The Clifton School Curriculum

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Introduction

Our hope for The Clifton School is to cultivate a community full of wonder, dreams, and possibilities: a unique place where we value diversity and progressive education based on research. This document serves as a guide to our beliefs about how children learn and gives clarity to our curriculum expectations.

The Clifton curriculum is inspired by the Reggio-Emilia approach to education, which begins with a strong image of the child. Our curriculum uses a contextual, constructivist approach to education. By contextual, we mean that children learn information in a meaningful way—in the context of their daily lives and current experiences. Constructivism means that children build understanding from their relationships with others, previous experiences, and their environment. Learning does not proceed in a linear fashion, but spirals around as children revisit or return to concepts to reach a higher level of understanding from the material each time they experience it.

Our strong image of the child guides all of our curriculum decisions. We view children as strong, powerful, and capable of constructing knowledge. The foundation of our Reggio-inspired, contextual, constructivist curriculum is empowering relationships, rich environments and thoughtful planning based on the observations and interests of the children. There is little room for improvisation or last-minute decision-making in this approach to curriculum. Instead, one of the many roles of the teachers is to continually question and reflect upon their work with young children. Both teachers and children learn through rich relationships and meaningful shared experiences.

"Curriculum" includes every aspect of the school experience, extending far beyond pure educational content to include many other areas that involve the rights of children—especially, areas of classroom management and discipline. As outlined in this document, teachers are expected to interact with children and create a culture of kindness in which children are respected at all times.

Image of the Child

In designing The Clifton School Curriculum, we commit ourselves first to a strong image of the child. The capable child is intelligent and desiring of connections with others, full of complexity, wonder, resources, and symbolic thinking. We see children as having existing knowledge that they bring to learning opportunities. The child is not an "empty vessel" to be filled with predetermined, standardized, educational content.

With this strong image of children, teachers provide support and encouragement for them to move ahead in their own construction of knowledge.

Teachers listen closely to children to help them take hold of their own ideas and give them direction. The role of the teacher changes from one who directs learning to one who facilitates

it. The teacher's focus is not on delivering content but on encouraging exploration and investigation.

We have a positive image of the child as an active discoverer and inventor, who constructs knowledge from experiences in the environment.

When teachers adopt this image of the child as strong, capable, and filled with resources, it changes the way we work with children and the way we encourage them to work with each other. Teachers who see children as capable are more likely to encourage them to stay with their efforts. When children are treated as strong and capable, they adopt this image of capability in their own personal vision of themselves.

Rights of the Child

Most of us have been taught to think about children in terms of their needs – infants **need** to be fed and changed. Toddlers **need** to learn to share and to use the potty. Preschoolers **need** to learn letters and to write their names.

Our Reggio-inspired philosophy with its strong image of the child requires teachers to make a shift from this "deficit model," of the "needs of the children" to positive thinking about the "rights of children."

Let us see how this works:

Traditional "Needs" Thinking	"Rights of the Child" Thinking
Infants **need** to be fed.	Infants have the **right** to eat when hungry.
Infants **need** to be changed.	Infants have the **right** to be clean and comfortable.
Toddlers **need** to share.	Toddlers have the **right** to have things of their own that don't require sharing.
Toddlers **need** to learn to use the potty.	Toddlers have the **right** to decide when they are ready to use the potty.
Preschoolers **need** to learn the letters of the alphabet.	Preschoolers have the **right** to books and literacy experiences that stimulate their interest in letters and reading.
Preschoolers **need** to be able to write their names.	Preschoolers have the **right** to a variety of writing tools and paper and to be offered experiences that would make name writing important and meaningful.
Children **need** a clean, safe, healthy, and aesthetically pleasing environment.	Children have the **right** to spend their days in environments that have high standards of cleanliness and safety, and are aesthetically pleasing, well organized, interactive, and non-

	cluttered.

This way of thinking is difficult for some of us who have been focused for most of our lives on what children need and what we need to teach them. It is a subtle, yet dramatic shift in the way we see children and view ourselves as teachers.

Classroom Management: A Curriculum for "Softness"

Children have a right to spend their days in an environment that is warm, accepting, and loving. Long hours in a classroom can fray the nerves of teachers and children. This is all the more reason for teachers to make the use of "softness" of words and actions a high priority.

What is softness? Softness is achieved by striving always to respect the child's perspective on his experience, and not to prejudge the child's behavior from an adult point-of-view.

Taking the child's point-of-view, we are obliged to look at our classroom and our interactions with children in a different way—especially in matters of scheduling, transitioning, slowing down, validating children's emotions, and preventing discipline problems.

A. Scheduling

Teachers develop a classroom schedule that respects children's natural rhythms--avoiding excessive transitions that cut into the flow of sustained play and deepened learning. Maintaining continuity and flow means:

1) Reducing to a minimum the number of group transitions from one activity to another.
2) Allowing significant amounts of time for uninterrupted free play and project work.
3) Building flexibility into the classroom schedule to accommodate the extended interest of children in certain activities.
4) Allowing for flexible teacher supervision between indoors and outdoors, enabling one teacher to facilitate small group work in the classroom while the other teacher supervises the larger group on the playground or piazza.
5) Helping children with classroom maintenance routines to reduce prolonged cleanup times.
6) Creating fun ways to move as a group from one activity to another, avoiding any feeling of regimentation (e.g. imitating the movement of animals as opposed to walking obediently in a straight line).

Our image of the child guides how we organize our day. As a community, we must devise schedules that respect children's natural rhythms, avoiding excessive transitions that cut into the flow of sustained play and deepened learning. Schedules should be flexible to accommodate children's extended interest in a certain experience.

SAMPLE INFANT SCHEDULE			
7:00-9:00am	Arrival, greet children and families, free play, breakfast		
9:00-9:15	Music and movement		
9:15-10:00	Sensory activities in areas		
10:00-10:45	Outdoor play		
10:45-11:00	Prepare for lunch		
11:00-11:45	Lunch		
11:45-2:00	Nap	Free play	
2:00-3:00	Sensory activities in areas		
3:00-3:15	Snack		
3:15-3:30	Music and movement		
3:30-4:15	Sensory activities in areas		
4:15-5:00	Outdoor play		
5:00-6:30	Departure	Free play	Piazza time

SAMPLE PRESCHOOL SCHEDULE			
7:00am	Arrival, greet children and families, prepare for the day, set out provocations, and offer piazza or outdoor experiences		
8:30am	Breakfast served for those who wish to eat	Child selected activities	
9:00am	Morning meeting, music/movement, storytelling and morning agreement		
9:30am 11:30am	Child selected activities: Exploration of environment	Planned small group experience	Outdoor play:10:15am-11:00am
11:45am	Teacher and small group of children prepare lunch	Storytelling	
12:00	Lunch		
1:00-3:00	Naptime/Rest time		
3:00-5:00	Afternoon Activities: Exploration of environment	Snack	Outdoor play: 4:15pm
5:00-6:30	Closing meeting, care for materials and environment, water plants, feed class pets, collaborate with children to gather materials for the next day		

Let's look at an example of **appropriate** and **inappropriate** scheduling of a classroom for young children:

Time:	Do:	Don't:
Morning/ Piazza Arrival 7:00am	Greet and connect with each individual child; invite them to become involved in an activity and/or include them in preparation for the day.	Don't assume that the child has made a transition to the classroom without your support. And don't focus on your morning preparations to the exclusion of the children.

Breakfast 8:30am	Create a "Breakfast Center" to prevent wait time and to allow children freedom to serve themselves or engage in another activity, if they so choose.	Don't make children sit and wait for breakfast.
Morning Meeting 9:00am	Hold a group meeting to revisit significant conversations and experiences and to help children make connections to projects and activities. This morning meeting helps to create a sense of belonging and group identity. An essential part of your job is to delight, captivate, and set an upbeat tone for the rest of the day. During meeting time have one teacher prepare and lay out several activities for the morning. This allows for a crisp transition to activities and prevents distracted, unfocused behaviors.	Don't transition aimlessly to free play in the classroom, ignoring the need to assemble and give group focus to the morning.
Morning Activities	Create a large block of time to allow children uninterrupted, sustained engagement in activities.	Do not chop up the morning into brief time segments with lots of transitions from one activity space to another. For example, scheduling center time from 9-9:30am; unstructured piazza time from 9:30-10; outdoor time from10-10:45; unstructured centers 10:45-11:30.
Small Group Experience	Allow for small group experiences. For example, during morning activities take three children to the piazza for a focused sensory activity or to work on a large mural painting project. *Remember state ratios still allow for a division of each class into small and large groupings. State teacher-child ratios are as follows: Infants: 1:6 Toddler I 1:8 Toddler II 1:10 Preschool 1:15	It is unacceptable to keep the whole class together all morning.

See appendix for samples of actual classroom schedules.

Children eat, nap, and have diapers changed throughout the day, as needed. We try to avoid "assembly line" diapering. Buggy rides to explore the school occur periodically.

