly in the words of the children.

Originally I looked for a way to connect the children’s thoughts to their actions and also to the idea of being part of a group. To that end, I made a magnet with each child and teacher’s picture. Every morning at our meeting, which we do while all the children eat fruit together at a table, we begin by talking about who is present, taking the magnets of the absent people off the board. We then talk about our day, listing what we have done already in that morning, usually in the words of the children, and then listing what we would like to do. I will discuss the evolution of the process later in the paper. After the meeting, the board is placed in a prominent place near where parents pick up their children. At the end of the day, I photograph the board and review it through personal notes and reflections. A third source of data, apart from the photos and personal reflections,

was a family survey asking for the parents' sense of the daily board's impact on classroom culture and their personal use of the information presented.

Creating a Reggio inspired program means working as a teacher-researcher, to learn with them, as Rinaldi (1998) articulates, "The challenge for the teacher to be present without being intrusive, in order to best sustain cognitive and social dynamics while they are in progress." (p. 118) To satisfy both the action research project's need for data validation and to satisfy the pedagogy for a Reggio inspired program, I felt that collecting the evolution of our morning meetings, my reflections on that process, and the opinions of the parents would be appropriate data collection strategies. Collecting data on the social impact that documentation has on our program from newly and minimally verbal children posed special challenges. Looking to the families of those children and inquiring about their attitudes and tracking the shift in the documentation process itself, as well as observing my own attitude in that period has proved to be a rich source of data.

### ***Data Analysis***

As the data collection progressed and amassed, I knew it was necessary to narrow my focus to the most successful forms of documentation. Since my process had changed in a manner similar to the one described in Moran et al, 2007, I knew the first part of the analysis needed to be gathering and deciding which format was proving most successful in connecting the children to each other and to their emerging culture, as well as to their activities, and then connecting those parts to their families.

After studying the photo-reflection binders, the formal panel, the videos and observations, it became apparent that the Daily Board was the most important for answering my questions. I had

been reflecting and writing about the board's content as the days passed. Gathering the photos of the boards themselves, I looked at the patterns that emerged, coding them for the social content in regards to the children's plans for the day, as well as looking at the evolution of the board's content while again reflecting on the process as I recalled it. I also compared the parent responses to the surveys, coding them for their awareness of the classroom culture.

### *Findings*

As I wrote earlier, my initial efforts with the daily board was as a categorizing activity, connecting the names and faces of the children to the activities the teachers had planned for the day,



as in figure 1:

Figure 1: The original format for the Daily Board

I discovered that the direction was too much in the hands of the adults. The teachers were still leading the choices, leaving no room for reflection or true collaboration by the children.

I moved to a more general group discussion of our day's activities. The children still didn't maintain interest for very long in the discussion. After talking with my co-teacher, I learned that she felt that the meeting was still too adult oriented and didn't leave room for the unexpected and spontaneous that often happened throughout the day. I agreed that the direction was still too much

in my hands and that the children's "voice" was not present enough in the documentation. From here, I began to capture the children's language on the board, for instance when reflecting on a trip to the park where children from an elementary school took over the toddler playground, more than one child declared "too many big kids", which I carefully wrote on the board. This was a breakthrough, an example of the "dynamic exchange" that Rinaldi (1998) discusses.

From that point forward I directly quoted the children's language, dividing the board between "What we have done" and "What we want to do", so I was able to capture both the reflection on the morning and the hopes for the rest of the day. The children's objectives were more tangible since they were being archived. As a result, the teachers became more aware of the children's interests and could make better choices about planning activities to extend those interests. This change in the format allowed us to structure our *progettazione*, flexible planning. By collaborating and discussing our desires for the day and *writing them down*, we became more aware of their importance for the children and were better able to adhere to the daily plan. Another discovery was how often the children wished to repeat activities, which in turn slowed our offerings of activities. Gandini and Goldhaber (2001) contend that documentation can show the persistence of children, and thus function as an advocate for the child. By requesting the same activities regularly, we witnessed this advocacy in action.

In the development of classroom culture I saw a shift in the kinds of statements made over the two-month period. In the beginning the statements were mostly singular, involving individuals, such as "I want to play in the sandbox". Over the following month they progressed to more plural references, "we were digging", and "I helped J throw a party". Self-organization became more

apparent as the children plotted “pushing trucks” together, or choosing play partners. Children began to use each other’s names more frequently on the board, “I played with E” or “I want to play in the sandbox with J”. Often the children declared their intent to do the same things as their classmates, and would then proceed to do so.

