

**Art-Embedded Curriculum in Early Childhood Education:**

**The Playful Playground**

by

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A curriculum project submitted to

Sonoma State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Education

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**Art-Embedded Curriculum in Early Childhood Education:  
The Playful Playground**

Curriculum Project by  
Ryan Kurada

**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of my cognate project was to develop, implement, and document an art-embedded curriculum project inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. I focused on exploring how the processes of teaching and learning are affected when activities in the visual arts are meaningfully embedded in a first grade curriculum.

**Description:** The project followed three phases: investigation, representation, and reflection. In each phase, students utilized the visual arts to “defamiliarize” an everyday object in order to construct a deeper understanding and appreciation of it. At the conclusion of the project, students exhibited their project constructions, making their learning visible in a format that attempted to break down the boundaries between art and other disciplines.

**Findings:** An art-embedded curriculum supports developmentally appropriate practice as all children, regardless of ability level, are able to develop competency in their symbolic and representational capacities. They use visual art processes and open-ended materials to naturally construct and communicate meaning across the curriculum while meeting academic standards.

**Conclusions:** Embedding visual art processes into the curriculum support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. An art-embedded curriculum reflects a postmodern shift in viewing art as children’s primary mode of communication making their thinking and learning visible across all disciplines.

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

MA Program: Education

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# The Playful Playground

A curriculum project by Ryan Kurada and Ms. Straub's 2015 First Grade Class



# Project Overview:

## Section 1

**Project Rationale/Big Idea:** This art-embedded curriculum project is centered on the theme of play which is the principle means from which young children learn. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, students will be encouraged to utilize a wide variety of “expressive languages” (Vecchi, 2010) such as drawing, painting, and sculpture in an effort to “defamiliarize” (Katz, 1998) and construct new understandings of an everyday object in their environment, the playground. The goal of this project is to facilitate children’s explorations of playgrounds and their design, through a variety of mediums in order to deepen and expand upon their knowledge, appreciation, and imagination of this everyday place of play.

**Grade Level:** 1<sup>st</sup> grade

**Time Frame:** 5 weeks @ 60 - 90 minute segments each

**Objectives:** All students will:

- explore the topic of playgrounds in a language and literacy-rich environment through print and non-print media.
- practice communication, critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, and collaboration skills while working with peers.
- discover the design process by inquiring, researching, planning, building, and testing designs.
- develop familiarity with a wide range of art materials.

- construct a model playground using natural, recycled/reclaimed, and traditional art materials.
- reason with shapes and measurement of real objects.
- reflect on both the process and product of the project through verbal and written forms.

### **Materials and Resources:**

#### ***Read-Alouds***

- *Playgrounds* by Gail Gibbons
- *My Dream Playground* by Kate Becker
- *Iggy Peck, Architect* by Andrea Beaty
- *Rosie Revere, Engineer* by Andrea Beaty
- *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt
- *Going Places* by Paul A. Reynolds
- *Junkyard* by Mike Austin
- *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires
- *Sand Castle* by Brenda Shannon Yee
- *The Nowhere Box* by Sam Zupardi
- *Sandy's Circus: A Story About Alexander Calder* by Tanya Lee Stone
- *Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building* by Christy Hale
- *Artist Ted* by Andrea Beaty
- *What Do You Do With An Idea?* by Kobi Yamada

- *Measuring Penny* by Loreen Leedy
- *Boy + Bot* by Arne Dyckman

### ***Informational Texts***

- *Urban Playground Spaces* by Monsa
- *Playground Design (Architecture in Focus)* by Michelle Galindo
- *Design for Fun: Playgrounds* by Marta Rojas Del Alamo
- *Handcrafted Playgrounds: Designs You Can Build Yourself* by M. Paul Friedberg
- *Let's Build a Playground* by Michael J. Rosen
- Landscape Structures Inc. *Playground Inspirations* catalogue

### ***Art Materials***

- Tempera/acrylic Paint
- Crayola crayons and markers
- Oil pastels
- Black ink pens
- Paint brushes
- Plastic sheeting
- Paper towels
- Newspaper
- Aprons/smocks

- Glue
- Scissors
- Pens
- Pencils
- Masking Tape
- Egg cartons (for paint palettes)
- Plastic containers
- Shoeboxes
- Construction, butcher, drawing, and poster paper (of various sizes/colors)
- Natural materials (clay, twigs, leaves, rocks, etc).
- Recycled/reclaimed materials (foam, colorful plastic lids and caps, yarn, netting, paper tubes, cardboard panels, craft sticks, pipe cleaners, wood scraps, plastic and metal loose parts, etc).

***Artwork:***

- **Title and date:** *Children's Games*, 1560
- **Artist name:** Pieter Bruegel
- **Medium:** Oil on canvas
  
- **Title and date:** *Walt Disney Concert Hall*, 2003
- **Artist name:** Frank Gehry
- **Medium:** Architecture

**Audio file:** “Urban Playground Full of Children:”

<http://www.soundsnap.com/node/84250>

**Materials for Documentation of Student Learning:** digital camera, smart phone (for audio and video capture), pen and notebook

**Instructional Resources:**

- Projector
- Whiteboard
- Chart paper
- Clipboards
- Playground Journals
- Teacher-created “Playground Research” handout
- Teacher-created “Final Reflection” handout
- Teacher-created digital slideshow (photographs of playgrounds designed by various artists)

**Summary of Project:**

- Students will investigate the topic of playgrounds through inquiry-based discussions, direct experiences, individual and collective artmaking, read-alouds, also shared research and writing activities. (*Investigation Phase*)

- Students created parts for a collaborative class playground using a wide variety of natural, recycled/reclaimed, and traditional materials.

