Debunking the Myths:

Creating a Shared Understanding of Emergent Curriculum

WEBINAR BY SUSAN STACEY, M.A.

Context: A little about myself and my connection to Emergent Curriculum

- A British education – hands-on experiences as a learner, leading to…
- A belief in constructivist, experiential teaching and learning, and
- A belief in the power of play
- The influence of Pacific Oaks College and Betty Jones

- Now, teaching curriculum courses, presenting workshops & seminars for adults….

What are the common myths about Emergent Curriculum?

- ‘There is no planning in Emergent Curriculum’
- ‘It’s all about the children’s interests’
- ‘We have to respond to all of their interests’
- ‘There is always project work going on’

Clarifying what Emergent Curriculum is: A working definition

- **Beginning** with observations of children in action; then a thought response
- "Child-initiated, teacher framed" ; both teacher and child have a voice – therefore curriculum is a collaboration
- Plans are developed frequently in response to children's ideas, questions, play, needs
- Creative rather than prescriptive

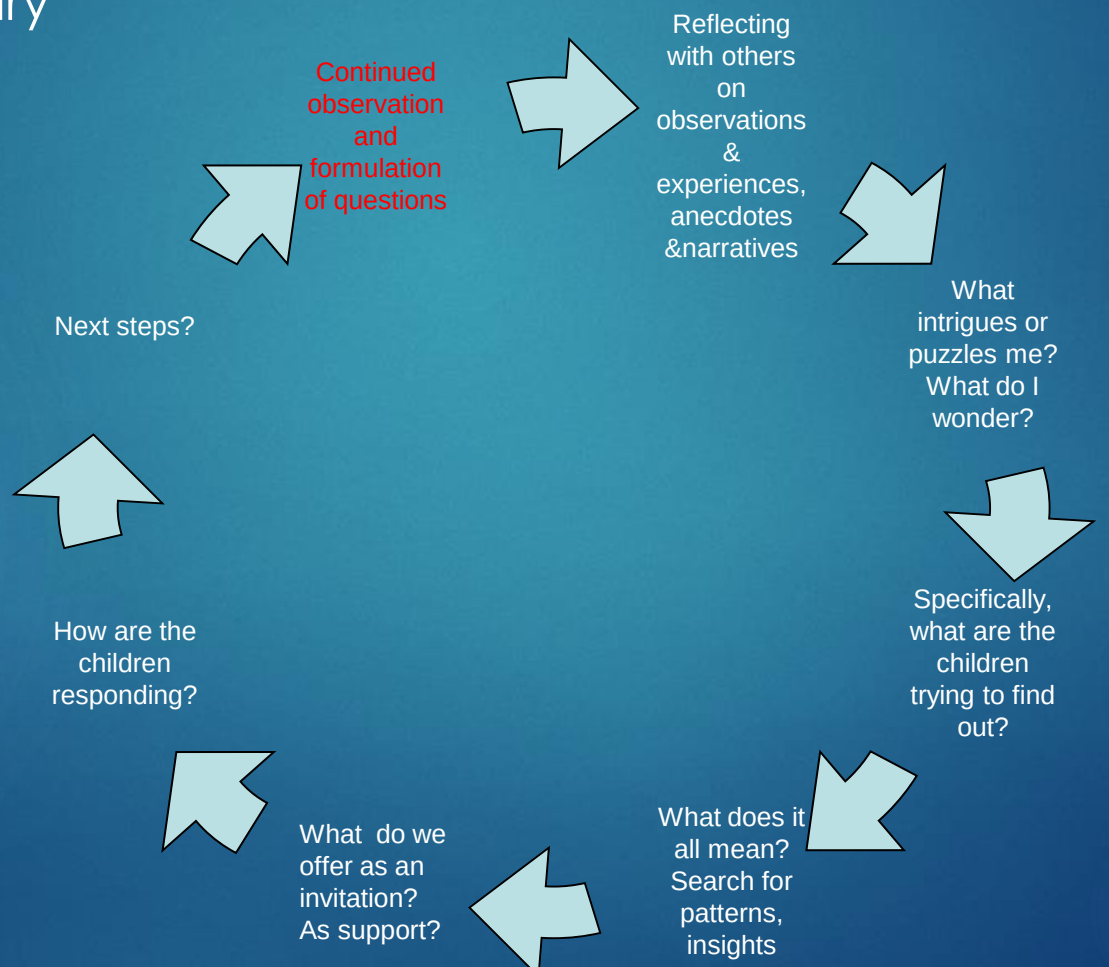
What emergent curriculum is not....