B. Transitioning

Classroom management should always aim to minimize "wait time" for children. "Wait times" are transitions and child waiting times. In terms of downtime, teachers will follow these guidelines:

Time:	Do:	Don't:
Early Morning	Make learning centers immediately available to arriving children by having chairs at the tables, lights on, easel set up, sensory table open, light table, and other provocations ready.	Make children wait for learning centers/materials to be made available.
Breakfast	Allow children to serve themselves breakfast.	Make children wait at the table while the teacher prepares to serve breakfast to everyone.
Morning Meeting/Circle Time	Engage the children by reading a story, singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, etc., at the beginning and end of circle time.	Make children wait in circle while other children or the teachers are busy transitioning from/to other activities.
Small Group Time/Center Time	Prepare materials ahead of time, so that children can quickly become engaged in their small group/learning center activities.	Don't wait until the last minute and require children to wait while the teacher assembles the materials for small group/learning center activities.
Transition Indoors/Outdoors	Minimize waiting time. **Indoors to Outdoors:** as one teacher assists the children with the final clean up and bathrooming, the other teacher gathers on the rug with those children who are ready. Engage the children with songs, fingerplays and rhymes. When all children are ready, on teacher invites the children to gather at the door. She gently touches each child on the head as the group counts together. "How many children do we have?" If the children do not have direct access from the classroom to the playground, you will need to repeat the counting process when you	Don't make children line up single-file and wait until the entire class (teachers included) is ready to make the transition.

	actually enter the playground. **Outdoors to Indoors**: Give the children a 5 minute warning before it is time to go inside. If it is the end of the day, involve the children in putting the toys away. One teacher signals that it is time to go in and they gather by the door. Together they count the number of children and go in together. When the children enter the classroom, they count together again. Make the counting fun! With older children you may try counting in another language or by 2's.	
Naptime	Provide quiet, interesting activities for children once they wake up from nap. If a child is not sleeping, go over to the child and help her calm down for a nap. Some children may need their backs rubbed, soft music, a special sleep blanket, or toy. Encourage preschoolers to wait to put their mats on the floor until right before naptime to prevent others from walking on them. When children show signs of sleepiness provide a mat/crib.	Don't force children to lie on their mats with nothing to do when they wake up from nap. Avoid yelling across the room at children who are not sleeping. Avoid scolding or threatening a child who is not sleeping. Do not send a child to another room at naptime. This is a form of time out, which is not acceptable. Avoid placing mats down before lunch or sending children to their mats as a time-out. Do not try to keep children awake to fit your schedule.

C. Slowing Down

Teachers will "slow down" to involve children in important decision-making processes that go on in a classroom. In terms of slowing down, teachers should follow these guidelines:

Example:	Do:	Don't:

Cleaning up a mess	Teacher provides support for children to clean up their own messes, both by familiarizing the children with the organization of the room and by providing clean up tools (brooms, dustpans, and soapy water spray bottles).	Teachers clean up all messes, because it is faster and easier to do it that way.
Solving everyday problems	Teachers look at common, ordinary problems as opportunities for learning and culture-building. Marker tops keep disappearing? Too crowded in the dramatic play area? What ideas do the children have to solve such problems? Although it may take longer, the process of involving children in such decision-making both deepens the children's sense of ownership in the classroom, and eases the job of classroom management in the long run.	Teachers rush in and solve every problem—either environmental or social – without engaging the problem-solving skills of the children.
Bringing new materials into the room	Teachers celebrate the arrival of new classroom materials with contagious excitement, and support the perceived value of those materials through lots of conversations with the children, and thoughtful organization and display of those materials.	Teachers add new materials to the room without giving them proper introduction.
Focus times	Teachers schedule ample time for each classroom activity, respecting the rights of children to fully engage in the classroom experience.	Teachers rush through small group and free play times without giving children enough time to fully engage classroom learning opportunities.
Process over product	Teachers observe and listen closely to the process children go through in creating, constructing, and imagining their way through each learning context. Teachers document and engage the creative process of individual children and groups with an eye to understanding and make those processes visible to the children,	Teachers rush through an activity in order to produce a product for every child, overlooking the richness of the process of creation.

	parents, colleagues, and the larger community.	
Conversations	Teachers facilitate conversations in such a way as to reveal the unique point-of-view and thinking of each child. With the help of follow-up questions and explicit linkages between the ideas of different children, teachers patiently probe into the thinking process of both individual children and groups of children.	Teachers either dominate conversations or glean only superficial information from children, without delving any deeper, and without facilitating an exchange of ideas between children.
Lunch time	Teachers sit with children and help them learn to serve themselves. They talk to children about what they are eating or did during the morning.	Teachers hurry through lunch, either by performing all the serving tasks themselves, or by failing to support the social and sensory experience of eating lunch together.
One-on-one time	Teachers greet children warmly in the morning, and find times throughout the day for friendly, nurturing interactions with individual children.	Teachers are constantly busy making last-minute preparations for the day leaving themselves little opportunity for quality one-on-one time with children.
Social conflict	Teachers sit with children while they negotiate a situation-of-conflict and support them until the children come up with a solution that satisfies them both. This may involve teaching the children how to use "I" statements, validating both children's point-of-view, and helping them come up with alternative solutions (e.g., When John and Tom both want the same dump truck, the teacher can get another dump truck out of the closet, or suggest that John drive the truck and Tom fill up the back with dirt, or suggest that John may have the truck in five minutes or when Tom is finished using it.).	Teachers settle conflicts between children coercively, because it is quicker and easier to do so.

D. Validating Emotions

Our primary responsibility as teachers is to validate and acknowledge the legitimacy of children's feelings under all circumstances.

Genuine validation means more than just saying, "*I know you're angry, BUT...*" Genuine validation starts with an effort to understand the child's point-of-view, and proceeds from the assumption that feelings are legitimate responses to the challenges of daily life. Genuine validation helps the child to understand why he feels the way he does, and assures the child that there is no such thing as an unacceptable feeling. Validation of children's feelings is a process and not a momentary, inauthentic acknowledgement that precedes judgment or punitive measures by the teacher.

Healthy emotional development will be impeded if we don't help children understand their feelings. We recognize that children need adult support in learning about the world around them; however, we often overlook the importance of the adult support in helping children understand feelings. Empathy, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem all require awareness, and self-acceptance of all feelings; regardless of what those feelings are. Before children are able to negotiate and problem-solve in situations of conflict, the intensity of their feelings (emotional distress) must first be de-escalated through the process of validation.

Children are born with a desire to connect positively to the important people around them. Our job is to remain supportive in helping children find their way into that positive relationship with friends, family, and teachers.

Please remember "behavior" is the product of feelings, and feelings have causes. We do children a disservice when we focus on the behavior, and fail to engage children in a conversation about the feelings that underlie that behavior.

When we value children's feelings, this allows children to develop empathy and become responsive to others.

When a child experiences conflict or emotional distress, the following principles and steps of validation should guide our response to that situation:

The Process of Validation

Preschool Example:
Situation: Four-year-old Anthony is sweeping the floor in the dramatic play area. Stephanie hits him and grabs the broom shouting, "*I had it first!*" Anthony is crying and they are both tugging on the broom.

Key Principle	Action	Do and Don't
Consciously open yourself to the children's emotional point-of-view.	Take notice of your emotional reaction to the situation and, as much as possible, clear your mind of any bias for prejudging the situation. Don't expect the children to adopt your emotional view.	**Do:** Move close and think positively. See the situation as an opportunity to help children problem-solve. **Don't:** Replay in your mind all the times Stephanie has hurt other children.
Stop hurtful behavior and respond to any injuries.	Calmly and confidently approach the children. Say to Stephanie, "*I can't let you hurt Anthony.*"	**Do:** Place your body between the children, if necessary, and put your hand on the broom. **Don't:** Immediately solve the problem by taking the broom away or sending Stephanie to time-out for hitting.
Acknowledge the children's feelings, realizing that feelings have causes and need to be understood. Children are capable problem-solvers with adult support.	Say, "*It looks like you are both really upset. What's the problem here?*"	**Do:** Use a calm, supportive tone of voice. **Don't**: Assume you know what happened or why.
Ask questions and gather information from the children.	Say, "*What's the problem here? Stephanie? Now Anthony, you tell me.*" Move closer to the child who is not talking.	**Do:** Let each child describe the situation from their own perspective. **Don't**: Get frustrated by the length of time it takes to help children problem-solve.
Reconstruct the situation with empathy.	Repeat the problem based on what the children tell you: "*So Stephanie, you had the broom but put it down to go to the bathroom. When you came back, Anthony had the broom. When you tried to get it back, he refused and you hit him. Right?*"	**Do:** Help the children see the situation from the other child's perspective. **Don't:** Let your adult sense of justice dominate. "*She had it <u>first</u>, so he needs to give it back,*" or "*She hit him, so she can't play here anymore.*"
Research solutions with the children, recognizing that children are capable problem-solvers with adult assistance.	Say: "*You both want this broom. How can we work out this problem so everyone is happy?*"	**Do:** Repeat the children's suggestions. If they need more ideas say, "*Would you like to hear my ideas?*"

		Don't: Give your ideas until the children try to come up with some of their own.
Restate the suggested solutions. Repeat the chosen solution.	Say, *"Anthony, you said Stephanie could hold the dust pan while you finish sweeping, and then you can trade. Does that work for you, Stephanie?"*	**Do:** Give encouragement to the problem-solvers. "*You figured it out!*" **Don't:** Assume that the agreed upon solution will work itself out smoothly – stay close by for a while.

Toddler Example
Situation: Seth and Brittany (non-verbal toddlers) are playing with trucks on the floor. Seth tries to grab the fire engine that Brittany has, when she resists. He bites her on the arm. She is crying.