*(Representation Phase)*

- Students will reflect upon their own work in verbal and written forms; students will also respond to the work of their peers and present their work to the greater school community. *(Reflection Phase)*

**Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as necessary)

- English Language Learners
- Learners with Special Needs
- Accelerated Learners

**Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this project:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- Naturalist intelligence

## Assessment Planning

	Formative	Summative
• Informal observations (photo/audio documentation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Daily class meetings based on project topics (e.g. playground design)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Writing samples and artwork	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Playground journal/quick write & draw	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Model playground		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Final reflection & concluding presentation and exhibition		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

# Investigation Phase:

## Section 2

## Segment 1

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will be engaged in a read-aloud of *Playgrounds* by Gail Gibbons and discuss their personal playground preferences. Students will complete a collaborative drawing depicting their most favorite thing to do on the playground and will complement their drawing with a written description. This segment serves as a reflective introduction to the playground project.

**Prep work:** Read: *Artist Ted* by Andrea Beaty before starting Segment 1.

**Materials:** whiteboard, *Playgrounds* by Gail Gibbons, brown all-purpose paper, Crayola crayons, markers and oil pastels, half sheets of colored construction paper, pencils, audio recording of “playground noises,” camera, audio recording app, pen and notebook

**Audio file:** “Urban Playground Full of Children:”

<http://www.soundsnap.com/node/84250>

**Documentation:** Photograph students working and audio record student conversations.

**Objectives:** All students will:

- reflect on playgrounds by making connections to their personal life.
- practice cooperation skills while producing a collective drawing.
- enhance the narrative of a drawing through writing an opinion piece.

### Into

- Play the audio file “Urban Playground Full of Children” as students return to the classroom from afternoon recess.
- Ask students: “What do the sounds make you think of?” Encourage students to be specific about what they hear.
- Gather students on the carpet and initiate a brief discussion about the sounds.
- On the whiteboard, create a concept map based on what students know about playgrounds. Write the word “playground” in the middle of the board and record student comments around the word “playground.”
- After completing the concept map, read the book *Playgrounds* by Gail Gibbons.

### Through

- After reading the story, ask students: “What do you like to do on the playground?”

- Have students think about the question and encourage them to engage in a “think-pair-share” as they discuss their most favorite thing to do on the playground.
- After the “think-pair-share,” have students share their answers with the whole group.
- Explain to the students that they will be creating a drawing of their most favorite playground activity.
- Roll out a long sheet of brown paper and place several trays of markers, crayons, and oil pastels on the classroom floor.
- Explain to students that they are to draw on either side of the rolled out paper (10 students on one side and 10 on the other).
- Tell them when they are finished drawing to go to the resource table and select one half sheet of colored construction paper and go to their desks.
- On the construction sheet of paper, tell them to write about their drawing, what they are doing and why they like doing it. **(Write this prompt on the board to remind them).**
- Model an example writing response by asking one student what is their favorite thing to do on the playground and encourage them to provide reasons to support their opinion. Write this response on the board.
- Be sure to tailor the model writing sample to include a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing sentence. Remind students of common

writing mechanics such as proper capitalization, punctuation, appropriate spaces between words, neat handwriting, etc.

- Dismiss students from the carpet by row to begin the activity.
- During the activities, monitor students as they are drawing and assist them in their writing, as necessary. Also, remind them to write their name beside their drawing and on the back of their writing sheet.

### Beyond

- Gather students on the carpet around the collective drawing.
- Have students walk around and observe the collective drawing and then have them resume their seats in the circle.
- Once back in the circle, ask them: “What did you notice about each other’s drawings?” “Did you have any questions you want to ask any of your friends?” “What kinds of things did you notice that your friends liked to do on the playground?”
- Store and prepare the collective drawing for exhibition later.

### Potential extension activity:

- Playback the “playground noises” audio clip. Have students draw/write about what they think is going on based upon the sounds.

### **Modifications for Learners’ Specific Needs** (adaptations as necessary)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-

time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.

- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide extra questions about their drawing to augment their writing.

**Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students:

- successfully reflect on playgrounds by making connections to their personal life?
- successfully practice cooperation skills while creating a collective drawing?
- successfully enhance the narrative of a drawing through writing an opinion piece?

## Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:

### California Common Core English Language Arts Standards

#### *Reading Standards for Literature K–5*

- 1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- 7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

#### *Writing Standards K–5*

- 1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

#### *Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

### National Core Visual Arts Standards

#### *Responding*

- 7.1 Describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences of one's self and others

## Segment 2

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will practice their observational skills by observing and discussing the artwork *Children's Games* by Pieter Bruegel. Students will also complete an observational drawing of their own school playground and write what they noticed about its shapes and other physical characteristics.

**Prep work:** Read: *Iggy Peck, Architect* by Andrea Beaty before starting Segment 2.

**Materials:** projector, whiteboard, clipboards, full sheets of 8.5 x 11 white sketch paper, black ink pens, small bag of crayons, lined paper, camera, audio recording app, pen and notebook

**Documentation:** Photograph students working and audio record a few students explaining what they noticed about the playground.

**Art Work (see Appendix A):**

**Title and date:** *Children's Games*, 1560

**Artist name:** Pieter Bruegel

**Medium:** Oil on canvas

**Link:**[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Les\\_jeux\\_d'enfants\\_Pieter\\_Brueghel\\_l'Ancien.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Les_jeux_d'enfants_Pieter_Brueghel_l'Ancien.jpg)

**Objectives:** All students will:

- use an inquiry-based approach to describe, analyze, interpret, and judge Pieter Bruegel's *Children's Games*.
- demonstrate observational skills by drawing the school playground from different points of view.
- describe the shapes of playground structures in verbal and written forms.

### Into

- Have Pieter Bruegel's *Children's Games* projected on the screen as students return from lunch recess.
- Gather students on the carpet.
- Lead a Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) discussion with the students based on the focus artwork. Have students take a minute to quietly look at the projected image.
- After about a minute, begin to ask students the three VTS facilitation questions: "What's going on in this painting?" and follow up students' comments with "What do you see that makes you say that?" and "What more can we find?" Explain to students that the painting was done a long, long time ago before playgrounds were invented. Ask students: "What is the difference between how kids play now and long ago?"