- Prescriptive or linear
- Predictable or thematic
- Rarely repetitive
- Tedious; neither for teachers nor for children.
- NOT unplanned! Emergent Curriculum is ***intentional***

- POLL

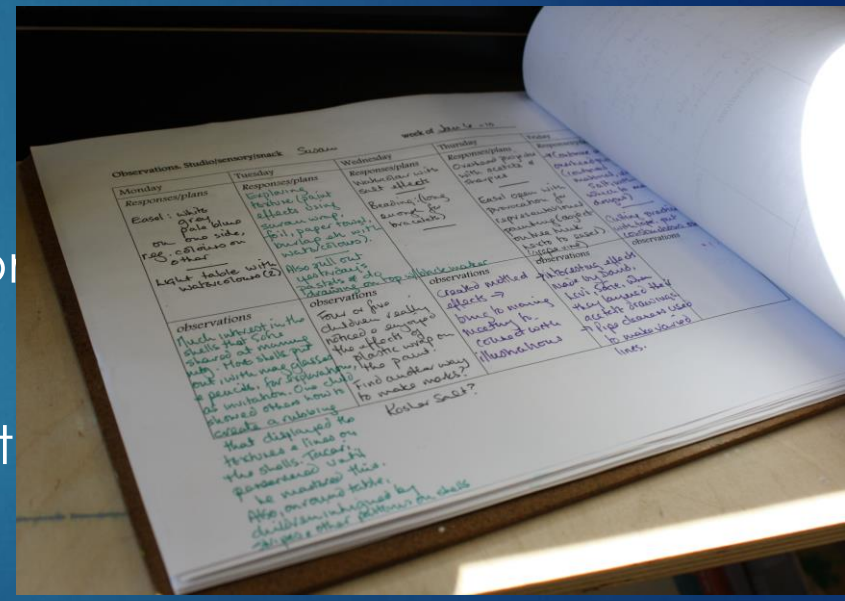
How does Emergent Curriculum unfold? The Big Picture

- A Cycle of Inquiry
- Whatever the age group, this cycle remains the same



Observing: what and how?

- We are observing for curriculum purposes
- Observing also includes listening
- We need tools, and a system for organizing observatio
  e.g. camera, notepads, clipboards, post-it notes….
  anything that we will use consistently and can return t
  reflection purposes



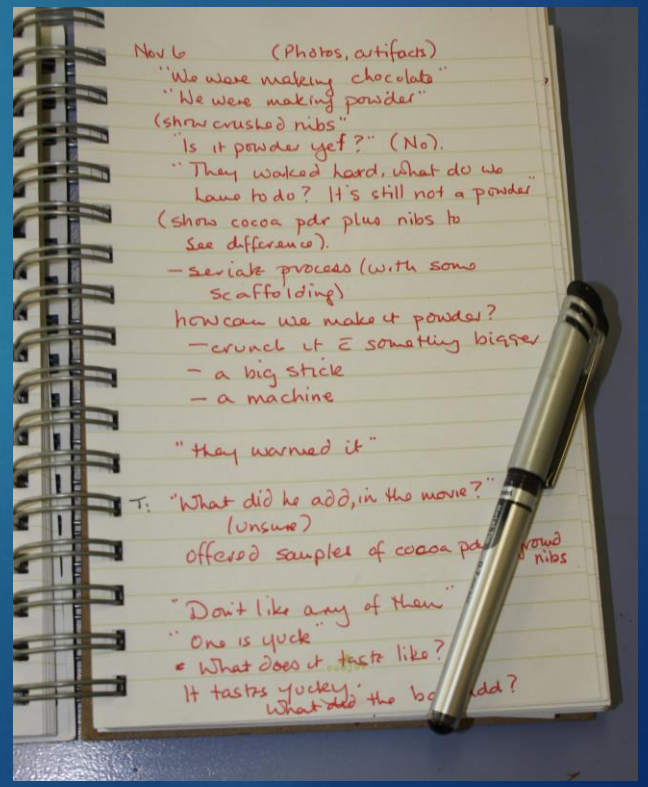
What to observe for; some considerations