Key Principles/Practices	Action	Do's and Don't
Be open to the children's emotional point-of-view. **All feelings have causes and need to be understood.**	Note your emotional reaction to the situation and try not to prejudge the child or expect him to adopt your emotional point-of-view. Look at the situation as an opportunity to help develop social and problem-solving skills.	**Do:** Remember that biting is a typical response of many frustrated toddlers. **Don't**: Replay in your mind all the other times Seth has hurt children.
Use a calm, supportive tone of voice.	Acknowledge Seth's feelings and describe the response/emotions of the other child. Involve Seth in comforting the victim, if possible.	**Do**: While comforting Brittany and tending to the injury say to Seth, "*I know you wanted the fire truck, but we do not bite our friends. It hurts. See how Brittany is crying? Can you think of a way to help her feel better?*" **Don't**: Ask Seth why he bit Brittany. **Don't**: Ignore Seth's feelings. **Don't**: Require Seth to say he is sorry. Sorry is a feeling, and you cannot mandate sorry. It must come from within. You can encourage the

		child to help the victim feel better. He may say "sorry", give a hug, or get a wet paper towel to put on the injury.
Children are capable problem-solvers with adult support.	Once the emotional distress has subsided, it is time to help the child discover alternative ways to handle the situation. Ask questions (you may have to answer them yourself) to help the children see other possible solutions.	**Do**: Say, "*You both really want this truck. What can we do?*" Provide suggestions. **Don't**: Immediately put the truck away, so that no one can play with it.

Infant Example		
Situation: Christopher, an infant has recently napped, been fed, and changed, but is crying in the cozy corner.		
Key Principles/Practices	**Action**	**Do's and Don't**
We must consciously open ourselves to the child's emotional point-of-view.	Take notice of your emotional reaction to the situation, and as much as possible, clear your mind of any bias for prejudging or assessing the situation. Do not expect the child to adopt your emotional point-of-view.	**Do:** Say to Christopher, "*It's okay sweetie pie. I'll be there in a second.*" **Don't:** Say to yourself, "*There's nothing wrong with that baby. He's just trying to manipulate me.*"
All feelings have causes. **Feelings need to be understood.**	In a calm voice, the teacher will try and help figure out why the child was frustrated and help put language to the child's feelings. Help the child establish the relationship between the provocation and the feelings. By offering descriptive language, clarify with the child the link between the trigger and the feeling.	**Do:** Go pick up the baby and say, "*What's wrong, sweetheart? Do you need a little company? How 'bout a little dancing?*" Sing and sway back and forth to soothe the baby… **Don't:** Ignore the baby or pick up the baby only briefly, until the crying stops.
There is no such thing as an unacceptable feeling.	Acknowledge the child's feelings through mirroring, so that the child has no doubt	**Do:** Remain with the baby and stay emotionally available for as long as it takes to comfort the baby. "*My*

	that their feelings are legitimate and have value. One good way to do this is to tell the child you have experienced those feelings yourself.	*mommy used to sing,* Row, Row, Row Your Boat *to me when I was upset*.” **Don't:** Give up and justify your lack of staying power by saying to yourself, “*I shouldn't be spoiling this baby—he'll never learn how to be independent…*”
Children are capable problem-solvers with adult support.	Once the emotional distress has subsided, it is time to help the child discover alternative ways to re-engage with the environment. The focus is upon meeting the needs of the child, so that 1) they are attuned to their emotions and 2) they know that they will not be left alone to handle their own distress now or in the future.	**Do:** After he has settled, hold Christopher, sing to him, and find ways to soothe him. Sit down with Christopher and play peek-a-boo, build with nesting cubes, or other activities that may engage him. **Don't:** Ignore the baby's continued cries, saying to yourself, “*His parents never put him down. They're just spoiling him. The only way he'll ever be independent is to let him learn how to comfort himself. This is for his own good.*”

E. Preventing Discipline Problems

Acceptable Discipline Techniques	Unacceptable Discipline Techniques
Giving children choices and granting them the largest possible share of power in classroom decision-making. For example, if a child doesn't want to put their shoes on before going outside, the teacher could say, “*If you want to play outside, you need to put your shoes on; if you're not ready to put your shoes on that's okay, you may sit at the picnic table with the markers.*”	Mandating a certain rule and not allowing the child to have any control or power over the situation. “*Put on your shoes, or I will put them on for you!*”, or “*Put on your shoes. You aren't doing anything until you put on your shoes!*”
Using a respectful, gentle tone of voice in all situations.	Using a negative or loud tone of voice (i.e., a tone of voice that is shaming, sarcastic, threatening, punitive, disparaging, belittling, embarrassing, harsh, or otherwise disrespectful).
Making sure your non-verbal communications match your positive verbal communications.	Using punitive and threatening facial expressions and body language to communicate your displeasure with the child.

Redirecting children who are displaying inappropriate behavior to equally engaging activities to help promote a positive response. This requires careful observation and proactive intervention to help the child maintain equilibrium and may require one-on-one interaction.	Allowing inappropriate behavior to escalate to the point where alternative activities are no longer desirable to the child.
Creating an environment that builds a sense of ownership and belonging for children, which keeps children authentically and creatively engaged.	Failing to reflect upon the connection between behavior and classroom environment and failing to execute environmental strategies to reduce conflict and keep the children engaged.
Facilitating reciprocal listening between children, negotiating (letting the children co-construct a meaningful solution to the problem), and problem-solving when conflicts or distress arise.	Removing the source of conflict or distress without supporting the children's right to solve their own problems. For example, taking a toy away from two children who are fighting over it, or imposing your sense of justice upon a situation or conflict between two children.
Adapting group experiences, so all children feel good about themselves (e.g., when a child is disturbing the group at circle time, the teacher tries some of the following: 1) invites the child to sit close to her; 2) includes the child more directly in the activity; 3) changes the activity; and/or 4) allows the child to move away from the group time).	Ignoring children's unique interests, strengths, thoughts, and capabilities in seeking to prevent classroom conflict (e.g., forcing the child to sit for circle time).
Documenting recurring patterns of a child's challenging behavior to analyze and better understand the context in which it occurs. Using this information to implement new ways of supporting the child.	Assuming you understand the intentions or motives of a child's behavior.
Listening and being respectful of the child's point-of-view in all circumstances in order to better understand the goal of the behavior.	Focusing on control by isolating the disruption or "misbehavior" and discounting any relevant feelings of the child.
Speaking to children at their level and close enough for private conversation.	Isolating children (e.g., **time-out**) or closing off an area of the classroom from children's play.
Creating smooth, delay-free transitions. (Children should not have to sit and wait at the table while the teacher prepares the meal without activities. Children should not have to sit and wait without providing experiences to keep them engaged).	Subjecting children to unnecessary wait time/down time and regimented transition routines. For example, making children sit waiting for food, toilets, or art materials to be distributed; **making children stand in line;** or making children sit quietly in a circle waiting for the teacher to engage them.
Modeling tenderness and other appropriate behaviors.	Modeling behaviors that you are trying to discourage in the children (For example: yelling across the room, sitting on furniture,

	speaking unkindly, and not listening).
Keeping group sizes small for focused project work.	Doing all activities with the whole group.
Allowing each child daily one-on-one attention.	Purposely avoiding one-on-one time to prevent "spoiling" the child or viewing it as "taking time away from the rest of the class."
Focusing on children's positive behavior and engaging the children who are exhibiting negative behaviors with positive distractions and involvement. (e.g., If they are not paying attention during circle time, invite them to help tell the story.)	Focusing on negative behaviors and telling them what not to do. *"Don't talk!"*
Providing specific suggestions which focus on actionable behaviors such as: *"Those blocks are for building. Can I help you build something?"* instead of, *"Don't knock those on the floor! You need to start acting like a big boy!"*	Using praise, rewards, food, and stickers for good behavior: *"If you potty on the toilet, I'll give you a sticker!"* or *"Oh, you're such a GOOD boy!"* or *"If you lay quietly on your mat, I'll give you a piece of candy."*
Explaining rules using positive language. *"Hands are for helping. Feet on the floor. Please, walk in the classroom."*	Explaining to children what they should NOT do. *"Stop hitting! Don't climb on the table! Don't run!"*

Environment as "Third Teacher"

A. Environmental Characteristics

"*The structures, choice of materials and attractive ways in which educators set them up for the children become an open invitation to explore. Everything is thoughtfully chosen and placed with the intention to create communication, as well as exchanges among people and interactions between people and things in a network of possible connections and constructions.*" (Hundred Languages of Children, pgs. 162-163)

The classroom environment should function as "the third teacher" and consistently engage children. The environment should be a space which allows for innumerable acts of imagination and problem-solving for the children and should hold a careful balance between active and quiet spaces, with most materials easily accessible to the children. The following **environmental characteristics** should be incorporated into every classroom.

1. **Active and Quiet**. Both active and quiet experiences should be accompanied in the environment. Active play in blocks, dramatic play, and music should be balanced by more quiet play at the easel, manipulative and book areas, and the sensory table.
2. **Social and Solitary**. Children should have the opportunity to choose between social or solitary contexts during the school day. Social contexts might include

dramatic play, blocks, or communication center. Solitary contexts include reading books, working with clay, visiting cozy corner, or hiding out in other nooks and crannies in the classroom.

3. **Novelty/Challenge and Familiarity/Practice.** Children require new and challenging materials to sustain engagement and support deeper thinking (new puzzles, new songs, toaster oven in dramatic play). Children also need the opportunity to use familiar objects and activities where they can repeat the same activity or use the materials the same way (easels, clay, water table).

4. **Open and Closed.** Children should have the opportunity to use both open-ended and close-ended materials. Open activities have no "correct" outcome and do not have an arbitrary stopping point (clay, paint, blocks, sensory materials, dramatic play). Closed activities allow for only one correct outcome and have a clear ending (puzzles, Montessori materials, math games).