## Through

- After the VTS discussion, explain to students that they will be going out to the playground and becoming “playground observers.”
- Ask students: “What does it mean to “observe” something?” Have students engage in a “turn and talk” discussing what the word “observe” means.
- After the “turn and talk,” on the whiteboard, create a concept map of the word “observe” and record student comments.
- Explain to students that to observe something means to look very closely at something (just like they did with the painting).
- After completing the concept map, tell students that we will go out and observe our school playground and draw only what we see. (Model this task).
- Ask students what kinds of shapes they anticipate seeing on the playground; draw and label all the shapes students identify on chart paper.
- After generating a list of shapes, tell students that they can use these shapes to help them observe and draw what they see out on the playground.
- After explaining the task, have students retrieve a clipboard, a full sheet of white sketch paper and a black pen as they line up at the door.

- Once students are lined up, lead them outside to the playground and begin the observational drawing activity. Tell students that they can draw from anywhere on the playground (front, back, sides, and inside the playground structures).
- Assist and monitor students on the playground.
- Remind students to write their name on the back of their paper.

### Beyond

- After the observational activity, lead students back to class.
- As students come into the classroom, have them bring their drawings to the carpet.
- Once on the carpet, have students do a “turn and talk” and discuss what they noticed about the playground and its shapes as they were drawing it.
- Tell them they will be writing about what shapes they observed while drawing on the playground.
- Call on a student to help model a writing sample to assist other students in their own writing. Be sure to tailor the model writing sample to include a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing sentence. Remind students of common writing mechanics such as proper capitalization, punctuation, appropriate spaces between words, neat handwriting, etc.
- After the discussion, have students select a sheet of line paper, go to their desks, and write about what they noticed about the playground.

- Monitor and assist students while they are writing.
- Collect and store work for exhibition later.

**Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide extra questions about their drawing to enhance their drawing/writing.

**Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- Naturalist intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- successfully describe, analyze, and begin to interpret and judge the art work?
- successfully demonstrate observation skills through a drawing of the school playground?
- successfully describe the shapes of playground structures in verbal and written forms?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:****California Common Core English Language Arts Standards***Writing Standards K–5*

- 2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

*Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- 4. Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
- 5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

**California Common Core Math Standards (1<sup>st</sup> Grade):***Geometry*

- 1. G. Reason with shapes and their attributes.

**National Core Visual Arts Standards***Creating*

- 1.2 Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art.

**California Science Standards***Investigation and Experimentation*

- 4. A. Draw pictures that portray some features of the thing being described.

**California Social Studies Standards***A Child's Place in Time and Space*

- 1.2 Students describe the physical and/or human characteristics of places.

### Segment 3

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will analyze the engineering process by looking at the architectural designs of Frank Gehry's *Walt Disney Concert Hall*. Students will be introduced to the idea of building a model playground. Students will research playground designs using various books and research handouts.

This segment is comprised of two parts which are meant to be completed on different days. During Part 1, pairs of students will search through playground photo books. Each individual student will then select and draw four playground structures that they think kids would enjoy on the "Playground Research: Part 1" handout. They will record which books and page numbers they got their playground structure photos from. During Part 2, students will decide which one of the four playground structures kids would enjoy the most. They will cut out their chosen structure and paste it on the "Playground Research: Part 2" handout and then write about why they think kids would enjoy their chosen structure the most.

**Prep work:** Read: *Rosie Revere, Engineer* by Andrea Beaty before starting Segment 3, make 22 copies of the two "Playground Research" handouts (**see Appendix B**). On chart paper/whiteboard, write the word "Research" at the top. Under the word "Research," write "Research means to learn more about something." Also, draw a picture of an eye and a book that appears to be open.

Under these two images, write: “Look at the pictures closely.” Set out two playground books per table group (see informational texts pg.13).

**Materials:** projector, document camera, pencils, camera, audio recording app, pen and notebook

**Art Work (see Appendix C):**

**Title and date:** *Walt Disney Concert Hall, 2003*

**Artist name:** Frank Gehry

**Medium:** Architecture

**Documentation:** Photograph students researching and audio record student conversations.

**Objectives:** All students will:

- interpret the modeling process of an engineer.
- discover the research process.
- write a simple research report about a playground design.

## Part 1

### Into

- Display photos of Frank Gehry's Walt Disney's Concert Hall (drawing, model, and completed architecture) on the projector. Have students observe the images quietly for about a minute.
- As students are observing the images, ask students: "What do you notice about these pictures?" "How are these pictures the same and how are they different?"
- Based on the photos, ask students: "Which one of these photos would be considered a "model" of the building? "What is a "model" of something?" Have students do a "turn and talk" about what they think the word "model" means and have them share their thinking.
- Explain that a "model" is a small version of something that artists, engineers, and architects create (remind students of the stories *Artist Ted*, *Iggly Peck, Architect*, and *Rosie Revere, Engineer*).
- Explain to students that we are all going to become engineers and build our own model playground next week.

### Through

- Explain that before engineers build a model of something, they have to do research and learn more about what they want to build.
- Explain to students that they will be learning about playgrounds shown in different books.

- Refer students to the teacher-created research chart paper/whiteboard. Have the class read the definition of the word “research” and explain to students that they will have a chance to look at books to learn more about playgrounds.
- Tell them when they look at the books, to look at the pictures closely. (Model this task with a book).
- Model how to complete the “Playground Research: Part 1” handout. Tell students that as they are looking through the different kinds of playground books, to find and draw four playground structures that they think kids would enjoy. Explain to students that they can use what they find in the books to help them come up with ideas for when they build their own playground structures.
- Display a playground book under the document camera and model going through a book with the whole-class. Tell students that as they are going through the books, to search for playground structures that they think kids would enjoy. (Write this task on the board).
- Tell students that tomorrow (Part 2) they will have to choose just one of the four playground structures that they drew and write about why they think kids would enjoy it the most.
- Tell students that below each playground structure that they draw on the “Playground Research: Part 1” handout, they must write down the **source** and the **page** number where the photo came from. Explain to students that a “source” means where you got your information. Have students

repeat the definition of **source**. Write the word **source** and its definition on the research chart paper.