- What are the children playing at?
- Do they have a repetitive idea that they keep coming back to?
- What is their underlying agenda?
- What are they understanding and what ar
  they misunderstanding?

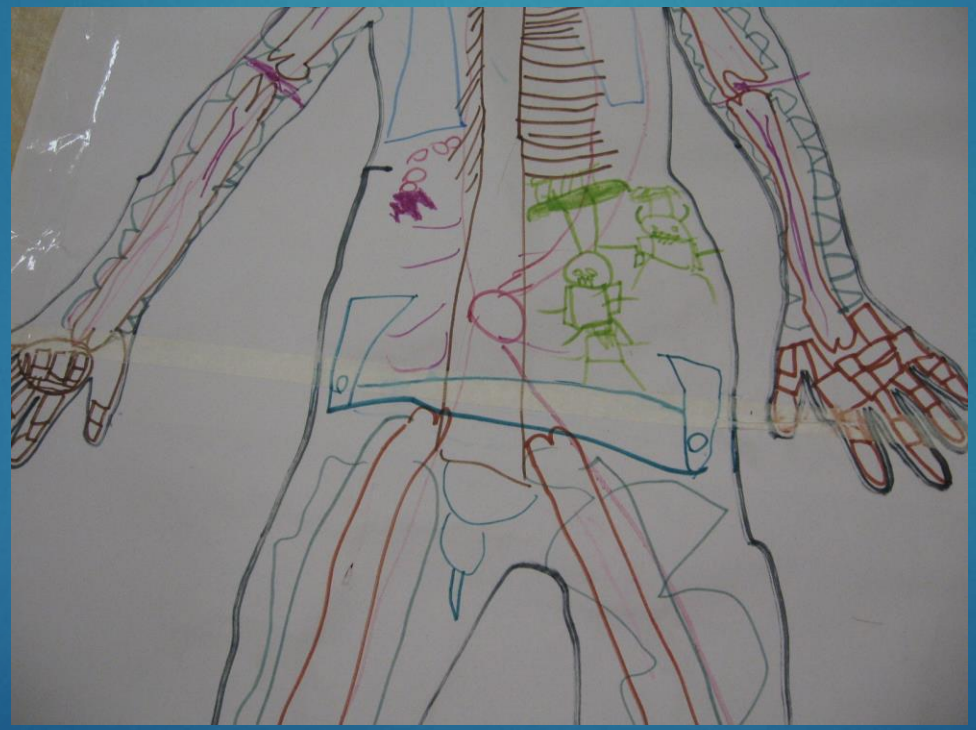
What are they saying? Listen carefully to their conversations with other children, their questions, arguments.