5. **Realistic and Nonrealistic.** Children need a balance of realistic and nonrealistic materials. Realistic materials allow children to make connections to real world objects and their uses (real cooking ingredients to make real fruit salad, real woodworking tools), while non-realistic materials support imaginative/fantasy play and creative, unconventional use of objects (pieces of fabric, boxes, milk crates).

6. **Child's World and World at Large.** Children need materials that reflect their world at home (family pictures, familiar household objects) and the experience of cultures and peoples both alike and different from themselves (Balinese puppet, ethnic foods, firefighting props).

B. Rich and Diverse Materials

There are a number of essential materials that must be incorporated into the classroom environment. These materials must be accessible to the children, and be organized and displayed in an engaging and enticing manner. Teachers should organize the different types of materials in a way that supports the multifaceted play occurring in each part of the classroom. For instance, literacy materials should be provided in many classroom areas (such as, menus in dramatic play, traffic signs in the block area, and paper and clipboards in the science area). Similarly, natural materials should be integrated into most play contexts in the classroom (such as, rocks, twigs, and stumps in the construction area; fresh herbs, gourds and seashells in dramatic play; leaves, dried flowers, and pinecones in the manipulative or art area). A common misunderstanding is that the following materials must be provided in narrowly defined learning centers (such as, dramatic play center, science center, block area, etc.). The requirement is only that the *experiences* be made available to the children somewhere in the classroom each day.

Materials supporting the following experiences are accessible to the children:

1. **Dramatic and Imaginary Play.** The dramatic play experience should be classroom-wide, supported by a generous amount of dedicated floor space, or some combination of the two. Materials should be attractively organized and support sustained imaginative play. Appropriate materials include: dress-up clothes and accessories; adventure props--scuba gear, capes, cowboy costumes, firefighting clothes, fishing equipment, princess costumes, butterfly wings, and doctor scrubs; kitchen/dining props--real cooking utensils, pots and pans, tablecloths, real food pantry items, silverware, gourds, and dried beans; baby dolls and baby care materials; puppets; sensory materials--dried flowers, water, fabrics, and sensory-rich foodstuffs like beans, pasta and rice; and open-ended materials like boxes, tote bags, and chairs.

2. **Inquiry Skills.** Supporting classroom investigation means providing an environment which encourages children to: 1) Engage, notice, wonder, and question; 2) Explore and investigate; 3) Collect data; 4) Record and represent experiences; 5) Reflect on experiences; 6) Use language to communicate findings. Tools and materials must be available to help support children's developing inquiry skills, such as magnifying glasses, prisms, hand lens, bug boxes, terrarium, field guide books, clip boards, flashlights, eye droppers, Petri dishes, scales, measuring tape, measuring sticks, thermometers, test tubes, and test tube holder.

3. **Science and Discovery.** Inquiry and discovery should be integrated into every aspect of classroom environment. Supportive tools, materials, and settings should connect to fundamental scientific concepts. Some of the concepts include: characteristics of living things; living and nonliving; needs of living things; life cycle; diversity and variation; and habitat. Some of the materials include real and plastic animals, non-fiction science books, plants, containers for collecting, terrarium, gravel, charcoal, flower pots, potting soil, glow light, polished rocks and gemstones, and natural objects in their organic form, such as cotton from the field, seed pods, seashells, and rocks.

4. **Manipulatives and Math.** Manipulative and math materials are important tools for building, problem-solving, spatial awareness, fine motor skills, one-to-one correspondence, counting, measurement, and logic. It is important to provide a variety of manipulatives to children, and to switch out manipulatives periodically. Manipulatives include Legos, Duplos, pattern blocks, Lincoln Logs, magnetic construction toys, mosaic pieces, parquetry boards, pentominoes, puzzles, tangrams, nesting and stacking materials, sorting objects (buttons, keys, beads, polished rocks, jewels, and coins), base-ten blocks, various Montessori materials, and non-competitive games for preschoolers. Useful accessories include trays, cups, mirrors, bucket scales, and materials for symbolic representation, such as plastic animals, people, rocks, and scraps of cloth. In terms of organization, manipulatives should be kept easily accessible in appropriate-sized, labeled

baskets or plastic bins.

5. **Sensory.** Teachers should provide multiple sensory experiences daily. This may include use of the sensory table, sensory tubs, and outdoor sensory investigation. The environment should have various sensory materials accessible to children daily. Water and sand play should be available to children daily. Children should wash their hands before and after water or sand play. Supervise the water play to ensure children do not drink the water. Children with sores on their hands should not participate in water play. Water should be changed before a new group of children come to participate in water activity. Some sand and water props include water wheels, various sized tubs and buckets, squeeze bottles, sponges, measuring cups, sieves, sink and float objects, funnels, brushes, and pipes. Engage all the five senses (touch, sight, smell, sound, and taste) with some of the following materials.

Sensory Ideas

Foods: fresh and dried herbs and spices, dried beans/lentils/legumes, popcorn kernels, flax seeds, pasta (dried and cooked), oatmeal, grits, cereal, flour, salt, birdseed, an abundance of visually interesting fruits, gourds, and vegetables, culturally diverse foods, items for various cooking projects, such as soy butter balls, salad people, and fruit salad

Natural Materials and Elements: dried flowers, collected natural materials, twigs, leaves, pine cones, acorns, seeds, moss, rocks, fresh-cut flowers, water, dirt, mud, coffee grounds, sand, and peat moss

Expressive Materials: glow lights, transparent materials and objects (transparent Legos, colored and clear containers of various sizes) on the light table, textured materials, clay, mosaics, paper, glue, wire, found objects, aluminum foil, plaster, homemade play-dough, variety of fabrics and textures, packing materials, bubble-wrap, recycled materials, different types of lights, mirrors, prisms, disco balls, acrylic shapes, shaving cream, wind chimes, shakers, whistles, multi-cultural instruments, and sensory garden

Various Mixed-Materials: cornstarch mixed with water, liquid starch mixed with glue, and flour mixed with water (refer to recipes in the appendix)

Tools to support and deepen children's imaginative and cooperative play during sensory experiences: miniature animals, baby dolls, sponges, brushes, cups, spoons, binoculars, magnifying glasses, light table, and overhead projector

6. **Construction and Building.** Building materials should be of sufficient quantity and variety to sustain in-depth construction experiences. Some important construction materials include unit blocks, small and large hollow blocks, architectural blocks, woodworking materials, large and medium sized boxes, milk crates, gutter materials, pvc pipes, and lattice pieces; dramatic play props like construction hats, tool belts, worker boots, work smocks, baby dolls, sandpaper blocks, and architectural blueprints in storage canisters; images and representations of buildings/structures in books, photographs, and documentation of past work; and different types of block accessories like trucks, miniature people, fabric pieces, animals, boats, and airplanes.

7. **Art and Creative.** Children should have open access to a variety of media and tools for representing and expressing their ideas and feelings. Various media should include clay and other modeling materials, wood pieces, wire, a variety of paints (acrylics, tempera, watercolor, and finger paint), pastels, markers, crayons, pencils, pens, variety of papers, lots of recycled materials and "beautiful stuff," chalk, natural materials (plants, beets, dried flowers, twigs, etc.), food coloring, finger paint, liquid starch, beads, glitter (plastic only), metallic paper, tissue paper, etc. Children should have open access to a variety of "Connecting Media," such as glue, yarn, string, wire, pipe cleaners, paper clips, rubber bands, and tape. Collage materials should be made available to children including leaves, pasta, feathers, seeds, seed pods, dried flowers, ribbons, recycled and found objects, and homemade paper. Children should also have access to a variety of tools including paintbrushes, paper-making frames and screens, rolling pins, clay boards and other clay tools, easels, and scissors; and a variety of unconventional tools, such as Q-tips, cotton balls, and thread spools. Clean-up materials, such as sponges, paper towels, spray bottles, brooms, and dust pans should also be available for children.

8. **Literacy and Language.** Teaching letter writing and phonics skills in isolation is inappropriate, such as drilling with flash cards or using worksheets. Children should be encouraged to write for a reason. Provide a daily sign-in sheet for them to write their names. Literacy activities should be integrated into meaningful project work and daily classroom experiences. Some examples of ways for teachers to promote literacy include writing down children's dictated words or stories; playing rhyming and rhythm games during circle time; supporting children's retelling of stories; playing silly word games; creating a print-rich environment; encouraging children to make signs, letters, and other meaningful types of print; displaying and discussing various types of documentation with children; allowing uninterrupted periods of play; developing children's symbolic representation; and discussing patterns and ideas in stories. Children should have materials for writing, drawing, reading, and listening to stories. Ongoing discourse with children is one of the most powerful ways to prepare them for later reading success. Therefore, starting with the infant classrooms, children should be engaged in conversations among peers and adults throughout the day. Example materials include picture books, child-made books, clipboards, magazines, books in each classroom area, magnetic letters, writing tools, recorded children conversations and stories, and cozy spaces for solitary and group reading.

9. **Music and Movement.** Children should have access to a wide array of musical experiences. The class should contain a diverse collection of musical CDs and instruments for children to utilize. Props to extend children's musical experiences should be made available including scarves, rhythm sticks, shakers, hoops, mirrors, etc. Children should be provided many opportunities to sing and create music.

10. **Computers: A Cautionary Note**. Computers do NOT replace hands-on materials and experiences. Electronic "skill and drill" games are not appropriate. However, there are some software programs that encourage creativity and problem-solving and are appropriate in Preschool classrooms. Computers are a great way to document children's stories for illustration.