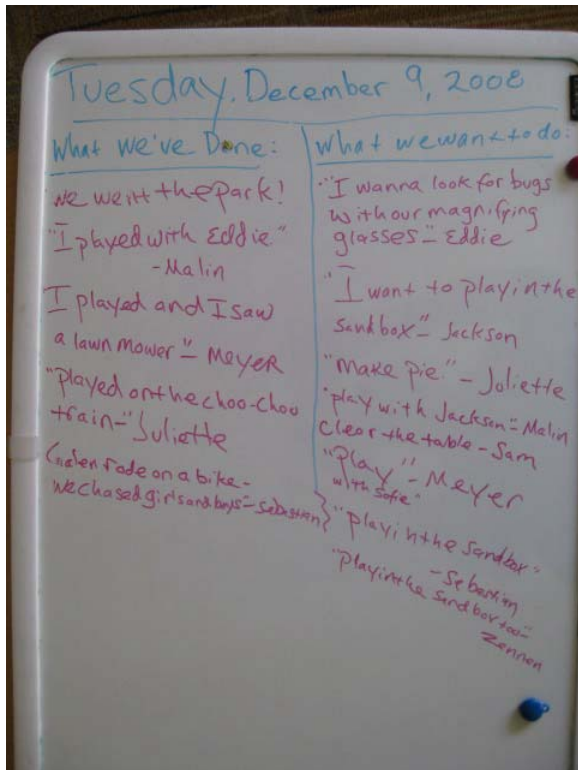


Figure 2: A later version of the Daily Board.

The children’s interest in the Daily Board has grown with time. I did not measure how long they were stay focused in the beginning, nor how long at the end, but the content became much richer and more varied, showing me that their attention was concentrated for longer periods of time.

The procedure of discussing and writing our plans is now an expected ritual for our meetings. The teachers and the children all take part. In has developed into a large part of the structure of our day. A key component of documentation is sharing it with families. Each day I put

the board up in a highly visible place for the parents to see as they pick up their children. My goal was to connect the parents to the words of their children and to see the efforts of the group as a whole. This has not been as successful. Of the parents that participated in the survey, those who do read it use it to supplement the language of their child when discussing their day, on parent put it, “kids are inconsistent narrators.” Some of the parents talk with their children about the activities written on the board, but the responses were similar to “I intend to...” or “I have forgotten to refer to it.” About half of the parents surveyed felt that the presence of the daily board improved their sense of the classroom culture through seeing the activities listed, though some of the others felt we already had a strong sense of classroom culture. When asked about their opinion of documentation, some parents requested a more formal way of communicating our documentation efforts to the families. More effort needs go into connecting the families to the Daily Board to have it function as a more effective form of documentation. With time, energy, and communication, I feel the parents will become more responsive to the information presented, though they may need more help connecting to it, perhaps through posting the photograph of each day’s board on a blog or in an emailed newsletter.

### **Conclusion**

With this research, I have shown that it is possible to introduce a systematic documentation process into a toddler and early preschool program. The data collected shows the positive impact that this documentation has had on our classroom culture through shaping our day’s activities based on the children’s interest and giving voice to the children themselves in a democratic fashion. Relationships become visible by the children choosing the same activities. The children can look

around and see who has the same interests, or the teachers can help guide those children together. Decisions are informed for both the children and the teachers. Through the changing development of the Daily Board, I have implemented a usable structure for the *progettazione* model of flexible planning in an effort to encourage relationships, sustain communication, and create relevant activities. Further work is warranted, including increasing communication with the families of the children in the program through this form of documentation. Rinaldi (1998) writes, "Sharing documentation is in fact making visible the culture of childhood both inside and outside the school to become a participant in a true act of exchange and democracy." (p.122) This objective, making visible the culture of our school was partially achieved through this project. The success and rapid evolution of the Daily Board, and that it is now a ritual shows that our program's children will continue to participate in the "true act of exchange and democracy" shaped by that ritual. The project will continue to change as the children develop. We will begin extending the conversations and ask deeper questions about how and why they are making their choices, always probing for the deeper meaning of their work. We will continue to support the relationships between the children through their shared goals, and in turn share the knowledge with the families in our community. Malaguzzi (1998) wrote,

[Children] feel more open to challenge, more able to work with their peers in unusual situations, and more persistent because they realize that what they have in mind can be tried out. Children know that when pursuing their goals, they can make their own choices, and that is both freeing and revitalizing. (p. 87)

By the act of documenting the day's plans in our toddler and early preschool program, I have seen that persistence and shared that freedom, my wonder at the growth of communication, community, and culture revitalized.