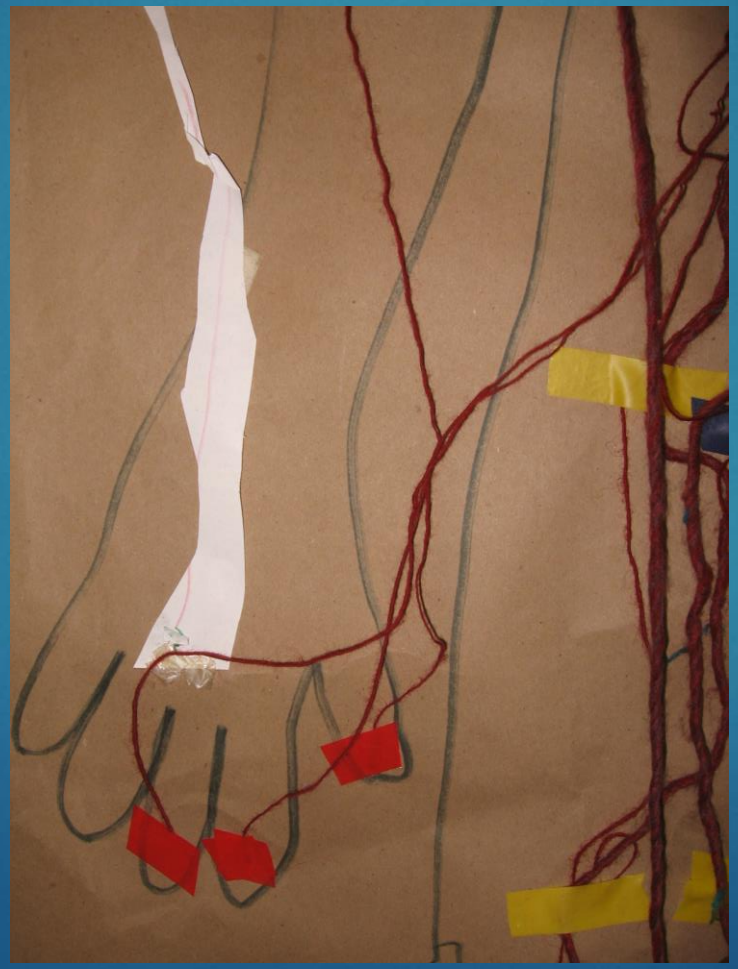
Write these down, verbatim!

Think about what these conversations tell us…



Watching for how the children demonstrate what they know….





- Watch for how children use materials.
- Are they sticking with one approach? Do they experiment? Combine materials in unexpected ways?

Pause to reflect: why do this?

- We are trying to make sense of what we have seen
- Others may hold a different perspective. It is useful to hear everyone's point of view
- Reflection leads us to a direction for next steps – a direction that will be meaningful to the children

Responding to our first observtions: Several choices

- Dependent upon:
  - What we think is happening for the child
  - Whether this involves one or two children, or many
  - The resources we have available
  - The age group we are working with
  - The way our team works together

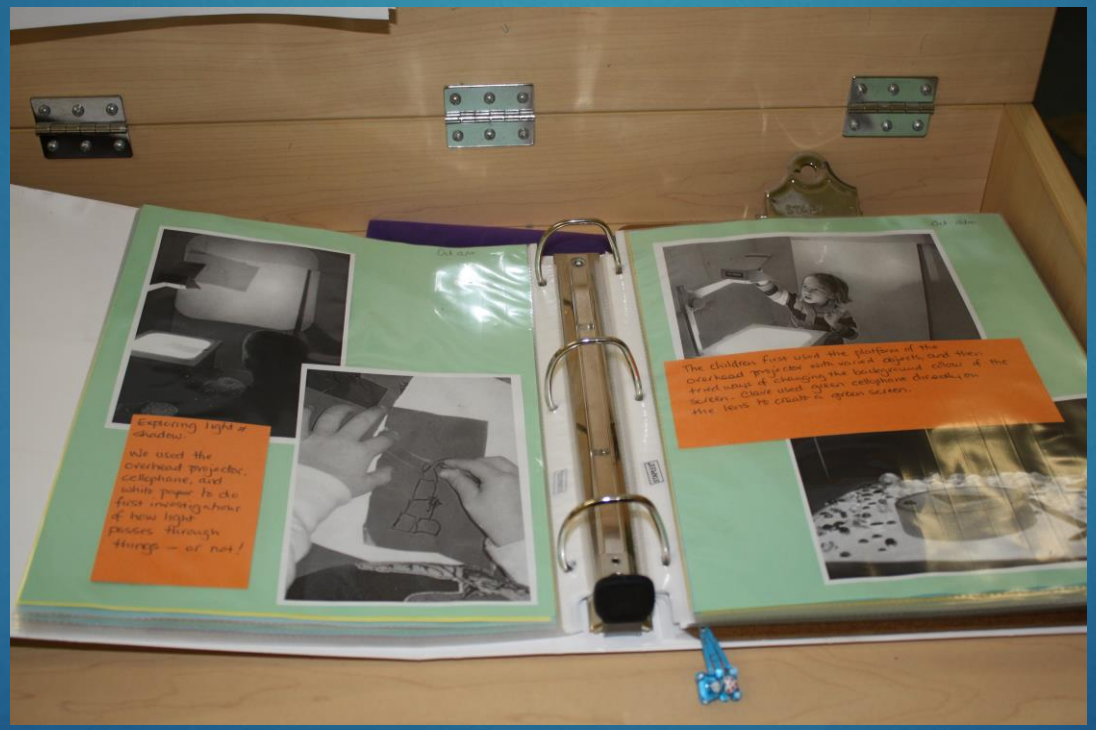
Provide an initial invitation to ‘test the waters’

