

A personal point of view...

# Marking a Moment in Time

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As a Registered Early Childhood Educator, working at Today's Family, within an Ontario Early Years Centre, at the neighbourhood location in Mohawk College, I have the pleasure of working alongside children and their families. Our program philosophy is based on "emergent curriculum." Emergent curriculum develops an educational environment in response to children's observed interests and needs rather than pre-developed plans.<sup>1</sup>

Re-evaluating our notions of our views of what Early Childhood looks like today is an integral part of our focus. As part of professional development, I had the opportunity to contribute to the Embracing the Early Years Conference held in November of 2013. As a member of one of the conference committees, we decided to develop a token of appreciation to present to the conference speakers. We chose a bookmark as a representation of "a moment in time."

At our interactive parent/child play time program, I see many different children and their families. During the week that we were to make the bookmarks, a child named Alijah (age 2), his mother, Amy, and his baby brother, Anderson, attended the program.

The blank bookmarks were placed on a table. For days the bookmarks were not touched. Eventually, one day, Alijah approached the table and reached for the blank rectangle-shaped paper. Alijah showed immense concentration as he worked, carefully meeting the crayon with the paper. I was beginning to think that Alijah would not want to part with his new creations. After he was finished, he left his work on the table and walked away. I asked Alijah if I could keep them. Alijah replied, "Sure," showing no interest in them at all. In that moment, I realized that Alijah's work represented something bigger. Alijah reminded me of relationships – as if I were the blank bookmark and Alijah were the crayon.

An important element of emergent curriculum is *reflection*. Reflecting on Alijah's work with Kathy Cope, a

colleague working with the Artists at the Centre Project, we thought carefully and deeply about the importance of Alijah's work. We engaged in an intense dialogue around the notion of Early Childhood and the importance of thinking critically about our program and professional practice.

Another key element of emergent curriculum is documentation of the process. In a traditional mode, Alijah would have been encouraged to focus on the creation of a product. Instead, Alijah's work represented the connection between theory and practice. One might view the marks he left on the paper as the outcome of the activity, but after reflecting on the documentation, it became evident that a more complex notion emerged. He reminded me of the importance of valuing the process over the product.

That *moment in time* served as a reminder of the cycle of inquiry and reflective practice. If we view Alijah as a representative of all children, the meeting of the crayon would represent them. If we view the paper as a representative of the adults working alongside the children, the bookmarks represent the collaboration.

We are all richer for the experience. ◀

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Bredekamp (2013), *Effective Practices in Early Childhood Education: Building a Foundation, Second Edition* (Pearson: Toronto).



For more information, books and resources about emergent curriculum, go to <http://www.naeyc.org>.