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## REFLECTION

*What We Want To Do Today* is an action research project that shows my writing ability and skill at educational research. This artifact contains my best literature review to date, one that I am continually able to refer back to, showing breadth and depth in educational research. This paper is also a good demonstration of my written language proficiency (something that I hope has been demonstrated throughout this portfolio).

A personally and professionally fulfilling assignment, *What We Want To Do Today* took me further into the application of the Reggio Emilia principles by finding a workable way to interweave documentation into my practice in a relevant and authentic way, deepening my understanding of the pedagogy.

Stephanie Agnew  
EDEC 537, Spring 2009

## **Assessment and Documentation: Understanding the Process**

### **Introduction**

Teachers are natural observers. We are set down in rooms that have their own microcosms of life running through them in the multiple ways children move in a space, interact with environments, and learn from surroundings. In traditional assessment we are expected to isolate our students from their usual context in an effort to understand just where they are on the developmental spectrum. When we instead choose to closely observe and watch how the children use the space and people of their environment, and then document those efforts, we get a much more authentic sense of a very young child's progression and are better able to utilize that information for future planning communication. Moreover, when we extend the boundaries of our observations into the realm of pedagogical considerations, we can extend not only the child's learning, but also our own as well.

Observation and documentation in an early childhood educational environment uncovers patterns of interaction and participation for both children and teachers, revealing the relational nature of the learning environment. Used as a tool to further understanding, it not only helps facilitate flexible planning within a school, but also increases a sense of community and the creation of peer culture. Reciprocal in nature and collaborative in practice, documentation intertwines daily

activity and the communication between all parts of the school community: students, teachers and families, extending and deepening the social culture. Documentation, dependant on interaction and contact at every level, is a true foundation to better understanding and supporting children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Children benefit through the reciprocal nature of documentation. The teachers learn from and about the students, who in turn gain from that greater understanding. Documentation offers children the opportunity to reflect and revisit what they have experienced (Rinaldi, 1998), giving them a sense of belonging while simultaneously valuing their work (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). It can help serve as a basis for communication between children and each other, with staff, and with parents or the larger community (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). Rinaldi (1998) writes, with regard to children and documentation, "... it invites self-evaluation and group evaluation, conflict of ideas, and discussion." (p. 122). By providing the visual examples of time spent together, children are able to make more concrete their experiences with one another and their learning community at large.

Assessment often sounds like a dirty word in the early childhood education field. Images of little heads bent over bubble-in test forms scare the teachers of the very young away from the formalized notion of assessing our students. Assessment, however, is a vital component of a successful quality early childhood program. Comprised of multiple components, assessment can be geared toward screening for developmental risks, looking at a program as a whole, tracking a specific child's progress, or looking at specific cognitive, emotional, or physical skill attainments. Within the realm of assessment models are natural context, authentic assessments. Set in real-life situations,

multiple methods of data gathering are used to detail various aspects of a child's development.

Within this sphere lies the art of documentation.

### *Pedagogical Relationship*

Macdonald (2007) draws attention to Reggio Emilia approach of pedagogical documentation, noting that the reflective nature of documentation creates a *disposition* toward learning since the learning is made visible. She points out that beyond the traditional model of observation and artifact collection, pedagogical documentation negotiated between the content produced and the process of production. This is a valuable distinction, as it takes the teacher beyond their role as curator of the child's content creation and the observer checking off boxes to the role of deep researcher into the child's understanding. Gandini & Goldhaber (2001) also point out the value of the deeper reflective process involved in documentation, commenting that many of the most recent writings on this form of assessment focus too much on the end product, whether a formal panel, portfolios, or some other adult created artifact. Rinaldi (1998) reiterates this point,

Documentation is not a final report, a collection of documents in a portfolio merely helps in term of memory...It is instead a procedure ...that sustains the educational process (teaching) in the dialogue with the learning processes of the children. (p.120)

This is the philosophical dividing point that makes documentation such a challenge to most teachers, yet also what make the assessment aspect of documentation so valuable as a component of both the learning and teaching processes that Rinaldi points out.

