



EMERGENT CURRICULUM APPROACH

Democratic education and the Reggio Emilia approach

MPECC Limited, through Alexandra Park Children's Learning Community and Alex Park Democratic School, aims to promote a democratic curriculum that will foster in our pupils the values and skills needed to be citizens able to take part in our society by becoming active members of their communities, not just as future adults, but also as the children that they still are.

MPECC's curriculum is not a curriculum to be delivered, consisting of a list of skills, knowledge, experiences and outcomes planned in advance - we trust that a child's expressed interests and manner of engagement with the environment is directly related to the child's current developmental needs and natural drive to learn, and we work from that basis to support each child's journey through the education.

MPECC's educational approach is to present an environment (physical, social, emotional) within which children, individually and in groups, can develop an evolving, emergent, personalised and largely experiential curriculum. It is developed - 'co-constructed' - with staff and pupils in mixed age social groups.

This approach supports each child's unique development through play, projects, activities and experiences within engaging and varied environments and by developing respectful, facilitative relationships with others in the group and the wider community.

In this context, each child's character, interests and needs are the impetus for a journey of exploration and personal development best described as an '*emergent curriculum*' [inspired by Reggio Emilia in Italy, an emergent curriculum approach has already been adopted in many early years settings in the UK; MPECC believes there are enormous benefits to extending this approach to older groups of children].

Rather than starting with a lesson plan which requires a "hook" to get the children interested, an emergent curriculum starts from the children's interests. This is not to say that the teacher has no input; educators engage and intervene to ensure that these experiences encompass a range of skills and knowledge over time.

An idea for a curriculum activity, plan or project may be sparked by anything or come from anywhere. For instance, a teacher may overhear a pair of children having a discussion about characters in computer games, that leads to the whole group sitting down and discussing all the possibilities for finding out and experiencing more. Thus, the child's experience through the school is of voluntary engagement with stimulating and interesting activities of varying kinds, over the course of which many kinds of skills, knowledge and development are encountered, accompanied by a growing understanding and appreciation of learning as an activity in itself.

The emergent Curriculum approach in practice

MPECC uses real-life activities as vehicles for learning. Children feel that what they are doing is worth doing for itself. Direct, practical experience of all sorts of activities is valued. For example, the children look after the chickens by themselves, this responsibility involves organisation skills and provides an opportunity for the teachers to deliver biology and science lessons. Beyond its academic benefits, this task as a very important bi-product, will develop children's negotiation, communication and team work skills.

MPECC offers a holistic and integrated curriculum, addressing development of ability, knowledge and judgement across all 'subject' areas and life skills.

MPECC empowers children to take the initiative in and self-direct much of their learning, with or without the help of others; to have authentic control over decisions to do with their learning and gives access to a full range of available and appropriate resources. Children learn most effectively and deeply through engagement in activities that interest them, and when adult support is appropriate and well judged. In this context, it is expected that they will learn more purposefully, more effectively and with greater motivation, and develop an appreciation of learning that will be valuable throughout their life.

Learning is a social process through which meaning and understanding are created through interaction with others. For young children and pre-readers especially, access to others who are able to converse at length about matters of interest to the child is essential to acquiring knowledge and developing understanding. The free flowing nature of conversation in all classrooms at MPECC provisions fosters assimilation of vocabulary and language development.

By mixing different ages in the classroom we promote peer support and peer-to-peer learning. Older children are able to teach younger children new skills and sometimes are even more successful at getting reluctant students to pay attention and understand new concepts.

Children organise their own life and work as a group, teachers facilitate this process but will not direct it. Children meet every morning to organise their day, plan common projects together, make decisions to make changes, decide what resources they need, evaluate their life together, whether rules are being broken and they set up new ones if needed. Children can explain their argument, discuss it and vote to reach a decision. They also practice other democratic ways of making decisions such as how to reach consensus.

MPECC understands that playing is a serious activity for children, through which they explore their world, their society, and stretch their mental and physical abilities.

MPECC advocates the use of project-based learning rather than subject based learning because projects are more inherently interdisciplinary and student centred.

They enable students to learn to organise their work and manage their time or, during group projects, to collaborate.