Can be a simple addition – always with open ended materials – that scaffolds

Can be a small change in the environment

Or, further conversation with children

Revisiting documentation with the children



Having children represent their understandings

Then pause again to reflect

- What were the children's responses to the invitation?
- What are their understandings and misunderstandings?
- What does this tell us?
- What are our next steps? Do we need to take this further?

Possibilities?

- A short or long term project
- A larger change in classroom environment
- An ‘expert’ to help scaffold children’s knowle
- Reaching into the community

A short term project: Cleaning our Water

- Began with exploring pipes & water during play
- Naturally occurring questions engaged children's curiosity – how were these questions addressed?
- How did teachers scaffold learning through play?

Beginning with play…

When left-over pipes and fittings were brought into school as an invitation to explore; the children immediately understood that they were pipes for carrying water.

They explored how the pipes fit together and how water moved through them.

Teachers asked "Where does the water go after being in our pipes?"

The children checked under cabinets and inside the toilet in order to figure out where the water was going...

The children understood that water leaves our homes or classrooms through pipes.

But , then what happens?

‘It goes to the ocean,’ they told us, but how does it get cleaned before it gets there? This is a puzzle for them....yet they have prior knowledge of water treatment plants due to the local news reports & parent conversations….

During play, the children make ‘dirty water’

As the dirty water, full of sand, beans, paper etc., ran through a set of rocks, it came out looking different.

Then, we tried pouring the water through gravel, and it looked different again....

The children offered ideas about why this had happened. They said that ‘the rocks catch the junk’ and the water can pass through the small holes into the container.

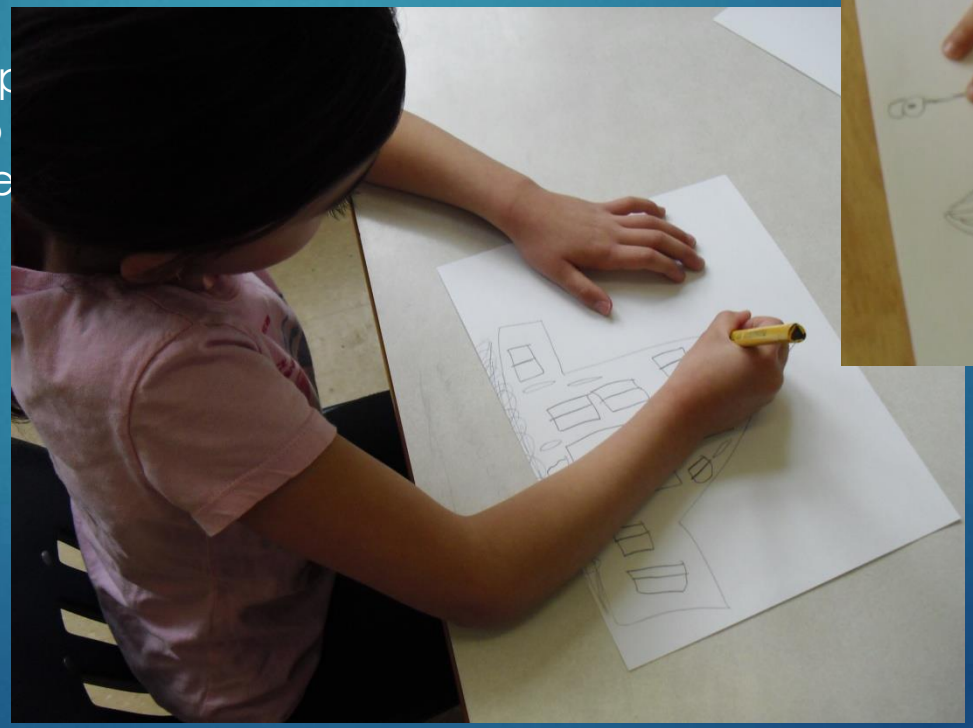
‘Now, we have to figure out how to get the water even cleaner!!’