- Explain to students that there will be two playground books per table. Tell students that they will be looking at a playground book in pairs as they complete the handout.
- Remind students to take care of the books by turning the pages carefully.
- Distribute “Playground Research: Part 1” handouts and have students retrieve a pencil to begin the activity.
- As students are working, monitor and assist them in their research and writing.

### **Beyond**

- After the research activity, have students bring their handout to the carpet.
- Have them do a “turn and talk” and discuss the playground structures that they drew with a partner, and then have them share out to the whole class.
- Collect handouts and save for Part 2.

### **Part 2**

- Have students decide which of the four playground structures that they drew would kids enjoy the most. Model this task.

- Have students cut out their one chosen playground structure from the four they drew in Part 1 and paste it on the “Playground Research: Part 2” handout.
- On the handout, have students rewrite the source and page number on the sheet and then write about why they think kids would enjoy their chosen playground structure the most. Encourage students to support their opinion with specific reasons as to what about the playground structure kids would enjoy.
- Model an example writing response on the board.
- Be sure to tailor the model writing sample to include a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing sentence. Remind students of common writing mechanics such as proper capitalization, punctuation, finger spaces, neat handwriting, etc.
- After students complete the handout, have them bring it to the carpet.
- Have them do a “turn and talk” and discuss the playground structure that they wrote about with a partner, and then have them share out to the whole class.
- Collect handouts and save for exhibition later.

**Potential extension activities:**

- Have students refer back to the playground that they drew on their “Playground Research” handout and have them create miniature clay sculptures of them.

- Engage students in a whole-class discussion centered on the types of playgrounds the students researched. Ask students what kinds of playgrounds did they research? Outdoor, indoor, school or park playground? With assistance from students, create a class bar graph that displays the different playgrounds they researched.

#### **Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide further questions about their researched playground design to enhance their writing.

#### **Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence

- Interpersonal intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- successfully interpret the modeling process of an engineer?
- successfully engage in all aspects of the research assignment?
- successfully write a simple research report about a playground design?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:**

### **California Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

#### *Writing Standards K–5*

- 1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.
- 7. Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of “how-to” books on a given topic and use them to write a sequence of instructions).

#### *Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

### Segment 4

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will be engaged in a read-aloud of *My Dream Playground* by Kate Becker. Students will critique a photo of their school playground and discuss what they would change or add to the playground.

Students will be encouraged to discuss their dream playground. In small groups, each student will then draw a structure which will eventually be included in a collaborative playground.

**Prep work:** Take a photograph of the school playground and read: *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt before starting Segment 4.

**Materials:** *My Dream Playground* by Kate Becker, projector, teacher-created playground slideshow (photographs of playgrounds designed by various artists **see Appendix D**), whiteboard, 5 sheets of 22 in. x 28 in. poster paper, Crayola crayons, camera, audio recording app, pen and notebook

**Documentation:** Photograph small groups working and audio record student conversations during group planning.

**Objectives:** All students will:

- discuss playground design using print and non-print media.
- describe how to change the school playground environment.

- draw structures for a dream playground in small groups.

### Into

- Gather students on the carpet.
- Read and discuss *My Dream Playground*.
- After reading the story, project a photograph of their school playground.
- Lead inquiry into the photo by asking students: “What do you like and dislike about your school playground?” “If you could change or add something to the playground to make it better, what would you change or add?” Call on students to share out.
- Show the teacher-created playground slideshow. Explain to students that here are some examples of how different artists used their imagination to create new kinds of playgrounds.
- After showing the slideshow, have students close their eyes and imagine if they could create their own dream playground, what would they wish for it to have? Have students do a “turn and talk” and discuss their ideas with a partner.
- After the “turn and talk,” go around the circle and chart each students’ comments in a “Wish List” on the whiteboard.
- Tell students that they are going to get into groups of four and explain that each group member should draw a **different** playground structure.

- Explain to students that they will use what they draw to help create the dream playground.
- Have students think about and share what playground structures they want to draw. Refer students back to the class-generated “Wish-List” for support.
- Elicit from the students how they can work together in their group. Have students share out their ideas. Have students model how they could work together. Review *The Day the Crayons Quit* to reinforce cooperation and listening skills.
- Explain to students that they will need to discuss in their groups about what structures they want to have in their dream playground before drawing.
- Lay 5 sheets of 22 in. 28 in. poster paper (one sheet per group) and 5 tubs of crayons across the classroom floor. Dismiss students by row from the carpet to go to a sheet of paper as a way for them to form their own groups. Limit four students to a group.
- Tell each group member to write their name under their drawing on the poster paper so that we all know what playground structure belongs to who.

### Through

- Assist students in creating their group drawings and model effective ways for working together, (i.e.: sharing space and ideas and taking turns drawing).
- Document who is in each group for next segment.

### Beyond

- Store work to share next segment.

### Potential extension activity:

- Have all students in each group write a short narrative about their group drawings, explaining what playground structure(s) they drew and why.

### **Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide extra questions about their dream playground parts to enhance their drawing (or writing).

**Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- successfully discuss playground design using print and non-print media?
- successfully describe how to change the playground environment?
- successfully draw structures for a dream playground in small groups?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:**

**California Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

*Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- 2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

## Next Generation Science Standards

### *Engineering Design*

- K-2-ETS1-1: Ask questions, make observations, and gather information about a situation people want to change to define a simple problem that can be solved through the development of a new or improved object or tool.

## Segment 5

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will identify what playground structures they drew in Segment 4. Students engage in a read-aloud of *Junkyard* by Mike Austin and discuss how different materials can be creatively reused and recycled. Students will familiarize themselves with the materials that are available to build their model playground structures.