C. Classroom Feel

The goal for every classroom should be to strike a balance between stimulation and calm, and to create an inviting and open-feeling environment. The room should be organized, tidy, and clean. Eliminate clutter and anything that distracts from the essential visibility of the children's experience and learning. Moreover, an overall impression of softness and natural materials should be felt upon entering the classroom. Finally, the organization, lighting, flexibility, and openness of the space will allow large-scale, sustained, collaborative, and creative play.

1. **Child vs. Teacher Control.** The environment should be set up to allow for maximum child control. Examples include 1) The majority of classroom materials should be open and accessible to the children. 2) The classroom space should be flexible enough for child-initiated projects with a minimum amount of teacher, "NO"s. 3) Classroom rules, projects, arrangement, and interactions should all be constantly measured against the question: "*Am I giving the child as much power and control in this situation as I can?"*

2. **Image of the child.** There should be evidence that the environment mirrors an image of the child that is rich, powerful, competent, and connected to others. Documentation of children involved in classroom decision-making should be prominently displayed. In general, everything about the classroom space should send the message to children: "You are powerful."

3. **Openness.** The arrangement of furniture and settings should permit as much free movement in the classroom as possible. As a rule, all furnishings should be carefully selected to support classroom goals. Open spaces allow for large-scale, child-initiated events in the classroom.

4. **Transparency.** Transparency has two meanings in connection to the environment. First, transparency means that the identity, intentions, values, and experiences (e.g., words and representations of both--the family culture and classroom culture, significant experiences, ordinary moments, and evidence of project work and educational direction) of the classroom are fully visible. Second, as a physical characteristic, transparency contributes to the feeling of openness and lightness in the room. Whenever possible, divisions of classroom space should be made using transparent materials and partitions (e.g., open shelves, sheer draperies, and trellised partitions).

5. **Less is more.** The room should be free of clutter. Every item in the room is thoughtfully

chosen and made available to the children in an organized and well-maintained space. "A place for everything, everything in its place." Each classroom item should be kept in a defined spot which is obvious to the children.

6. **Collaboration.** The classroom setup should promote social interactions and co-construction of ideas. For example, the teacher supports a project where two children agree upon creating a mural together to enhance the appearance of the cubby area.

7. **Identity.** There should be evidence of the children's individual identities (e.g., children's pictures and work evident throughout the room), as well as the identity and shared values of the class.

8. **Flexibility.** The environment should remain flexible with space, time, and materials (e.g., dramatic play clothes should not be isolated just to the housekeeping corner). Furnishings and room arrangement should be movable, and multi-purpose spaces should be provided.

9. **Invitation and display.** Classroom displays should be thoughtfully located, aesthetically pleasing, safe, inviting, and clearly organized. Some displays may include bulletin boards, white boards, portfolios, three-dimensional displays, hanging displays, portfolio displays, computer displays, and wall surfaces. Displays and presentation of child-accessible materials should also be organized and attractive. Materials should be the focus on shelves and displays; therefore, the containers or baskets should be plain and uniform.

10. **Respect for materials.** All materials should be kept clean and in good condition. Puzzles are complete, dramatic play and construction materials are unbroken, and art materials are well maintained. Children are involved in the process of caring for materials. See the atelierista for help in caring for art materials like paint brushes, drawing pens, and other tools.

11. **Magic and enchantment.** The room should include delightful, surprising elements that provoke children's wonder, curiosity, and excitement.

Documentation Based Planning

A. Observing and Listening

It is essential that teachers devote a significant amount of classroom time to listening and observing children. This is necessary to connect with the richness, identity, and thinking involved in the processes of children, both as individuals and as group participants.

Listening and observing are not about stepping away from children, but rather about getting closer – closer to understanding the child's point-of-view, thinking processes and social relationships. Listening is not passive – listening is in fact an active, participatory process for teachers. Careful listening requires teachers to:

- Repeat back to children their comments and/or verbalize their actions to clarify meaning, support self-awareness and memory, and to stimulate an exchange of ideas amongst children.
- Constantly interpret the meaning of what she is hearing and seeing and respond in ways that foster learning.
- Strive to gain a better understanding of the child's point-of-view.
- Ask open-ended questions to elicit children's thinking, self-awareness, expression, and conversation.
- Present ideas and options, model useful exploration skills, and offer herself as a resource for children.

Teachers are always listening and observing children; however, there may be times when co-teachers agree ahead of time to a place and time for special observation. Often this occurs during planned small group experience.

B. Documenting and Interpreting

Teachers document and interpret their observations of children. Generally, teachers take hand-written notes or use a combination of note-taking, photography, video, and audio-taping. The documentation can be compiled in various formats. To be useful, documentation must be kept organized and accessible. Documentation can be compiled in various formats.

Documentation Formats

- Teacher observation notes made throughout the day
- Child narratives
- Anecdotal records
- Running records
- Documentation panels composed of beautifully arranged transcriptions of verbal communication, photographs, and the children's work
- Drawings, writings, or sketches with accompanying comments and reflections
- Daily diary
- Written feedback related to a project from colleagues, parents, and children
- Child's portfolio

- Child's self-reflections
- Child's conversations
- Transcriptions of audio tapes
- Samples of a child's work (i.e., writings, drawings, paintings, constructions, collages, compositions, written songs) at several different stages of completion
- PowerPoint presentations
- Narratives for display
- Project history journals
- Photographs with accompanying comments and reflections

The purposes of documentation:

1) To help teachers plan and support children's sustained and deepened learning.
2) To make visible, and therefore, culturally powerful, the rich identities and capabilities of children.
3) To reflect on the value of the children's work.
4) To heighten the teacher's level of awareness of what actually happens during classroom experiences.
5) To show the advantages of providing activities and materials that are concrete, real, and relevant to the lives of young children.
6) To explain the growth and development of a child in all domains of development (i.e., physical, emotional, cognitive, and social).

Ideally, documentation should encourage teachers to revisit children's learning experiences and their own developmentally appropriate practices.

Other uses (Wurm, Working the Reggio Way, Pg. 107):

- *For children to reflect on their own work*
- *For children to connect to and reflect on other children's work*
- *For adults to reflect on children's work and hypothesize about where their work with students might go next*
- *For families to experience the work and explorations of their children*
- *To document children's growth over time*
- *To develop a complex and detailed picture of the child in all developmental domains*
- *To provide a resource for the wider community of educators to understand children's learning better*
- *To share with the community at large what is happening inside a school*

Documentation Panels

Content may include the following:

- Project Narrative: Include a summary of the overall project (for example, a brief project history; major concepts, questions, hypotheses, skills and emotional responses that are evident; and class name, names of teachers, and ages of children.
- Include dated samples of children's work that reveal growth.
- Include photographs and narratives that reveal the learning process.
- Use a title to explain the content of each section when using a panel.
- Include a variety of types of documentation (for example, samples of children's comments or conversations that help the viewer understand their thinking).
- Include KWHL charts and project webs.
- Explain the significance of each item included.
- Include artifacts from the project in the display.
- Explain what was learned and how it was learned.
- Reveal the growth in understanding, skills, or dispositions (emotional response) of one or more children.
- You may want to include your reflections regarding your role in the learning experience.

Construction and aesthetic guidelines include the following:

1. Trim all items neatly (be sure there are no ragged edges or crooked sides).
2. Avoid the "polka-dot effect" produced by the use of many like-sized photographs.
3. Arrange items so that the display is pleasing to the eye.
4. Attach photos and samples neatly to the panel (tape or adhesive should not show).
5. Avoid using rubber cement – it does not last over time (double-stick tape works well).
6. Use only one color when colored borders are used to mount documentation.
7. Use subtle paint or covering as a background on the panel, so it does not distract from the documentation.
8. Make sure scanned or copied photos of artwork are not distorted.
9. Attach clear plastic bags or sleeves to hold large objects, such as videotapes that are meant to be removed and viewed.
10. Make an effort to include three-dimensional elements to the display.
11. Correct all spelling and grammar.
12. Use at least a minimum of 16-point type font. Use the same easy-to-read font throughout the panel.
13. Have coworkers and an administrator provide feedback before posting a documentation panel.
14. Locate the panel at eye level of the intended readers.

An example of an anecdotal record:

Leila sat next to J.R. at the art table. J.R. greeted Leila, "Hi Leila, want to share paint with me?" Leila said, "No, I have my own paint right here." Leila picked up the large paint brush, dabbed the paint brush into the white paint and moved the paint brush up, down, and side to side on her paper to create stars. J.R. asked Leila, "How do you make the color purple?" Leila said, "Red and blue." She demonstrated this to J.R., Lily, and Jackie, who were also at the art table. Leila, using the middle tray, dabbed her paint brush into the red paint and back to the middle of the tray; she dabbed her paint brush once more into the blue paint and back to the middle of the tray and swirled them both together. J.R. said, "Wow! You made the color purple." Leila said, "Yes! I did." Leila dabbed her brush into the water and back into the white paint and continued making stars on the paper.

C. Planning

Prior to completing the planning form, revisit the documentation you have gathered and share it with the children, families, and co-workers. Please complete the plans in pencil, so it is easy to make changes based on children's responses.

<div align="center">Step-by-Step Instructions</div>

Step A- Complete Box 1: **Observation Leading to Planning**
Revisit your collected documentation and select key points that will guide your planning process. Be specific with what children say and do. Describe the actions, words, and interests from the previous week.

Example: Samson and Jill continually walk over to the store, in the pretend area, removing the bowls. They then place the bowls on the table, repeatedly filling the bowls with food and dumping them onto the table.

Avoid: The children love dramatic play.