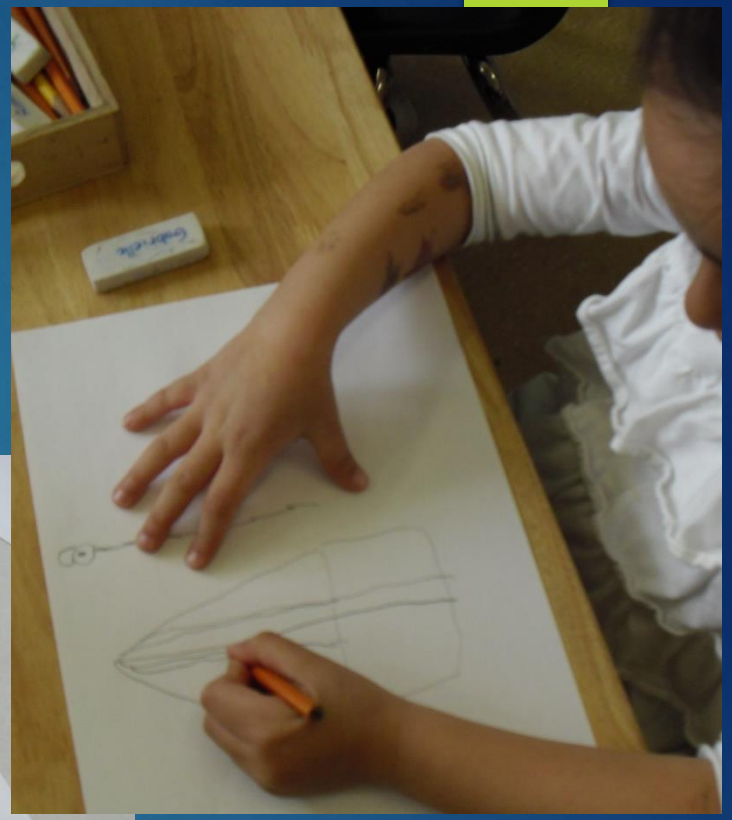
Linking to home…

The children mentioned that their parents used coffee filters to catch coffee grounds in their machines.

We offered coffee filters as a way to further filter water and make it even cleaner....

In the studio, and at small group time, the children continued to draw their theories of how water travels from home to 'factory' and then into the ocean...





April 24

After noticing what dissolves in water, or doesn't, the children fished out the 'pollution' in order to clean up the water....this led to discussion about what living creatures need in order to live in water....