**Prep work:** Read *Going Places* by Paul A. Reynolds before starting Segment 5, set out reclaimed/recycled materials around the classroom (see p. 14), create labels for all material bins.

**Materials:** Easel, group drawings (from Segment 4), whiteboard, *Junkyard* by Mike Austin, teacher-created playground structure models, reclaimed/recycled materials, camera, audio recording app, pen and notebook

**Documentation:** Photograph students observing materials and audio record student conversations.

**Objectives:** All students will:

- identify and describe playground structures designed in Segment 4 group drawings.
- discuss how different materials can be reused and recycled.

- explore various reclaimed/recycled materials.

### Into

- Gather students on the carpet.
- Place each group drawing on the easel for the class to see. Have each group member identify and describe which playground structures they drew.
- Encourage students to make comments about each other's playground structures.
- On chart paper, list each item each student has drawn (e.g. Slide – Cadence, Teeter Totter – Julie).
- If students drew more than one playground structure, list those also.

### Through

- After the list is complete, read *Junkyard*. Engage students in a discussion on how different materials can be reused and recycled.
- Connect the *Junkyard* book to the upcoming activity by explaining that they will be using recycled materials to build our dream playground.
- Show students teacher-created playground structure models. Ask students what do they notice about the teacher-created models and have them share what they noticed.
- Discuss the importance of size and making sure that when they build their structures, they are not too big or too small.

- Introduce students to the “materials area” of the classroom. Explain that the materials in the classroom are the materials they will use to start building their playground next time.
- Guide students on a “materials tour” and lead them around the classroom, stopping to observe and talk about the materials.
- During the “materials tour” discuss how these materials were also used to build the teacher-created models (e.g. pipe cleaners, paper tubes, caps, etc). Also, encourage students to analyze the physical properties such as the shapes, sizes, and colors of the different materials.
- After the “materials tour,” return students back their group drawings.
- Provide each student with a shoebox and allow 5 students at a time to begin collecting different materials they need to build their playground structure.
- Tell students that after they retrieve their materials they can go on the classroom floor and begin familiarizing themselves with the materials (and possibly begin building their playground structure).
- Monitor students working together and exploring the materials.
- As students return to the classroom floor, encourage them to explore concepts of measurement by trying to figure out what sizes of different materials they need in order to make their model.

### Beyond

- After all students have gathered enough materials to build their individual structures and have spent time familiarizing themselves with the materials, have them put their materials back in their individual shoeboxes and have them write their name on it.
- Store shoeboxes on the shelf in the classroom for next time.
- If time permits, have students discuss what they enjoyed about exploring the materials.

### **Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide students with further questions about their material(s) of study to help them figure out how to best use them.

### **Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence

- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- successfully identify and describe playground structures designed in Segment 4 group drawings?
- successfully discuss how different materials can be reused and recycled?
- successfully explore various reclaimed/recycled materials?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:**

**California Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

*Reading Standards for Literature K–5*

- 1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- 3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

*Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**California Common Core Math Standards (1<sup>st</sup> Grade):***Measurement and Data:*

- 1. MD. Measure lengths indirectly and by iterating length units.

**National Core Visual Arts Standards***Creating*

- 1.1 Engage collaboratively in exploration and imaginative play with materials.

**Next Generation Science Standards***Engineering Design*

- K-2-ETS1-1: Ask questions, make observations, and gather information about a situation people want to change to define a simple problem that can be solved through the development of a new or improved object or tool.

**California Health Standards***Personal and Community Health*

- 1.8. P: Identify materials that can be reduced, reused, or recycled.

# Representation Phase:

## Section 3

## Segment 6

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will build their playground structures and will be introduced to the “quick write/draw activity.”

**Prep work:** Read *Sandcastle* by Brenda Shannon Yee before starting Segment 6. Assemble playground journals, set out the playground books, reclaimed/recycled materials, and the group drawings around the classroom.

**Materials:** *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires Group, group drawings, chart paper (listing each student’s playground structures), playground journals, pencils, natural, recycled, and traditional art materials (see materials list pg. 13-14), butcher paper, plastic sheeting, aprons, paper towels, egg cartons (for paint palettes), camera, audio recording app, video capture, pen and notebook

**Documentation:** Photograph students building and audio record student conversations, and videotape students building

**Objectives for all Representation Phase segments:** All students will:

- construct parts for a collaborative class playground.
- practice cooperation skills.
- experiment with a wide variety of materials.
- self-assess individual progress.

- contribute to group decision making for ideas in creating and exhibiting displays.
- present work to peers and the larger school community in verbal and written forms.

### Into

- Gather students on the carpet.
- Read and discuss *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires.
- Explain to students that today they will start building a model of the playground structure they drew on their group drawing.
- Explain that they will be spending several days building their dream playgrounds. Remind students to take their time and do not rush.
- Tell students that while they are building they can look back at their research and the playground books to help them with ideas.
- Explain that some materials may not work the way you want them to. Ask students what they will do when they come across a problem with a material.
- Suggest to students that they can try to find ways to make materials work by cutting or taping the materials, combining materials, bending the material, ask group members or adults for help, try new materials, etc.
- Refer students back to the theme in the *Most Magnificent Thing* and to not get frustrated if something doesn't work out right away.

- Explain to students that unused materials should be put back where they got it from.
- Dismiss students by row to retrieve their paper bags containing their gathered materials from the previous segment to start building their playground structure. Tell students that they can work on the floor or at their desks.

### Through

- Assist and monitor students working and provide guidance in helping students construct objects.
- Review student progress and make plans for classroom meetings.

### Beyond

- Initiate a short debrief with students about their building experiences.
- Introduce students to the “quick write/draw activity” and model how to complete it in their playground journal. Explain that after each segment, they will write one or two sentences describing how they feel about their structure and quickly sketch their in-progress playground structure.
- Store work safely and securely for students to continue next segment.