## *Ongoing Challenges*

Cardy and Kroeger, (2006) discuss the many intentions involved in documentation, from the pinpointing of great joys, to the sharing provocations, as well as looking at stress and interactions. These intentions, they say, come from the questions teachers must ask themselves in the documentation/assessment process. Cardy and Kroeger conclude that many novice teachers are reluctant to document in part because of the necessity of asking the deep questions that come from intention. Many teachers feel that the effort to document takes them away too much from their important interactions with students.

This paradox recurs in the literature surrounding documentation. Too often the focus is on the finished product and the time teachers spend creating it. As often too, however, is the fear that the act of observing and documenting takes the teacher away from their students, when the essential goal, according to Rinaldi (1998), Cardy and Kroeger, (2006), and Gandini and Goldhaber (2001) all point to the resulting closeness between teacher and students because of the time spent intentionally watching and connecting the learning of the students.

## *How close is too close?*

In his controversial 1999 article, Richard Johnson draws parallels between the idea of “Cargo Cults”, groups of native islanders that, after experiencing wartime occupations replete with modern supplies, become worshipful of the potential for sudden reappearance of fully stocked transports, and early childhood educators, who, he says, are eager for fully formed models of practice to essentially “colonize”, without regard to social context, as exemplified by the popularity of the Reggio Emilia

approach. Johnson believes that Reggio style documentation has been commodified, and benefits from a different perspective, that of constant surveillance and social control. Johnson acknowledges that documentation is successful for showing the wonder in a progressive way of teaching, might think that it could be considered almost Big Brother-like in practice.

While this shifting lens of perspective is certainly an interesting position to address, it does not take into account that not all moments of a child's day are going to be documented, nor even closely observed. In fact, quality programs know of the need for private spaces and offer them. What can be documented in that situation is a child's need for privacy, not what they do in the moment of privacy. Creating a Reggio inspired program means working as a teacher-researcher, to learn with them, as Rinaldi (1998) articulates, "The challenge for the teacher to be present without being intrusive, in order to best sustain cognitive and social dynamics while they are in progress." (p. 118)

## **Conclusion**

As an assessment strategy, documentation and observation are excellent for allowing a naturalistic, authentic view of a child's development. They are also vital for program and environmental evaluation. The key component, however, is not the finished product, but the reflective commentary that accompanies the artifacts. Too often we get lost in the idea that we, as teachers have to produce a succinct visually stunning marking of a child's success, but that is just another form of high-stakes testing, totally inappropriate for the early childhood setting. Instead, we need to allow that pedagogical documentation allows for greater understanding in all parts of the classroom, from the arrangement of materials, to the creation of curriculum, to the communication

with parents about the progression of their child. While some might say that this is the latest trend to follow and allows for tacit social control, documentation as assessment is really a philosophical perspective with a wide variety of applications but with a fundamental goal of knowing each individual with whom you work. It is severely constrained by time, energy, resources, and lack of awareness, but as a means to guide us towards a better epistemological understanding, documentation is unsurpassed. It takes us to a cycle of inquiry that results in a high level of intellectual involvement, for both the teacher and the student, which is, after all, the goal of assessment.

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## REFLECTION

Spring of 2009 had me in the Authentic Assessment course. One assignment was to write a position paper on a topic related to assessment. I again chose to look at documentation, but to include with it the component of observation and to examine how the two interact with teachers and students. This assignment also required us to research opposing viewpoints, which introduced alternate perspectives in my inquiry of the Reggio Emilia approach, forcing me to address my own views of the approach and to understand more deeply how and why they appeal to me. The project also showed me how the observations I was practicing were true assessments.