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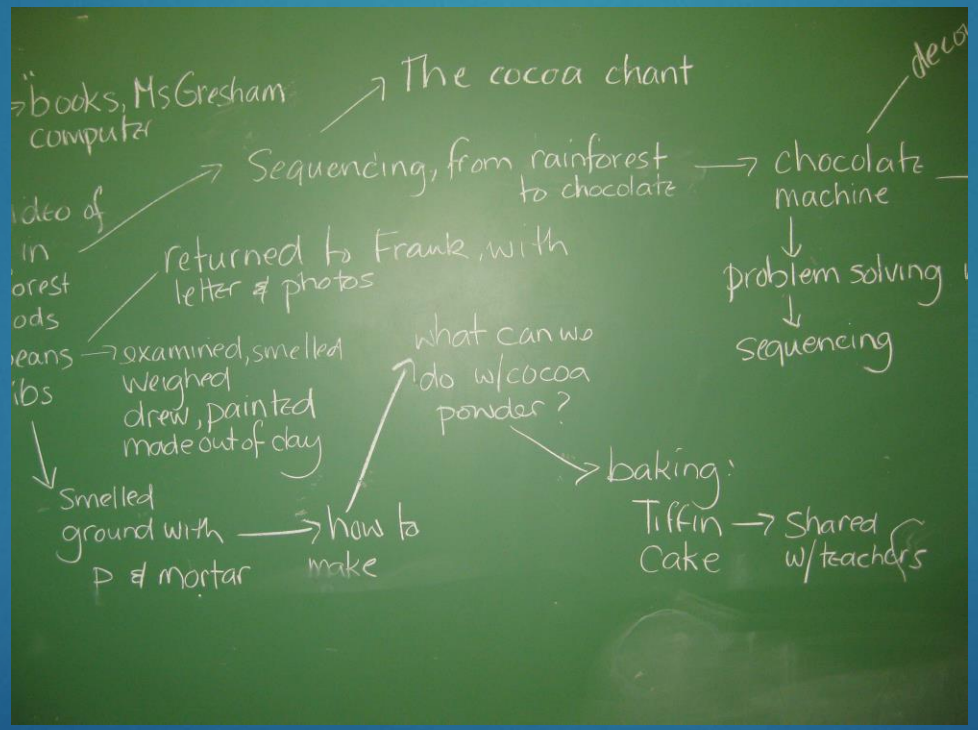
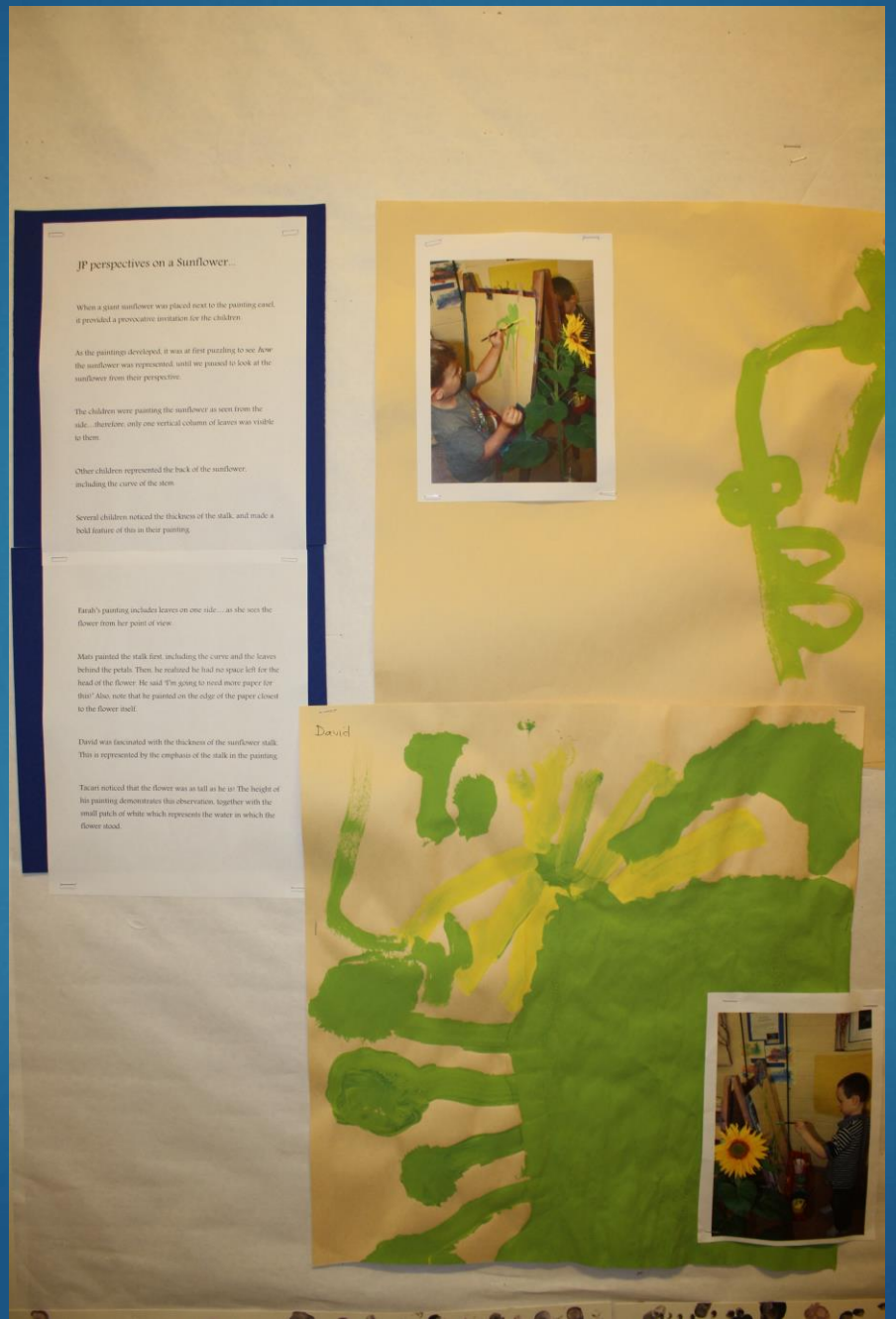
- After reviewing documentation, the children began to think about animal habitats, and how we can protect them. In order to reinforce what kinds of things living creatures need, we created a ‘frog pond’ and new investigations began….

