

Infants Make Meaning: Reflective Teaching and Learning with Infants and Toddlers

Mary Jane Maguire-Fong

Margie Perez-Sesser

18th Annual Birth to Three Institute
Washington, D.C.
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An invitation to . . .

Practice observing, documenting, and reflecting to plan curriculum, assess learning, and engage families.

Explore a simple framework for preparing written curriculum when working with infants and toddlers and their families.

Connect the dots between curriculum and assessment.

**Part 1:
Reflective Planning with Infants & Toddlers**

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2014 Early Head Start National Resource Center's Annual Birth to Three Institute
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What the research tells us:

http://www.alisongopnik.com/lantern_v_spotlight.htm

4

If you want to hear/see the evidence from science:

Web link to presentation by Dr. Alison Gopnik, describing some of the research about how babies learn:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrymCwZC7n0&feature=relmfu>

Web address to Dr. Patricia Kuhl's TED talk on The Linguistic Genius of Babies

- http://www.ted.com/talks/patricia_kuhl_the_linguistic_genius_of_babies.html?quote=907

5

Infants are Like Scientists

They...

- Explore
- Investigate /Experiment
- Form hypotheses... "If I do __, __ will happen."
- Form theories ... "This is how things happen."

6

Infants are:

- Born with an amazing capacity to gather and organize vast amounts of information.
- ACTIVE learners, making meaning within moment-by-moment, everyday encounters with the world around them and within the company of others.

What they learn becomes a foundation for all later life learning.

If you want to hear/see more of the evidence from science:

Dr. Karen Wynn's research on infants' awareness of fairness:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-UQkDs9I0I>

Dr. Michael Tomasello's research on toddlers' helpful behavior:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeU5x2W7cU&NR=1>

8

"We as teachers are asked by children to see them as scientists or philosophers searching to understand something, to draw out a meaning, ... We are asked to be the child's traveling companion in this search for meaning.

... We are also asked to respect the meanings that children produce, the explanatory theories they develop, and their attempts to find and give answers. When we honor the children this way, the children reveal [their thinking] to us."

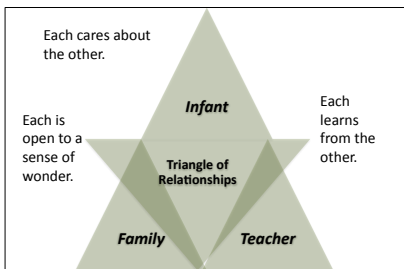
Carlina Rinaldi, *Reggio Children*

Rinaldi, C., Creativity, Shared Meaning, and Relationships. In Lally, R., Mangione, P., & Greenwald, D. (2006). *Concepts for Care*. San Francisco: WestEd.

9

Teachers are Researchers

- From “not knowing” to “trying to find out”
 - How is the child making meaning?
 - How do we support them in this?
 - How do children reveal to us their thinking?



Teaching and learning with infants and toddlers begins with listening and observing.

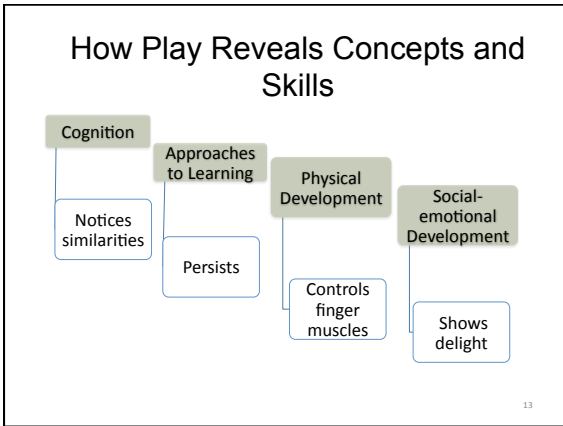
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Early Head Start School Readiness Goals

- Language and literacy
- Cognition and general knowledge
- Approaches to learning
- Physical development and health
- Social and emotional development.

Source: *School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs: Examples from the Early Head Start National Resource Center.* DHS EHS NRC – June 5, 2012

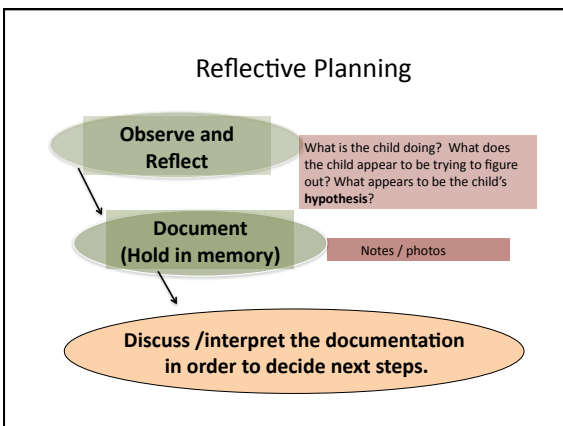
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To Meet EHS School Readiness Goals...