# Social & Emotional Learning:

## *Curriculum Orientation for Happy Baby Small School*

Presentation by Stephanie Agnew  
Spring 2009



# *What Is Social & Emotional Learning?*

- ❖ Emotional learning leads to self-regulation and the recognition of the emotions of others.
- ❖ Social learning deals with successful interactions with others
- ❖ Social-Emotional learning skills affect all other areas of learning
  - Skills include:
    - Empathy
    - Conflict Resolution
    - Community development



## *Why is Social & Emotional Learning Important?*

- ❖ We construct our view of the world, in part, through social relationships
- ❖ Our experience and reactions to others helps shape our consciousness
- ❖ Community develops through shared experiences
- ❖ All learning domains are affected by social & emotional development



# Empathy

*Fostering empathy involves changing perspective and making an educated guess about how another feels.*

Strategies include:

- ❖ Teacher modeled behavior: “ She is sad because she misses her mom. I’m cuddling her.”
- ❖ Labeling feelings: “He is angry because you took his shovel. Remember when you were mad because he took your block?”
- ❖ Find opportunities for children to use their skills: “ Do you see her crying? Do you think she wants a hug? Do you like hugs when you are sad? Ask her if she wants a hug.”



# Conflict Resolution

*Conflict offers opportunities for children to exercise their social skills. It can also lead to deeper communication and understanding. Conflict involves expanding cognitive and emotional development. It can also lend to the development of community.*

Strategies include:

- ❖ Teacher modeling of calm, non-reactive behavior. Recognize that the conflict belongs to the children and allow them space to resolve it peacefully until needed. This means seeing the children as competent and powerful.
- ❖ Use multiple means of guidance: non-verbal calming, narrating and validating points of issue.
- ❖ Clarify and restate problem, ask for solutions from the children without judgment: “He took your truck. Did you want him to? Tell him you didn’t want him take it. Now, how can we solve this?”
- ❖ Propose solutions when they need help: “Let’s ask if you can find him another truck. Will that work for you?”
- ❖ Value the children’s resolution abilities. Do not continue process if children lose interest.
- ❖ Do not force arbitrary and insincere solutions. Let the children’s sense of justice prevail over your own.

# Community Development

*Each group of young children create their own community, complete with rules, rituals, interests. Social and emotional learning supports the creation of a trusting, caring, child-centered mini-society.*

## Strategies include:

- ❖ **Co-creating an inviting environment with multiple dimensions, with both group and individual space, and represent the children in the space.**
- ❖ **Considering and modeling inclusive language, moving from “me” to “we”.**
- ❖ **Acknowledging individual needs as well as whole group needs.**
- ❖ **Find opportunities for children to help one and other : “She needs an ice pack, will bring one to us?”**
- ❖ **Establish recognizable routines and include children in their creation.**
- ❖ **Honor the games and rituals the children develop.**
- ❖ **Include children in whole group problem solving: “We need to keep the sand in the sand box. Do you have any ideas how we can do that?”**

# Assessing Social & Emotional Learning

- ❖ Observe the children and consider their interactions when assessing
- ❖ We look for children to develop social and emotional skills in the following areas:
  - Successful separation from family
  - Express emotions appropriately and begin to recognize emotions in others
  - Accepting of comfort from people in community, both adults and peers
- ❖ Skills should expand in all domains:
  - *Language & Literacy*: Are language skills expanding to include emotional and social expression?
  - *Physical*: Can children successfully navigate the shared space?
  - *Cognitive development*: Do we see evidence of critical thinking skills when working in our community?





# Key Points to Remember

- ❖ Social and emotional learning is perhaps the most valuable skill learned in pre-kindergarten environments. Working with toddlers and two year olds is an excellent arena to guide the very young to the creation of their first peer – rich community.
- ❖ Supporting young children in social & emotional learning means first seeing them as competent, allowing them to also see themselves as competent.
- ❖ Teaching respect means respecting those we teach.
- ❖ Look to share power whenever possible



# Resources

Carter, D. & Curtis, D., *The Art of Awareness: How observation can transform your teaching*. St. Paul: Redleaf, 2000.

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## REFLECTION

I enjoy the opportunity to get creative with my work. As a teacher in a creativity and arts rich environment, I look for occasions to break out of the black and white page most often required for an education student. In this Power Point presentation I had such a chance. Created as another addition to my website, it is a tool for teacher orientation at Happy Baby, outlining the basics of the value of social and emotional learning and the way I expect the teachers to support the children in their interactions while in our care.

This project also allowed me to synthesize several semesters worth of research, from moral development to cognitive growth, as well as assessment and accessibility. The project was instigated by the creation of my technology portfolio, and is a good example of using alternate modes of instruction, as well as a useful component of teacher training.