Step B- Complete Box 2: **Ways to Incorporate Ideas into Plans**
Brainstorm ways to incorporate the observations summarized in Box 1 into activities to extend learning. List the ideas. It may help to create a web to generate activities or to involve the children in the creation of a KHL Chart. All activities do not have to relate to a specific project.

Step C- Complete Box 3: **Developmental Milestones**
Considering the ideas in Box 2, list developmental milestones that may relate to those experiences. See appendix for developmental milestones for your age group.

Step D- Provocations

Using the information generated in the first 3 boxes, complete the rest of the plan sheet/s, listing the specific objects/provocations that you will add to stimulate learning. Remember that all provocations do not have to relate to a specific project.

D. Projects
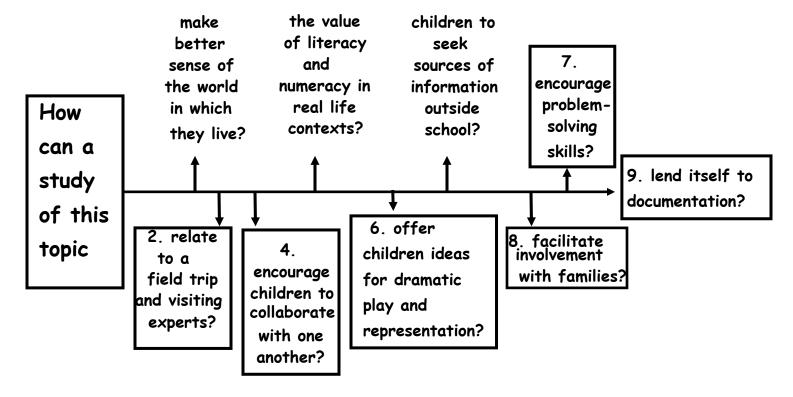
What is a project?
A project is an in-depth study of a topic conducted by a child or group of children. Projects are organic and fluid and grow in every direction. Projects are not linear, but are a form of spiral learning where children are encouraged to revisit previous activities and discoveries and build from their newly found knowledge in the pursuit of understanding. The project approach to learning recognizes the value placed on the contributions children make to the development of their own knowledge and reflects the Reggio belief that knowledge is most effectively constructed with others.

How are projects selected?
Projects develop from the documented interests of children. They may come from a child's ideas, questions, hypothesis, special interest, discovery, shared experience, or a trip. Many projects are generated from a teacher's observation of the children's spontaneous play and explorations. Based on children's responses, teachers introduce materials, questions, and opportunities that provoke children to further explore the topic.

As teachers and children brainstorm the rationale for engaging in, continuing, and/or re-launching a previous project, the teachers may ask themselves and each other the questions on the graphic organizer below.

3. enable children to understand

1. help children

5. encourage

How can a study of this topic

- make better sense of the world in which they live?
- the value of literacy and numeracy in real life contexts?
- children to seek sources of information outside school?
- 7. encourage problem-solving skills?
- 9. lend itself to documentation?
- 2. relate to a field trip and visiting experts?
- 4. encourage children to collaborate with one another?
- 6. offer children ideas for dramatic play and representation?
- 8. facilitate involvement with families?

How long do projects last?
Since children's interests guide the project, no time frame is set. As long as interest is there and new questions for discovery arise, the project moves forward. A short-term project might last a few days or several weeks, and a long term-project, several months or a year.

How is a project different from a theme or unit?
A theme is a topic that a class explores (often superficially) for a short time. It is usually selected by the teacher. A <u>unit</u> goes into more depth than a theme and lasts longer, but is still largely teacher-driven. A project comes from direct observation of the specific children in the class. The project develops through the contributions of the children as they help construct their own knowledge.

How can we know that children are learning from this child-initiated approach?
Children who are exploring something they are interested in go into a depth of understanding that often amazes adults. They search for their own answers in books, trips to the community, conversations, and explorations. They dictate understandings and make representations of their learning. They make plans for building structures and play environments that help them sort out what they are learning about a topic. They problem-solve, record information, make books, posters, graphs, charts, and journals to depict their understanding.

Teachers skillfully integrate content knowledge from the areas of expressive language (oral and written), receptive language (listening and reading), math, science, health, kinesthetics, and social studies into the project explorations. Projects also relate to the school's site, community, and families. This includes problem-solving among peers with numerous opportunities for creative thinking. Integrated into projects are the arts, including visual arts, music, movement, and drama; they are integral to the flow and life of a project.

E. Making Learning Visible

Making children's experiences visible requires careful selection of words and images that do justice to the children's experience. Refer to the following chart (based upon George Forman's chart) to help guide you in deciding what to make visible in your classroom.

Avoid words and images that:	Feature words and images that:
Merely show children engaged in many different activities.	Reveal the child's perspective and thoughts about their experiences, even while engaged in ordinary activities.
Merely show children meeting the expectation of teachers.	Tell stories about children creating, constructing, and inventing their own experiences.
Merely show children having "fun."	Show the emotional involvement and mental persistence of children solving problems and making discoveries.
Try to show every child involved in the experience, even when the activity wasn't especially significant for many of the children.	Highlight the most compelling words and images surrounding the experience, even if that experience was limited to one or a few children.
Only show or tell the children's experience, leaving the teacher's role and teaching practices invisible.	Include the role of the teacher, describing the provocation, hypotheses, questions asked, responses given, and teacher learning.
Show teachers correcting or improving upon a child's formulations or concepts, in order to provide more "accurate" information to the child.	Demonstrate children's serious attempts to understand concepts.
Make the learning of colors, shapes, letters, and numbers seem *more important* than creativity and problem-solving.	Focus on children's theories and the concepts they are trying to understand. *"Where do rainbows come from?"*
Only show sequential thinking that lays out photographs and text in a chronological sequence to report the important moments of a project.	Explain how one activity encouraged, deepened, or clarified an issue raised in the previous activity and demonstrate connected thinking.
Depict an idealized view of relationships (where children are posed or always having	Show the often difficult and complex process of children attempting to make connections

happy moments).	with each other.
Show the children playing (e.g., water table) and list the things that the children do in that space.	Look at the play space (e.g., water table) as a learning environment, illuminating the interesting concepts that children discover.

F. Revisiting and Re-launching

In order for higher levels of learning to take place, children should have many opportunities to revisit previous experiences. Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers benefit from exploring an idea from many different perspectives. Revisiting can be achieved through repetition and providing space and time for children to explore, investigate, and master concepts over time. Revisiting provides an opportunity to raise new questions, spark renewed interest, support children's memories, and discover new meanings and understandings for previous experiences.

Revisiting documentation with children can help them connect past experiences to the present, assign new meaning and significance to those experiences, provoke deepened leaning, and suggest new, child-initiated directions for learning. Discuss past events involving one child with that individual child and their classmates to help sustain a line of inquiry and make connections between past and present experiences. Teachers should revisit recorded comments, photos, or videotape with children on a daily basis, in both large and small groups. Ask the children provoking questions such as, *Is there another way we could have done this? What else would you like to know about dinosaurs?"* Share this documentation with co-workers and parents and get their ideas about where these observations may lead you in your continued work with the children.

Once the documentation has been revisited by teachers, children, and perhaps parents and colleagues, it may be time to re-launch the investigation based on interpreted observations using new questions, materials, and provocations. Direction of the re-launch will emerge through collaboration and co-construction of the children, teachers, and community.

G. Intentions and Research

"Intentionality" is our basic commitment as professionals to reflect and improve upon our teaching practices. Specifically, an "intention" is a declared, on-going commitment to enhance and/or research some aspect of the classroom experience.

A "declaration of intent" is a question or a series of questions derived from observations of the children and/or the classroom that we explore as we progress through the year with our children. Our question/s reminds us that we are researchers, always learning along with the children.

A "declaration of intent" may be a question or questions posed by one specific classroom, a village, or the entire school.

Some examples of "declaration of intent" questions:

> **Infant Classroom**: How do young infants, mobile infants, and toddlers respond to different kinds of music and musical sounds? How can I enrich musical experiences in my classroom?

> **Toddler I Village**: How do Toddlers use all their senses--sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing to explore and learn about their world? What are their favorite sensory activities? How can we provide a greater variety of sensory experiences?

> **Preschool Village**: How can we make sure children are prepared for a successful entry into more traditional public and private schools? How can we reassure parents that their children will have the "academic" content skills necessary for success?

> **Whole School**: How can we more effectively make our environments function as, "the third teacher" and also incorporate more natural resources in our environment?

A declaration of intent is not a project, but it may influence or be influenced by class projects and observed interests of the children.

Facilitated Experiences

A. Morning Meeting/Circle Time

The daily schedule should include a whole group gathering time each morning. This coming together experience creates a welcoming sense of belonging and gives focus to the day. Teachers must thoughtfully plan for this time and prepare props or materials to support these activities. Daily meetings will vary in time based on your age group. A Toddler I gathering may only last 5 minutes, while a Preschool morning meeting is typically 15-20 minutes. Children should never be required to stay in the morning meeting. Hopefully, your activities will be interesting enough to keep them engaged, but if they leave the group that should be allowed.