- Build on infants strong push to **ACTIVELY** learn.
- See infants as scientists.
- See teachers are researchers.

14



Observing, Documenting, Interpreting

“What kind of context, what kind of possibility can you offer to the children for the next step and the next step, not because you know the next step, but because you want to offer a possibility for going deeper and deeper in their research”

Quote from Carlina Rinaldi in DVD “New Perspectives on Infant/Toddler Learning, Development, and Care.” Sacramento: CA Dept. of Education.

Pose Curriculum as a Question

What might happen if we offer infants...?

In what ways might they explore if we add to the play space ...?

What might they do if we invite them to ...?

17

Planning question: What will the infants do in response to small containers added to the collection of familiar toys?

Observation	Reflection

18

Planning question: What will the infants do in response to small containers added to the collection of familiar toys?	
Observation	Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picks up small soap dish, mouths, fingers, peers at it Flings it away & it lands to his right Turns to look at pile of objects Picks from pile a soap dish identical to the one he had earlier Smiles as he waves it before his eyes Stares at soap dish dropped earlier Places 2nd soap dish on top of 1st one – identical match 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Severyn appeared to notice how one object was the same as the other object (emerging skill: classification, making "2"). -Showed delight in accomplishment. - Persisted


Curriculum = Contexts for Learning

Play Spaces
Daily Routines
Conversations/Interactions


Consistent with Head Start Performance Standard: HSPPS 45 CFR 1304.21(a)


Curriculum as Contexts

- Play spaces that invite children to investigate and build concepts and ideas
- Daily routines that invite children to use emerging skills and concepts
- Conversations/Interactions that support children in learning about self and other

Plan of Possibilities: Books in the play spaces		
Date: 11/4-8		
Place collection of cat puppets in basket along with books about cats; and collection of books about trains adjacent to train in connections-construction area.		
Planning Questions: What play and conversation will these books and related materials prompt when toddlers find them in the play space?		
		
Observations	Photos	Interpretations

Routines as Context for Curriculum	
Planning question: How will the toddlers respond when invited to use pitchers to pour milk?	
Observation	Reflection

Plan of Possibilities: Sign-in area at entry	
Date: 12/12-16	
Date:	Create a space near entry where toddlers can write in imitation of what their families do at arrival.
Planning Questions: What will the toddlers do if we create a place for them to sign in adjacent to where their families sign in?	
	
Observations	Interpretation

Plan of Possibilities: Helper chart	
Date: 1/10-14	
Create a helper chart and place at toddler level near group gathering space.	
Planning Question: In what ways might the helper chart and the rituals that it prompts provide new opportunities to use language?	
	
Observations	Interpretation

Conversation as Context for Curriculum

Guidance as Context for Learning

How do we support infants'/toddlers' learning about self, about others, about expectations and beliefs of the communities in which they live?

Conversation/Guidance as Context for Curriculum

Planning question: What will the toddlers do when we start responding to a bite or aggression with phrases like, "I can tell you are angry because he won't give you that truck. But it is not ok for you to bite him. Biting hurts people. Tell him, 'I want that truck.'" 		
Observation	Photos	Reflections
Record here what each child involved in such an experience did or said.		Teachers reflect on how each child responded to this new strategy for responding to biting.

27

Part 2:
Reflective Planning with Infants,
Toddlers, and their Families

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How do we Support Families in their
Infant and Toddler's Learning?

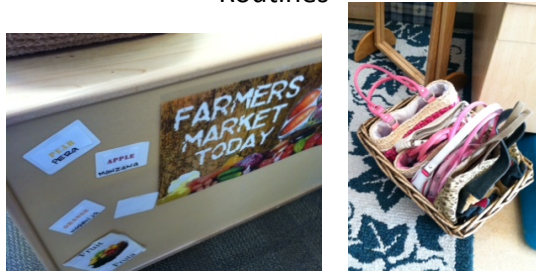
Today's families want the best for
their children but can feel
overwhelmed by marketing and
media influences

Engaging Families in Mindful
Reflective Dialogue about Toys

Make Good Use of Limited Funds

- Resist the flash of heavily-marketed expensive “educational toys.”
- Being a mindful, thrifty consumer.
- Provide information:
 - Consignment shops
 - Toy exchanges
 - Thrift stores
 - Yard and Estate Sales

Play Materials that Build on Family’s Customs, Values and Routines



Materials that Encourage Imagination and Home Culture





Materials that Reflect Family's Natural Environment

A photograph of a green tray containing various natural materials: two seashells, a piece of driftwood, and several smooth stones. Below it is a photograph of a woven basket containing several pieces of driftwood and stones.