Stephanie Agnew

EDU 552

April 26, 2009

Technology Portfolio

## 1) **Multimedia Content**

Using apture.com, I added many various links to my existing web page, [www.happybabydaycare.com](http://www.happybabydaycare.com), used as a marketing and communication tool for my small, private toddler program. I added personal photos from our Picasa albums, web pages with reference materials, short films of moments in my programs, and reference pages with more curricular information.

- *Analysis of the usefulness:* As a Reggio Emilia influenced early childhood educator, I already found multimedia useful in my work. I have, however, struggled over the years with the most practical ways to integrated multimedia into my communication with families. I found this resource, and the program I used, incredibly useful.
- *Implementation challenges:* Many ways of using multimedia are available for educators, from adding photos to blogs, emailing videos, and including children in the picture taking process; the challenges are more in sifting through both the media we create and the myriad ways of sharing it. Finding a program that helps organize, store and share the material is vital.
- *Possible adverse effects of the technology:* Adverse effects include over dependence on images versus well-conceived and edited thoughts. Also, children can become inured to the presence of digital technology and not give it the consideration that we as educators would like to see.
- *Bibliographic reference:*

**Apture, <http://www.apture.com/>**

This site allows users to integrate photos, music, maps, video, and links from the web to any personally administrated site. With its web-based service, Apture easily allowed me

create links that looked like any other, but connected to a variety of media, including uploading my own personal photos. This will make integrating photos and other media (such as a child's singing or a conversation between children) a truly simple process from any computer available.

## 2) UDL accessible website.

Using the WAVE accessibility checker, I verified and corrected my website to meet web accessibility standards. Currently, only the JAVA scripted slide show program isn't truly accessible, but was beyond my technical knowledge to both correct and understand why JAVA isn't accessible. All the integrated photos are accessible, however.

- *Analysis of the usefulness:* Universal Designs for Learning are a simple set of principals to follow, and will be truly useful when implemented across all disciplines.
- *Implementation challenges:* The biggest challenge for me in this component was realizing that my site was already fairly accessible. I was required to add alternate titles for all photos and to clean up the existing table. As I mentioned above, the JAVA scripted slide show (which my husband added to the site shortly after it was developed) was beyond my scope to correct.
- *Possible adverse affects of the technology:* Accessibility doesn't have a downside.
- *Bibliographic reference:*

### **Colorado State University Accessibility Project,**

<http://accessibility.colostate.edu/CSUstandards.htm>

This site has a wealth of easily accessed and understandable information. They offer many explicit tutorials and easy to watch videos, as well as links to other resources.

### **WAVE: Web Access Evaluation Tool, <http://wave.webaim.org/>**

Of the many website accessibility checkers I used, this was by far the easiest to use and correct from. It offers many kinds of services, from expensive training materials to a free web checker, WebAIM has tutorials about multiple disabilities and how to make the web more accessible to people with them. I found it succinct and simple, two things that will ensure it is utilized.

### 3) **Blog added to my updated website.**

In the course of this class, I updated my website in all areas and integrated a blog. Previously I kept a blog through Google's Blogger, but found adding photos and videos difficult, so I switched to using Picasa web albums. I look forward to gaining experience with the new blog.

- *Analysis of the usefulness:* As a parent communication tool, I think a blog can surpass email for quickly relaying useful information and sharing the children's projects and adventures.
- *Implementation challenges:* Very few. With basic technical knowledge and someone to call upon for help, installing and using a blog is simple.
- *Possible adverse affects of the technology:* Might lead to over reliance on technology versus face-to-face conversation. Educators might assume that all parties have kept current of the information, but that is rarely the case.

- *Bibliographic reference*

- **Word Press, <http://wordpress.com/>**

After doing some research, we discovered that Word Press's blogs are straightforward to install and integrate without complication to an existing web page. I haven't much experience using it yet, but adding multimedia content seems uncomplicated.

### 4) **Instructional Authoring**

I created and added a Powerpoint presentation to my website for teacher orientation to a specific curriculum.

- *Analysis of the usefulness:* This effort is an experiment for me. I would like to believe that the creation of an easy to read PowerPoint will allow incoming teachers to better understand our curriculum as related to specific topics. I hope also that it will be useful for staff meetings.
- *Implementation challenges:* As a design oriented person, I spent entirely too much time concerned with the appearance of my product. Other than that, PowerPoint is very simple to understand.