### Segment 7 - (TBA)

During the remainder of the Representation Phase, students will continue to construct the collaborative model playground. The teacher will continue to conduct daily read-alouds centered on the project-related theme of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills such as creativity, critical thinking, cooperation, and collaboration (see list of read-alouds pg. 12-13). As students finish building their playground structure(s) they will paint it, and upon completion they will assist in painting the natural landscape backdrop, paint/create items for the playground base, and a collaborative sky mural. Once these components are complete, the teacher and students will work together to arrange the individual student playground structures to form a collaborative model playground.

The teacher will continue to document student learning through photographs, audio recording, and occasional videos. Students will also have the opportunity to document their own learning as they self-assess their progress in their playground journals through the quick write/draw activity.

Using observational notes of student progress and interactions, the teacher will hold classroom meetings based on the emergent needs, issues, and problems of the class as a whole. During classroom meetings, the teacher will assist students in identifying problems and generating solutions to solve them. Problems and possible solutions will be charted.

### Representation Phase Tasks

- On-going formative assessment in playground journals: “Quick Write/Draw.” Students will briefly write about how they feel about their construction and draw a quick picture of their project in-progress. This type of assessment is meant to track the progress of each individual. Have students complete this at least twice days a week.
- Read: *Measuring Penny* and connect this story with having students draw and measure various playground structures constructed thus far. Have students use a non-standard unit of measurement such as “linker cubes” and record the data in their playground journals.
- Encourage students to reason with and define the types of shapes they are creating and using in their playground constructions.
- Hold classroom meetings to discuss ideas regarding how to paint/create the playground base (possible directions and materials will include: painting grass, adding natural materials such as rocks, leaves, wood chips, and constructing spring flowers from construction paper).
- Guide students in painting an environmental landscape backdrop that will go behind the playground. This mural will be painted on white butcher paper and will be attached to large cardboard box panels. Students will analyze the natural surroundings of their own playground and recreate it in a mural.

- Guide a small group of students in painting a sun, sky, and cloud mural.  
The teacher will make clouds out of saran wrap and dryer sheets to add to the mural.
- In collaboration with students, decide how the individual playground structures should be arranged to present the collaborative playground.

**Modifications for Learners' Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** enhance students' critical and creative thinking by encouraging them to brainstorm multiple ways an object can be manipulated for construction.

**Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence

- Interpersonal intelligence
- Naturalist intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- successfully construct parts for a collaborative class playground?
- successfully practice cooperation skills?
- successfully experiment with a wide variety materials?
- successfully self-assess individual progress?
- successfully contribute to group decision making for ideas in creating and exhibiting displays?
- successfully present work to peers and the larger school community in verbal and written forms?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:**

### **California Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

#### *Writing Standards K–5*

- 2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

#### *Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**California Common Core Math Standards (1<sup>st</sup> Grade):***Measurement and Data*

- 1. MD. Measure lengths indirectly.

**National Core Visual Arts Standards***Creating*

- 1.1 Engage collaboratively in exploration and imaginative play with materials.
- 2.1 Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.

*Presenting*

- 5.1 Ask and answer questions such as where, when, why, and how artwork should be prepared for presentation or preservation.

**California Content and Next Generation Science Standards***Investigation and Experimentation*

- 4. A. Draw pictures that portray some features of the thing being described.

*Engineering Design*

- K-2-ETS1-1: Ask questions, make observations, and gather information about a situation people want to change to define a simple problem that can be solved through the development of a new or improved object or tool.

**Reflection Phase:**

**Section 4**

### Segment (TBA)

**Lesson Goals and Description:** Students will reflect upon the playground project through an oral presentation and a written reflection task.

**Prep work:** Set up exhibition and prepare displays.

**Documentation:** Photograph students presenting and audio record student comments.

**Materials:** Teacher-created playground structures, whiteboard, “Final Reflection” handout (**see Appendix E**), pencils, crayons, camera, audio recording app, video capture, pen and notebook

**Objectives:**

- reflect on the playground project in verbal and written forms.
- respond to the work done by peers.
- present playground project to peers and the greater school community.

In the Reflection phase, students will be encouraged to reflect upon their learning individually also as a community of learners through verbal presentations and written reflections. This phase will prepare students to discuss their work with parents and the larger school community during the final

exhibition. Also during this phase, the teacher will organize and assemble a class book that will include photographs, student comments, and links to video footage made during the entire project.

- Have groups present their model playground. Encourage students in each group to explain their playground structures. Model how to present using a teacher-created model.
- During the presentations, ask students to tell the class about their playground. Ask guiding questions such as: “How did you make it?” “How did your friends help you create your playground structure(s)?” “What is your most favorite part about the playground project and why?”
- Facilitate a question and answer session for the class to make comments and/or compliments to each group member.
- Also, in collaboration with students, facilitate the creation of a class poem titled: “Our Playground” where students think of short phrases that describe their collaborative playground. Prompt the students by asking “What do we want to say about our playground?” This poem will be included in the exhibit pamphlet.
- Have students write a final reflection where they explain what they learned while doing the playground project (see Appendix E). Conference with students about their writing for them to edit and then write a final draft to exhibit with their work.
- Teacher will design exhibit invitations for parents

(Exhibition will take place when the class book is finalized).

- **Exhibition preparation:** send exhibit invitations home with students a week prior, create “exhibit plaques” for student work, hang collective drawings from Segment 1, observational drawings from Segment 2, group drawings from Segment 4 along the walls, place student playground journals and books around the classroom; organize a table for visitors to place orders for class books. Place the collaborative playground in the center in the room.

#### **Modifications for Learners’ Specific Needs** (adaptations as needed)

- **English Language Learners:** keep verbal directions simple, clear, and concise, elicit and concept-check vocabulary, provide adequate “wait-time,” physically point to objects while saying them, pair with bilingual/native speaker, give visual cues.
- **Learners with Special Needs:** confirm understanding and if necessary, re-demonstrate/explain lesson individually.
- **Accelerated Learners:** provide students with additional reflective questions for them to expand upon what they learned about playgrounds in written form.