Morning meeting activities may include:

- Welcome songs and fingerplays
- Storytelling (books, puppets, flannel stories, story cans, etc.)
- Music and movement experiences (instruments, scarves, etc.)
- Show and Share (3-5 Preschool children share something brought from home or a journal entry)
- Sequencing the day's events
- Planned questions and provocations to stimulate meaningful discussion
- Reflections on previous work experiences
- Focused conversation about ongoing project work or plans for future projects
- Introduction of new materials

- Meaningful recognition of weather, date, helpers

Traditional calendar activities have little meaning for Preschoolers. Your main focus should be on the concepts of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If you choose to have a monthly calendar, try some of the following:

- Let the children create the calendar themselves.
- Begin with a completed calendar, and have the children place number cards on top of the matching date.
- Mark the calendar with significant upcoming events: birthdays, music class, special visitor, parties, etc. "How many days until Jacob's birthday? What day does Ms. Julie come to our school?"

Teacher Tip

Rote memorization of the days of the week is meaningless; but if you tie the days of the week to specific activities and events, then it can be something important to know.

B. Small Group Experiences

What is the "small group experience" at The Clifton School?

The "small group experience" is a planned learning opportunity for two to six children. Two to four infant/toddlers or three to six preschoolers are selected based on documentation of a specific interest or for the teacher to share materials with a small group. The "small group experience" provides opportunities for children and teachers to have richer, more meaningful exchanges, with deepened engagement with the physical environment and materials.

How and when does the "small group experience" occur?

One teacher facilitates the small group experience while the other teacher is engaged with the rest of the class. The enriched environment functions as "the third teacher." In most classes, the small group experience follows the morning meeting, when other children are exploring provocations that have been set out in learning centers.

Where does the "small group experience" occur?

The small group may occur in a designated learning center within the classroom, open classroom space, atelier, library, courtyard, playground, rotunda, or other location that supports the experience.

How long does the "small group experience" last?

It depends upon the age and the interest of the children. It could last anywhere from 10 minutes to over an hour.

What about the other children and the need to maintain ratios?

The other children are involved with the enriched learning choices in the environment. During "small group experience" time we want to maintain licensing ratios:

Infants 1:6
Toddler 1:8
Toddler II 1:10
Threes 1:15
Fours 1:18

What are the benefits of the "small group experience"?

Small group provides opportunities for teachers to:

- Build relationships
- Introduce materials
- Support ongoing investigations of materials
- Revisit investigations of experiences
- Deepen teacher investigation of the learning process
- Provide a detailed exploration of children's theories
- Focus listening and documentation
- Investigate children's questions
- Investigate teacher's questions
- Deepen the research and exploration of class projects

Small group provides opportunities for children to:

- Build relationships
- Personalize investigations
- Broaden hands-on investigations of materials
- Develop and test their own theories
- Ask questions
- Facilitate their own learning
- Share their reflections
- Collaborate with teachers and peers
- Deepen the research and exploration of class projects
- Revisit investigations and previous documentation
- Plan future experiences

How do I plan for the "small group experience"?

After reviewing your documentation, consider experiences that would be enriched by a more focused time with the teacher.

Select the children that will be involved.

Decide on the provocations for the expanded learning.

Decide the best location for the experience.

Complete the small group section of the planning sheet. Write down specific questions you will ask and make sure the purpose of the experience is made clear to the children.

What the "small group experience" is NOT!

It is not dividing the class into two groups (some do art, some do blocks).
It is not arbitrarily pulling a few children over to do an activity.

C. Introduction of New Materials

New materials may be introduced in a large or small group setting. Teachers should facilitate discussion and provide hands-on experiences with the new materials, as needed. In small group situations, new materials should either be attractively presented on a table (e.g., on white butcher block paper or attractive trays), or introduced in their designated, child-accessible location (e.g., unit blocks stacked on the shelf, natural materials in a labeled basket on a shelf, and dress-up clothes on hanging hooks).

A good introduction to materials includes at least the following:

• **Open-ended questions** (e.g., "So, how can we have fun with these materials?" "Would you like to know the story of how these materials came into our classroom?" "Are there other materials that we can use with these materials?" "What do these materials feel/sound/smell like?" "What do you like about these materials?" "What rules should we make to take care of these materials?" [Have children demonstrate the rules that they create.] "Where do we put these materials when we are done playing with them?" "How can we help each other remember how to clean up these materials?").
• **Guided exploration** with the teacher modeling certain kinds of engagement with the materials (e.g., modeling the use of new tools, or new techniques with familiar tools or materials).
• **Comments and reflective questions** that support children's awareness about their own experience with the materials ("I wonder what your idea is for the clay, now that you've rolled it into a long thin strip." "Look at that interesting way to blend colors—how did you do that?").
• **Guided practice in cleaning up** and putting away materials.
• **Opportunity for children to report back** to the larger group about their experiences.

D. Conversations with Children

Teachers facilitate conversations among children throughout the day. Conversations can arise spontaneously, in the context of play, at meal time, during outdoor exploration and play, or in the context of planned group experiences, where specific questions and provocations are worked out in advance. In general, the goal in facilitating conversations is to validate the experience and point-of-view of each child. In some cases, the context will be an interaction between the teacher and an individual child. However, as often as possible, the teacher should draw multiple participants into the conversation and facilitate a meaningful exchange of viewpoints and theories.

Some strategies for provoking meaningful conversations with children include:

1. Encourage children to talk about things they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.
2. Help children notice details of their work.
3. Call children's attention to each other's ideas and work.
4. Ask children to expand upon their theories, intuitions, and insights around an experience and exchange ideas with each other.
5. Ask open-ended questions as children explore materials.
6. Invite children to fill in details in a story.

E. Provocations

A provocation is a change to the environment that sparks the curiosity and active engagement of children. The purpose of a provocation is to provoke or stimulate children's excitement, creativity, and thinking and to further the investigation of a topic of interest.

Some examples of provocations:

- A vase of fresh flowers placed beside the easel
- A train set added to the block area
- Flannel board with story added to the book corner
- A trip to Lullwater Park
- A ladybug placed in the science area
- A new book read at story time
- Bird seed, pouring props, and containers in the sensory table
- Rearranging an area of the classroom

There can also be social and verbal provocations, as when a new child joins the classroom or a teacher asks a question that stimulates a new thought.

When planning, teachers are expected to consider the hands-on provocations they will use during morning meeting, in the small group experience, and those provocations that will be added to learning centers.

Consider how you can add provocations to areas in attractive, unusual, or unexpected ways. Placing colored gem stones on a mirror in a Preschool classroom or arranging nature items on an interesting wooden tray adds interest and aesthetic appeal.

F. Outdoor Play

Outside time offers wonderful opportunities for theory-building and making discoveries. This is a more relaxed time for teacher observation and interaction with children. Teachers should be spaced around the playground in designated zones to provide for maximum supervision and safety.

Teachers should take special planned activities outside and be actively involved in children's play. This is a more relaxed time than in the classroom and allows for more one-on-one interactions. On days when you feel less energetic, take out a blanket and read some books, or sit by the sandbox and talk with the children. Outdoor play is not a time to get away from children, but an opportunity to get closer to them. Benches are designed to be used by teachers only when interacting with children.

Involve the children in keeping the outdoor play space attractive. They can assist with picking up trash and putting toys in the storage closets. All toys should be placed in the storage sheds at the end of each day.

G. Piazza Time

The piazzas in Italy are open public squares surrounded by buildings. They are considered as "the center of public life."

At The Clifton School, each age group has a piazza joining the classrooms in that "village."

The piazza is the central meeting area for the classrooms. It is a comfortable, relaxing place for the children, teachers, and parents to meet. It brings the classrooms together in a way that helps build a sense of community – we're all in this together!

Piazzas should be used for:

- Early and late day gatherings of children
- Large motor alternatives during inclement weather (see posted schedule for your class time)
- Planned music and movement experiences

- Planned small group experiences
- Village gatherings, meetings, and parties

Since the piazza is a communal living space, it must be cared for by the whole community. Everyone is expected to help keep it clean, organized, and orderly. Children playing in the piazza should be involved in cleaning up before returning to their classrooms. Piazza props and materials should not be taken into classrooms. Piazza closets are for storing extra piazza provocations for rotation, and individual classroom supplies should not be stored there.

Teachers are expected to be actively engaged with children in the piazza. No more than 12 Infants, 14 Toddler Is, 16 Toddler IIs, or 20 Preschoolers should ever be in the piazza at one time, except for special village gatherings.

H. Kids Kitchen

We have an area adjacent to our school kitchen, which is designed for small group cooking projects. Group size should not exceed six children. Plan nutritious cooking activities that involve active child participation. Avoid "junk food" recipes and those that allow for minimal child involvement such as Kool-Aid, Jello, and Rice Krispie treats.

The best food activities are those that relate to projects and the expressed interests of the children. Use cooking experiences to introduce children to multicultural foods. Invite parents to conduct a small group project in the Kids Kitchen. See the appendix for some recommended recipes.

I. Seasonal Rhythms and Holiday Celebrations

Children are very aware of the changes of the seasons and are the first to notice the little bud on the tree or the wiggly caterpillar crossing the sidewalk. Children may come to school with a ladybug in a jar; or teachers may set out a collection of leaves, pinecones, or flowers as a provocation.

Children's interest in these items may lead to continued exploration. We do not want to impose seasonal themes on children as is done in some traditional classrooms, where everyone focuses for a week on leaves whether these interest them or not. We do want to encourage and respond to children's observations of the changing seasons and build on their interests or questions.

Holiday celebrations present a greater challenge in a culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate classroom. Just as we try to follow children's interests throughout the year, when we hear them talking about their Halloween costume, the trip to Grandma's for Thanksgiving, chopping down the Christmas tree, or planning an egg hunt, we want to document, explore, and extend these experiences.