- *Possible adverse affects of the technology:* Similar to the blog, one party might assume that information shared is information processed, but that is rarely the case, and face-to-face follow up will be necessary.

- *Bibliographic reference*

Corbis, <http://pro.corbis.com/>

I shared this reference in class earlier, but I think it can be reiterated. Corbis is a stock photo site that allows free access to educators for non-commercial purposes. I used it for the backgrounds for my over-designed PPT presentation. It is fun and effortless to use and makes the work of creating presentations much more fun because one can consider the visual appeal. I hope that you will agree that my PowerPoint is more interesting than the average gray and blue backgrounds!



# Happy Baby Small School

- ★ Home
- About Child's Play
- Typical Day
- Photos
- Enrollment
- Hours & Fees
- Food
- About Us
- Comments
- News
- Blog
- 📄 Teacher Orientation

Stephanie Agnew  
1416 Derby St.  
Berkeley, CA  
License: 013418030  
::email us::

"My daughter Charlotte is thriving at Happy Baby, she gets really dirty, which means(to me

## About Happy Baby Small School

We are a small, play-based early start preschool program in South/West Berkeley dedicated to the needs of toddlers, twos, and preschoolers looking for a small environment. Located in a cheerful private home with a large garden, close to [San Pablo park](#). Enrollment is 12 children with three adults. We take an individual approach with each child, fostering independence and respecting each child's emerging personality and abilities.

We develop routines that frame our day: setting the table and clearing our dishes, [working in the garden](#), and having our morning meeting when together we plan our day. Special emphasis is placed on positive social interactions between the children, while giving them the guidance and tools to solve their own problems. We strive to follow the rhythm of each child and integrate those rhythms into the daily lives of all the children in our program.

Our environment is our curriculum, with age appropriate activities emerging as the children develop, based on their interests and the space around us. In these early years the emphasis is on play, movement, and developing life skills. We focus on developing relationships that foster a sense of comfort and security. Our philosophy draws from play-focused research, the [Reggio-Emilia approach](#), and the work of Bev Bos, with a strong emphasis on outdoor play. Our program supports and encourages



## REFLECTION

The final piece included is a description of the components gathered and generated for my Education, Technology, and Praxis class in spring 2009. This was an interesting course, combining current research and trends in education with the technology. The very practical application of the research, in the form of our final portfolio, was appealing to me. I was again able to expand my Happy Baby website, adding multimedia content, making it fully accessible with Universal Design for Learning standards, and the previously included Power Point presentation.

This project forced me to streamline the work I share with teachers and parents, while allowing for wider community access. This project is another example of the practical benefits I've achieved with my work at Sonoma State.

## THESIS PROJECT

As a culminating thesis project I will create a business and project plan for the expansion of my childcare program. Following is the rough draft of my introduction, which answers most of the questions required by the portfolio guidelines. In it, I include portions of previous work regarding nature play and the Reggio Emilia approach, which will be guiding foundations for the program plan.

To complete this task, I will familiarize myself with business plans specific to child care and school creation, and to call upon community resources for small business and child cares. I am also going to align the development of the business vision and mission with my theoretical background in Reggio Emilia and nature study.

The timeline I propose:

**December 2009:** Rough draft of introduction, literature review, and methodology

**January – March 2010:** Research of business plans and interviews with centers and resources.

**March – April 2010:** Writing and finalizing project

**May 2010:** GS02

## I: Introduction (revision)

*...[W]e need to find ways to let children roam beyond the pavement, to gain access to vegetation and earth that allows them to tunnel, climb, or even fall. And because formal playgrounds are the only outdoors that many children experience anymore, should we be paying more attention to planting and less to building on them? ( pg. 9, Nabhan & Trimble, 1994)*