Beyond Commercial Toys: Opportunities for Learning-Natural Materials



Reflection: Talk Partners

- Explore the materials on your table.
- What are the learning possibilities they offer?

- What are the learning possibilities if infants were offered these?



Re-purposed Materials Offer Opportunities to Build Motor Skills

Recyclable materials that foster opportunities to explore the environment using all the senses



Articulate learning with families:
Observe infants' play together.

Reflective Conversation: Key Questions

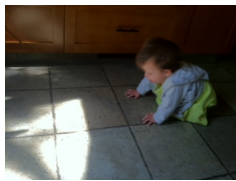
- What do you notice?
- How is she revealing her thinking?
- What might you offer next to help her go deeper in her research?

Gather parents' insight on
infant's interests and learning.

Learning about the child's home can bring interests into classroom
What pets are in the home?



Wonder with families as you observe children's curiosity.



What do you notice? How is she revealing her thinking? What might you offer next to expand her research?

Engaging Families in Mindful Reflective Dialogue about Guidance / Interactions

- Biting
- Sharing
- Compliance
- Book reading
- Use of media
- Being "present" and available (concern: cell phone distraction)

Engaging Families in Mindful Reflective Dialogue about Care Routines

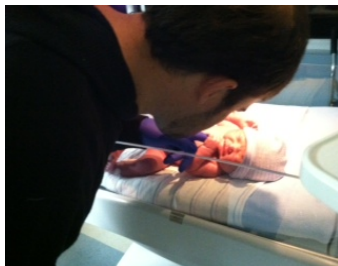
- Respectful diapering that invites infant’s participation
- Napping that invites joy-filled ritual and participation.
- Routines become learning experiences.

Learning infant’s ways of communicating

Reflective Practice: A Framework for Meeting Early Head Start Goals

“EHS § 1304.21(b)(1)(ii) ... encourage trust and emotional security so that each child can explore the environment according to his or her developmental level.”

From birth on, families are encouraged, **through responsive, reflective practice,** to build relationships that take full advantage of the **magic of language.**



PART 3:
Connecting the Dots . . .
Curriculum & Assessment

How do we know infants are learning and developing as we hope?

Mary Jane Maguire-Fong

Reflective Planning is a Cycle

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graph TD; A[Observe and Reflect] --> B[Document and Reflect]; B --> C[Interpret and Plan]; C --> A;
```

What new contexts might we offer to support infants and toddlers in going deeper in their research?

Ongoing Documentation Informs Periodic Assessment

```
graph LR; A[Photos  
Notes  
Work Samples] --> B[Periodic (psychometric) Assessment]; C[Ex: Ages & Stages or California DRDP];
```

Ongoing Documentation

Periodic (psychometric) Assessment

• Ex: Ages & Stages or California DRDP

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Observation	Reflection
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Reflective Conversation: Key Questions
<p>What do you notice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe & Listen
<p>How do children reveal their thinking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the learning -- What ideas or skills do you see? How do they relate to desired results / school readiness goals?
<p>How does this inform what you plan next?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Plan
<p>How do we invite families to join in this work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Participation

Tools for Documentation & Time for Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide easy-access, easy-to-use cameras and means for reviewing photos together. Schedule time to share notes/photo documentation and to engage in reflective dialogue.

Learning is a journey, not a race.

- “We as teachers are asked by children to see them as scientists or philosophers searching to understand something, to draw out a meaning . . . We are asked to be the child’s traveling companion in this search for meaning.” (Carlina Rinaldi, 2006).
- The best possible route for the journey is determined within day-by-day and sometimes moment-by-moment negotiation among teachers, families, and children.
- Our roadmap? Observation, documentation, and reflective dialogue.

58

“If we believe that children possess their own theories, interpretations, and questions...then the most important verbs in educational practice are no longer ‘to talk,’ ‘to explain’ or ‘to transmit’ – but ‘to listen.’”

- Carlina Rinaldi, 2006
The construction of the educational project. In “In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning.” New York: Routledge.

59

Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.” (Loris Malaguzzi, 1998, Hundred Languages of Children, p. 82)

Resources and References

- Lally, J. R. (2013). *For our babies: Ending the invisible neglect of America's infants*. New York: Teachers College Press and San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Lally, J. R. (Producer/Director), Mangione, P. L. (Writer/Director). (2006). *New perspectives on infant/toddler learning, development, and care* [DVD] (Disc 2, Chapter 3). United States: California Department of Education.
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- Maguire-Fong, M.J. (in press) *An Introduction to Teaching and Learning with Infants and Toddlers*. New York: Teachers College Press.
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