Each child chooses their own personal learning projects which they develop through six weeks and can continue extending for as long as they need. The personal projects will generally cover one or more of the foundation subjects, such as Geography, History and/or Arts. And necessarily, will require of the use of mathematical, language and technology skills. Science is usually a subject covered in a transversal way as are English and Maths, through not just focused lessons but also through project work, this holistic approach to the subjects in the English National Curriculum brings relevance and a deeper understanding to the children's learning.

By direct immersion in a wide range of experiences, children can develop at their own pace and in their own style and can discover all kinds of ways of predicting and controlling their world directly. By practising, they develop and amplify their learning competencies.

By learning how to learn, we learn for life. We aim to enable learners at the MPECC to develop skills of resilience, resourcefulness, relevance, imagination, language, communication, reflection and responsibility which will be useful for the rest of their lives. Children develop a deep love of learning coupled with a mature ability to manage their own learning so that they will be able to learn whatever needs to be learned.

We foster these skills by providing a safe and supportive environment where people are free to discover who they are, to explore their preferences and dispositions and how best they learn, by giving them the space to discover ways to manage feelings effectively and handle stressful situations, by supporting and facilitating their ongoing learning in immersive and stimulating ways through interactive relationships and, importantly, by empowering them with a greater and greater responsibility for the initiation, direction, control and evaluation of their own learning.

PSHE (Personal Social Health and Economic Education)

PSHE is at the core of our curriculum. Children at Alex Park Democratic School learn how to identify their personal qualities, attitudes, skills, attributes and achievements and what influences these;

- How to build healthy and respectful relationships with each other. Children are respectful of every person's differences, whether they are related to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and the different make up of families.
- A healthy (including physically, emotionally and socially) balanced lifestyle (including within relationships, work-life, exercise and rest, spending and saving and diet);
- Risk (identification, assessment and how to manage risk rather than simply the avoidance of risk for self and others) and safety (including behaviour and strategies to employ in different settings);
- Diversity and equality (in all its forms);
- Rights (including the notion of universal human rights), responsibilities (including fairness and justice) and consent (in different contexts);
- Change (as something to be managed) and resilience (the skills, strategies and 'inner resources' we can draw on when faced with challenging change or circumstance);
- Power (how it is used and encountered in a variety of contexts including persuasion, bullying, negotiation and 'win-win' outcomes);
- Career (including enterprise, employability and economic understanding);
- PSHE education makes a significant contribution to the development of a wide range of essential skills.

Essential Skills

The *intrapersonal* skills required for self-management

- Critical, constructive self-reflection (including being aware of own needs, motivations and learning, strengths and next steps for development, how we are influenced by our perception of peers' behaviour);
- Learning from experience to seek out and make use of constructive feedback;
- Setting challenging personal goals (including developing strategies to achieve them and knowing when to change them);
- Making decisions (including knowing when to be flexible);
- Recognising some of the common ways our brains can 'trick us' or 'trap us' in unhelpful thinking (including generalisation, distortion of events, deletion of information, misconceptions or misperceptions about the behaviour of peers);
- Resilience (including self-motivation, adaptability, constructively managing change including

setbacks and stress);

- Self-regulation (including managing strong emotions e.g. negativity and impulse);
- Recognising and managing the need for peer approval;
- Self-organisation (including time management).

The *interpersonal* skills required for positive relationships in a wide variety of settings

- Active listening;
- Empathy;
- Communication (non-verbal and verbal including assertiveness and recognising how this differs from aggressive and passive behaviour; being able to present and communicate ideas, arguments and thoughts effectively);
- Team working (including agreeing clear and challenging outcomes, facilitation, co-operation, networking and the ability to provide, receive and respond to, constructive feedback and take on different roles; the ability to recognise and learn from others' experience);
- Negotiation (including flexibility, self-advocacy and compromise);
- Recognising and utilising strategies for managing pressure, persuasion and coercion;
- Responding to the need for positive affirmation for self and others.

Skills of enquiry

- Formulating questions;
- Gathering and using data (including assessing the validity and reliability of sources of data and using a variety of sources);
- Analysis (including separating fact from opinion);
- Planning and deciding;
- Recalling and applying knowledge creatively and in novel situations;
- Drawing and defending conclusions using evidence and not just assertion;
- Identification, assessment (including prediction) and management of risk;
- Evaluating social norms;
- Reviewing progress against objectives.

Date - October 2018

Signed Headteacher-

Review – October 2019

Signed Director –