#### **Multiple Intelligences:** types addressed through this segment:

- Linguistic/Language intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence

- Spatial intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence

**Assessment of Student Learning:** To what extent did students...

- reflect on the playground project in verbal and written forms?
- respond to the work done by peers?
- present playground project to peers and the greater school community?

**Links to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Standards:**

**California Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

*Writing Standards K–5*

- 1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

*Speaking and Listening Standards K–5*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

# Appendix A

Segment 2

**Title and date:** *Children's Games*, 1560

**Artist name:** Pieter Bruegel

**Medium:** Oil on canvas

# Appendix B

Segment 3: "Playground Research" Handout: Part 1

**Playground Research: Part 1**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1**

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2**

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page:** \_\_\_\_\_

Front Side

# Playground Research: Part 1

3



Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_

4



Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_

“Playground Research” Handout: Part 2

# Playground Research: Part 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My favorite playground...

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_

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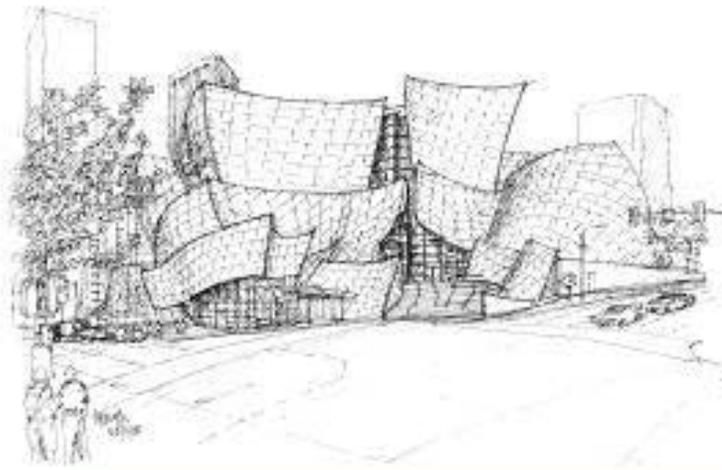
Front Side

A large rectangular box with a thin black border, containing 15 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across most of the width of the box. The box is centered on the page.

Back Side

# Appendix C

Segment 3: Frank Gehry Walt Disney Concert Hall



# Appendix D

## Segment 4: Teacher-Created Playground Slideshow



Dragon\_9



dragons-garden-france



lazy-playground-the-netherlan



Ferke-586-1024x768



iky-coan-london-artis-playgr



ipids-and-the-mushrooms-de



Hirtshals-fyr\_t\_m04



ingur.com\_Doyledown



iffel-sloerie-bbala-playable-s



five-natural-playgrounds-titled



five-natural-playgrounds-titled



lighthouse-slide-new-zealand



isytu-space-studio-weave4-b



an-Gym-Design-1outh-1okyt



an-Gym-Design-1outh-1okyt



ger-recreafom-modern-playgrc



ger-recreafom-modern-playgrc



oug11-iron-netting-create-a-pc



NetherlandsPlayground1



agone-robots-mountains-and-



igina\_Yarba Buena Playgrou



rk-playgrounds-sculpture-floren



ground-slide-n-schlawig-gen



playground-span



stel-playground-dome-arc2-a



park-playground-playscape-C



ark-playground-playscape-CI



ark-playground-playscape-CI



ark-playground-playscape-CI



ark-red-wagon-playground-ss



horischi-crochet-playground-1



ih-playground-climber-playsca



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leadrop-park-usa-2



tower-playgrund-denmark-2



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se-sandpit-natural-playground



se-sandpit-natural-playground



1



3



4518000844\_a6ed2fa500



orial-park-playground-sculptur



nteractive-play-structure-playg



blue-whale-sweden-2



rumbleby-denmark-2 624x411



-fullee-fly-eye-dome-playgroun



ard-labe-playhouse-vrginia-m



ground-playscape-baker-land



varyStructure\_play-a-1-playgr

# Appendix E

Segment 4: "Final Reflection" Handout

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**What did you enjoy the most about the playground project and why?**

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# Cognate Reflection

## **Art-Embedded Curriculum in Early Childhood Education**

Cognate Final Reflection by Ryan Kurada

Sonoma State University

Spring, 2015

**Committee Members:** Dr. Chiara Bacigalupa (Chair),

Lisa Pollack, M.A., Carlos Devillasante, M.F.A.

## Introduction

My goal for my cognate project was to develop, implement, and document an art-embedded curriculum project inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. My focus was on exploring how the processes of teaching and learning are affected when activities in the visual arts are meaningfully embedded in the first grade curriculum.

I am currently an elementary multiple-subject teaching credential candidate completing my full-time student teaching in a 1st grade classroom. I am also pursuing an M.A. degree in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education at Sonoma State University. My teaching philosophy centers on integrating the arts in the early childhood curriculum which supports my belief that young children learn best through direct, hands-on experiences.

**School Context.** I executed my project in a Rohnert Park, California public elementary school first grade classroom with twenty students. The school is considered to be located in a middle-income community. Classroom ethnic make-up comprised of children from mostly Caucasian and Hispanic backgrounds. The school is currently developing instruction around hands-on, project-based learning experiences for all students. Also, the school emphasizes

community-based learning connecting what students learn in the classroom to their families, friends, and local environment. This emphasis on community is supported by the school's influential Parent Teacher Association (PTA) which plans a variety of school-wide events and fund raisers to support resources for classroom teachers and the local community.

Although all subjects within the elementary multiple-subject curriculum such as science, social studies, and the arts are taught in my classroom, there is an increased focus on standards-based English language arts and mathematics instruction driven by tri-weekly district testing requirements in these content areas. In a 6 hour school day, the English language arts and math blocks averages approximately 120 minutes. Generally, these blocks are taught in a centers-based format where students rotate to different activities. I designed my project as a means to acknowledge the school's stated focus on project-based learning and demonstrate how to integrate and meaningfully address a wide variety of academic standards including but not limited to the Common Core State Standards (2010).