Obviously, we are not going to focus on the religious aspects of holidays, as we serve a very diverse population with varied religious preferences. We want to minimize the commercialization of holidays and focus more on meaningful family traditions. We encourage families to share books, games, songs, food, and other objects that are a part of their family observances. We all benefit from learning about the rich variety of family celebrations. Because celebrations build community and bring joy and meaning to life, we want to encourage you to create your own unique Clifton Celebrations.

Celebrations should not be limited only to the traditional holidays, but may also stem from events, projects, and bits of culture in your classroom. A teacher from one of the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy writes of an annual celebration that evolved from an ongoing classroom project on leaves. Children ceremoniously present parents with beautifully created gifts, and parents in turn contribute a gift to the classroom (such as a collection of games or books that parents hand-make to coincide with the project). After the exchange of gifts, they all enjoy an elaborately prepared meal on tablecloths with festive foods and cake. The celebration is unique to the classroom or school and involves the collaboration of children, teachers, and parents.

Relationship-Based Communication

Relationships are at the heart of our Reggio-inspired curriculum, and communication is the life blood of relationships. Communication that brings parents, teachers, and children together requires transparency, reciprocal listening, and follow through.

"Transparency" means that (within reason) teachers' decision-making processes should be open and visible to children, parents, and colleagues. When communicating decisions that impact curriculum and home-to-school matters, information needs to be clearly communicated, so that parents not only understand the decision, but how it was made.

"Reciprocal listening" means that communication is a two-way street and that teachers, children, and parents all have a right to be heard when decisions are made.

"Follow through" means that once a decision is made, it will be implemented as agreed upon by the classroom community, and the effects of the decision will be the subject of future communication.

A. **Written Daily Communication**

1. **Daily Diary**
Highlights from each day's classroom experience should be provided in the daily diary to parents. The purpose is to communicate events and exchanges that reflect the strong image of the child as their learning is made visible. Highlights might include: a verbatim (word-for-word) account of an exchange between children; descriptions of engaging classroom activities; examples of children's artwork/construction/dramatic play;

meaningful photographs of children accompanied by written explanation. The diary does not need to mention every child in the classroom daily, but over time, all the children in the classroom should be featured more or less equally. Display the diary outside the classroom with lesson plans and archive them in journals.

2. **Daily Report**
The daily report is a record of the toileting, eating, sleeping, and play activities of children who are not yet toilet trained.

B. Assessment and Portfolios

Assessment is a way of looking systematically at growth. Assessment is not about testing. Assessment is the complex process of observing, recording, and documenting the experiences of children…what they do and how they do it – over time.

"Authentic assessment" means evaluating children's growth through their daily activities, instead of using something that is not a part of their regular routine, such as standardized tests. We believe that children's everyday experiences most accurately show what children have learned and the progress they have made. At The Clifton School, we have chosen to organize our observations of children's learning into an individual portfolio for each child.

Teachers collect and record ongoing documentation that communicates clear evidence of each child's identity as revealed during episodes of rich engagement and expression. The portfolio provides insight into the child's interests, relationships, and ongoing skill development. It contains entries that demonstrate the child's growth in the cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional domains of development.

The purpose of the portfolio is not just to record and document a child's learning and development, but to reveal the child's emerging identity in order to enhance the child's experiences at school. The portfolio provides evidence that supports the child's ongoing investigations, theory construction, social relationships, and evolving skills with symbolic and expressive materials. Thus, the contents of the portfolio should be drawn from meaningful experiences. However, the developmental milestones accomplished by the children should be made clear to parents in the documentation.

- Portfolios should include samples of children's work showing development over time, creative and mindful use of materials, evidence of a child's contribution to a project, observational notes, narratives, anecdotal and running records, conversation transcripts, teacher's journal entries and self-reflections, children's scanned drawings, writing samples, or sketches with accompanying comments and reflections, parents' reflections, photos with accompanying comments and descriptions, and individual developmental assessments, and child webs. All photos should include either a reflection from the child or a description of experience in which the child is participating and the type of learning

that is taking place. Portfolios should be updated at least weekly with dated entries. Entries that highlight children's conversations, interactions, dramatic play, skill development, and project work can be copied directly from the classroom daily diary.

Portfolios can take a variety of forms, from a notebook binder or accordion file, to an electronic file. However, electronic portfolios must be available in hard copy and accessible to parents from the beginning of the child's experience in the classroom.

For infants and toddlers, photographs accompanied by teacher-written anecdotes will be most common. Infants and young toddlers do not produce much on paper, because they are too busy exploring the world around them. It is inappropriate to expect otherwise and to interfere with what they do naturally. Photos and anecdotes are the best ways to capture their learning as it unfolds.

Because preschoolers are able to represent more of their learning and knowledge; paintings, drawings, and writing and cutting samples will be included.

For all age groups, teachers write detailed descriptions of children's activities and direct quotes of their oral language. No two portfolios will look exactly alike. Each tells a distinctive story and includes unique ways in which children show their skills, interests, and personalities.

Occasionally, however, a child may need additional support to address individual differences that impact his or her ability to learn. These differences may prevent a child from communicating his or her thoughts, ideas, or needs in an effective or constructive manner. They may also cause a child to interfere with the learning process of other children in the classroom. When this occurs, teachers and administrative staff spend many hours observing and documenting the child's behavior in order to identify more effective ways to work with the child. Teachers will also request support from the child's parent(s) to assist in this process. This generally takes place during a parent-teacher conference in which the child's strengths and areas for growth are discussed. Parents may also be asked to complete a screening inventory to provide a more complete picture of a child's behavior.

The Clifton School has adopted the ASQ:SE as our screening tool for children with social and emotional difficulty. This tool is designed to be completed by parents and teachers, therefore, it does not provide a diagnosis, but helps determine if a child should be referred for further assessment by another professional. All information related to child screenings is handled in a confidential manner. Teachers and administration avoid discussing concerns about a child's behavior or abilities in front of other children, co-workers, or other parents. The Clifton School does not release screening results to anyone other than the child's parents without written parental consent.

C. Parent Collaboration

A positive working relationship with parents is at the heart of the Reggio philosophy. A parent orientation before the beginning of the school year is your first opportunity to begin building that partnership.   The beginning of our school year is referred to as "move-up." Move-up is the first week after Memorial Day every year.   To begin building these relationships, an effective orientation should include:

- Notification to parents of the orientation date and time at least 2 weeks in advance.
- An introduction of yourself with some biographical information, and provide parents an opportunity to introduce themselves.
- An orientation packet that includes not only housekeeping information, but also a clear statement of the Clifton curriculum approach, discipline policy, and parent collaboration opportunities.
- Examples of past classroom experiences and learning.
- Discussion of the parent-teacher partnership, describing the many opportunities for collaboration. Remember: parents are *partners*, which means that traditional forms of parent involvement—such as responding to teacher wish lists and volunteering to read stories in class—should not be emphasized before opportunities to participate creatively in the classroom decision-making process. For instance, parents should be invited to participate in curriculum planning, classroom environment decisions, portfolio strategies, and documentation analysis.
- Communication that shows a willingness to accommodate all reasonable requests, and a friendly approach to problem-solving challenges. Work hard to see things from the parent's perspective at all times.
- Opportunities for parent questions and comments.

Following the orientation, ongoing approaches to parent communication should include: regular informal conversations about the children's experiences, the daily diary, visible documentation to provoke conversation about individual and group experiences in the classroom, parent-accessible portfolios, formal meetings (no less than quarterly) with groups of parents to discuss classroom projects and learning, and classroom-sponsored social events for families.

Parent-teacher conferences are provided at least twice a year, once in the fall, and once in the spring. In an effective parent-teacher conference, teachers will:

- Discuss the positive highlights of the child's learning and social experiences over the past months.
- Review highlights from the child's portfolio, and in the fall conference, propose some possible new experiences that will build upon the child's observed interests, friendships, and learning.
- Provide ample opportunity for parents to share their perspectives on their child's experience at school, and respond thoughtfully and empathically to any questions or

concerns the parents might have.

- Record highlights of the conversation with parents, and revisit that documentation at the next conference.

Parents, teachers, and children are equal partners in the educational process, and parents should *continually* be invited to participate in the discussion of classroom experiences. Documentation of teacher-parent collaboration should be visible in the classroom. When the parent-teacher relationship becomes conflicted, teachers must make every effort to see problems from the parent's point-of-view, and move constructively toward the solution of a problem. Communication with families about their child's experience should be sensitive to family values, culture, identity and home language.

D. Atelierista Collaboration

Unique to the Reggio Approach is the collaboration and relationship between the atelierista, teachers, children, and community. In the context of the Clifton School culture, the primary responsibility of the atelierista is to support the professional development of teachers and the implementation of the curriculum expectations. This process will include working alongside fellow teachers, mentoring, questioning, developing workshop experiences, supporting documentation, as well as the usage of other tools to support teachers' work with the children. The atelierista will routinely join teachers during their planning time to discuss the teachers' observations, the children's interests, hypotheses, the possibilities of a project, and how to incorporate visual media into the children's learning experiences.

The Atelier

Maintenance and upkeep of the atelier is a vital role of the atelierista. The atelier will function as a workshop or a laboratory; a place for in-depth studies or investigations of the children's and teachers' ideas or themes.

To support our belief that children should have an array of materials to communicate their ideas, the atelier will also act as a resource of materials and mediums that can be selected by the teachers and children. The atelierista will be a source of guidance in both choosing and using those materials, as well as the exploration of various languages. When requesting materials not found in the atelier, please plan ahead: last minute requests for materials oftentimes cannot be heeded. Please be mindful that the materials within the studio are for the entire school community.

Glossary

Appendix