Documenting the work

- One of the most valuable uses of documentation is for children to think about where they have been in terms of investigations, and what they would like to find out more about....
- Do they have something more to say?

Teachers can document their curriculum path as it happens….




JP perspectives on a Sunflower...
When a giant sunflower was placed next to the painting easel, it provided a provocative invitation for the children.
As the paintings developed, it was at first puzzling to see *how* the sunflower was represented, until we paused to look at the sunflower from their perspective.
The children were painting the sunflower as seen from the side...therefore, only one vertical column of leaves was visible to them.
Other children represented the back of the sunflower, including the curve of the stem.
Several children noticed the thickness of the stalk, and made a bold feature of this in their painting.
Farah's painting includes leaves on one side.... as she sees the flower from her point of view.
Mats painted the stalk first, including the curve and the leaves behind the petals. Then, he realized he had no space left for the head of the flower. He said 'I'm going to need more paper for this!' Also, note that he painted on the edge of the paper closest to the flower itself.
David was fascinated with the thickness of the sunflower stalk. This is represented by the emphasis of the stalk in the painting.
Tacari noticed that the flower was as tall as he is! The height of his painting demonstrates this observation, together with the small patch of white which represents the water in which the flower stood.
David


Lenovo


Austin
My brain thinks about eating and fighting and having dessert. It tells me how to make towers. That's all it thinks about.
Christian
It tells me which way is going home. It tells me when I am hungry. It tells me I am born or scared, that I can see legs.
Valentina
My Brain tells me to go home. At home my brain tells me not to go to school. When I see my Mum my brain tells me to play with playdough with Mom. When I see my brother my brain tells me to play with him. My brain tells me to have snack.
Isabelle
My brain tells me to move my head and shake my arms. When I see my friends it tells me to run. When I see my Mom, it tells me to have breakfast
Darcy
The brain is telling me to make another brain out of plasticene. My brain tells me to turn Ms. Benson 's brain into a peanut. It teaches you to make stuff, to eat cheese and candies too.
My brain tells me to be good or bad but mostly my brain tells me to be good.
The brain is thinking about a shark tooth. And to get a spear. And a pet lizard. And to do a pillow fight.

Resources:

- *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings*
- *Unscripted: Emergent Curriculum in Action*
- *Pedagogical Documentation (coming in September)*
- All available through Redleaf Press or Amazon. In Canada, distributed by Monarch Books (Early childhood catalogue)
- Susan can be reached through her web page at www.suestacey.ca where there is a link to email, as well as her blog.

- Questions?