What does childhood look like? Imagine the ideal setting for children under the age of five. Is it a converted church basement with a small cement patio with limited access? Do you imagine a low-ceilinged room with fluorescent lights shining over pre-made, plastic, store bought toys with a clip-board bearing teacher checks off standards while children mill about in adult-directed “kindergarten readiness” activities. Do you imagine time-outs and punishment in the name of “discipline”? Holiday-centered monthly themes where everyone makes the same project? Does your vision include several hours per day spent indoors? Those are often the typical environments for early childhood education centers: church basements, institutional rooms, often run with developmental checklists and unvarying thematic content. Imagine now a place filled with sunlight, or a view or a rainstorm, surrounded by trees, dirt, sand, water, plants and other living things, where adults are responsive to the child’s needs and interests and helpful in the shared effort of research and discovery? Are the hours spent playing, mostly with found objects and art supplies, building materials, and other loose parts, those open-ended materials that allow for creative exploration? Are the imaginary children free to choose what to do with their time? Secure that the adults can help guide them through conflicts without mandating order based on an adult’s sense of justice? This is

the early childhood of my imagination that I would like to make a reality for some of the very young children of Berkeley, California.

In January 2005, I opened a small family child-care in my home when my son was six month's old. In the past five years my program has grown to serve twelve children per day and have a staff of four teachers. In that time I have studied the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia schools of Italy, embracing their view of the child as researchers who co-create their educational experience with the assistance of the teachers. In the schools of Reggio Emilia children are viewed as capable constructors of meaning and competent in their expressive use of language or symbolism, emphasizing cognitive and language development. All children are seen as having great potential. Children are also viewed as protagonists of their own development and seen as "...actors in their shared history, participants in society and culture..." (Edwards, p.180). The child's individual potential is intertwined with the social dynamic of the group, working collaboratively on projects, community development, conversation and conflict resolution. Relationships are vital—between the child and the teacher, between groups of children, teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-parents, and between the school and community. These collaborations are at the heart of Reggio. Parents are invited into the classroom and are active in the educational process as well, with the children, teacher.

In *The Last Child in the Woods*, Louv, (2005 ?) explains the reasons behind modern children's lack of connection to the natural world and why our society needs to re-engage with nature to both protect the environment and nurture the children. Louv writes, "Children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity" (p.54,

2000). To this end, the children in our program have near-constant access to the outdoors. Our yard is a rambling wild place, with fruit trees and fairy groves, berries to pick, paths to run on, a sandbox where the sand is always being trucked away to work on large scale endeavor in other parts of the yard or maybe for use in an art project with sand, glue, water, seeds, sticks, moss, or whatever else has found its way into our hands. We collect and examine bugs as we meet them, or go for exploration walks in the neighborhood to say hello to the old folks and dogs that come out to greet us. We play together all day, with only the occasional interruption to check-in about tools being taken, or friends being pushed out of the way.

The children are toddlers to three and a half years old and for most of them, this is their first experience away from home for large amounts of time. The goal of our school is to give children the time, space, and support they need to have the ideal early childhood, to turn the fantasy into a reality. That goal, however, has outgrown my home, leading to my decision to open a new facility in Berkeley. The process to launch an expanded early childhood program is tremendous, requiring multiple layers of bureaucracy and preparation, fundraising and development. In this process, though, a potential exists for the ideals of a program to become buried or blurred. The program I strive to create is entirely dependent on its ideology, so as I embark on its foundation, I wonder: at what points does a program's philosophy affect the planning and business decisions when opening a new early childhood education center?

The National Economic Development and Law Center publishes *Child Care Center: Financial Planning and Facilities Development Manual*, as part of an effort to improve the business development skills of childcare providers and thus increase high-quality childcare. In a four-part

manual, the parts and purposes of a business plan are outlined. Using that format, I intend to create a business plan and look closely at the steps at which the philosophical foundations intersect with the planning and decision process, from the cover sheet, through the organizational structure ending with the supporting documents. From the perspective of a play and nature based program, I will connect my planning choices with the foundation of my school's philosophy.

Here are the components of a childcare business plan, as adapted from *Child Care Center: Financial Planning and Facilities Development Manual*:

1. Cover Sheet
2. Executive Summary
3. Organizational Capacity
4. Description of the Proposed Project
  - A. Project Goals*
  - B. Description of the new or renovated facility*
  - C. Plan for managing the facility development process*
5. Market Analysis
  - A. Understanding need vs. demand**
  - B. Basic elements of market feasibility analysis**
6. Marketing Plan
7. Operations Plan
8. Financial Analysis
  - A. Summary of financial needs**
  - B. Development budget**
  - C. Financial projections**
  - D. Financial statements**
9. Supporting Documents

II: Lit Review

III: Methodology

IV: Findings

V: Conclusions, Implications, etc