My mentor teacher agreed to schedule my project during the months of February and March 2015, two to three days a week during a 2pm-3pm time slot. This time of day became known as the "PBL" or "project-based learning block" as defined in my mentor teacher's weekly plans.

**Project Motivation.** The motivation behind my art-embedded curriculum was inspired by the internationally-renowned "Reggio Emilia approach" where art is the chosen medium by which children are encouraged to communicate (Hertzog, 2001). According to Tarr (2008) the concept of art-embedded curriculum is deeply rooted in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. These schools contain ateliers or art studios. Reggio children use these creative spaces as sites of inquiry, investigation, and to solve problems that span the curriculum. In the embedded vision, art is not a mere handmaiden to other subjects; it is deeply integrated in ways that embolden children to communicate and make visible their thinking and learning, transcending the beauty and complexities of art and other disciplines. As Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia schools claimed: "Art is learned outside art...art wears everyday clothes, not Sunday's best" (Malaguzzi cited in Rabitti, 1994, 72)

In Reggio Emilia, teachers understand that many young children interact with their environment through sensory and nonlinguistic forms of cognition (Wright, 1997). According to Katz (1998), art in Reggio Emilia schools is not taught as a separate subject, discrete sets of skills, center or activity to be completed, or focus of instruction of its own sake. Instead, art is deeply embedded into the life of the school and curriculum as additional languages available to children who are not yet competent in conventional reading and

writing. The belief that art is inseparable from the rest of the curriculum is central to teaching and learning in Reggio Emilia schools (New, 1990).

After conducting a thorough analysis of the approach in Dr. Marker's EDCT 585: Curriculum Development course, he said, quote: "your work as a curriculum leader with Reggio will change lives" (pers. comm., 2014). As I embarked on the task of creating an art-embedded curriculum project, inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, I wanted to not only make a positive impact on the lives of young children and the school community, but also contribute to the growing body of research on art-integration in early childhood education.

### **Reflection on Planning**

***Project Topic.*** I began planning my Reggio inspired project based on my belief that curriculum for young children should be relevant, interesting, and meaningful to their lives. According to Katz (1998) Reggio teachers take full advantage of children's own immediate environments and first-hand experiences for the foundation of project work. Many teachers tend to introduce esoteric curriculum topics under the assumption that everyday objects and events are uninteresting, Reggio teachers seek to "defamiliarize" everyday objects and events in making them meaningful, interesting, and instructive to young children.

Familiar topics such as an exploration of birds, a local supermarket or investigating the school after a rainfall provide children with many opportunities to contribute to a project using their own knowledge. The children themselves take leadership in planning for specific observations as well as information and artifacts to be gathered.

My project focused on the topic of playgrounds which are part of children's everyday life at school. Because of its familiarity, they could contribute and enhance their knowledge of the topic. Szekely (2015) acknowledged how children's everyday exposure to playgrounds make significant contributions to their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and intellectual growth; however she mentioned society's disregard toward these everyday places of play. This realization influenced me to research the playground topic for my project work:

One of children's first architectural experiences is on a playground. The playground is a mini city, or urban landscape, just the right size for a child. Yet, no one ever asks a child to take a step back and explore it as such, to contemplate it as an art form, and to navigate it as an architect. Children might have played their whole lives on the sculpture and landscape design of great architects, yet they are unaware of their surroundings (Szekely, 2015, p. 38).

My goal in selecting this topic was for children to develop a greater appreciation of playgrounds as well as to expand their interests and imagination by constructing a collaborative dream model playground.

**Guiding Theories.** The theories that influenced my planning were firmly rooted in constructivist philosophies. The Reggio Emilia philosophical belief that a child possesses and speaks a “hundred languages” (Malaguzzi, cited in Hawkins, 1998) served as the guiding principle for my project. In Reggio Emilia, educators consider “languages” as the different ways children use to express themselves; mathematical language, scientific language, etc which they use to communicate and construct an understanding of their world (Vecchi, 2010). Vea Vecchi, a former atelierista teacher of the Diana school in Reggio Emilia, believed that learning takes place when young children interweave and make connections between different languages (or disciplines). She felt that these connections across disciplines are activated *in and through* the “symbolic languages” (Vecchi, 1998, 140) such as drawing, painting, and working in clay. She also believed that symbolic languages are an important “means for questioning and investigating the world and building bridges and relationships between different experiences and languages” (Vecchi, 2010, 57).

Building on Vecchi’s theory, Marshall (2005) stated that cognition occurs when neural nodes in the brain are activated simultaneously in net-like configurations; this is a process which cognitive scientists refer to as an act of neural processing or “connectionism.” This idea of “connectionism” explains how crucial it is for the mind to make connections in order to learn and function in

everyday life. Both Vecchi and Marshall validate the respected theories of Piaget (1963) who believed that in order for children to successfully construct knowledge, they must evaluate new experiences and understand how that relates to prior knowledge. Piaget's theory suggests that authentic learning not only requires children connect new to existing knowledge, but comprehend how these experiences fit together. In art-integrated learning, children are naturally encouraged to go through the mental process of "interweaving" or connection-making in their quest to make abstract disciplinary concepts concrete (Marshall, 2005). These theories have led me to conclude that art serves as a bridge, connecting human experiences and thinking.

In developing my project, I attempted to explore how teaching and learning are affected when processes in the visual arts were meaningfully embedded into the curriculum. I planned my project's learning segments so that children utilized the "symbolic languages" as vehicles for making their thinking and learning visible in a manner that authentically integrates various disciplines and addresses academic state standards. By dividing rather than connecting different disciplines, we run the risk of fragmenting children's reality and impeding their development of thinking learning (Vecchi, 2010). My art-embedded curriculum project supports a pedagogy that works on connecting rather than separating fields of knowledge.

**Project Organization.** My project was organized into three phases: Investigation, Representation, and Reflection. These phases were directly influenced by Bickart et al. (1999)'s "ways children construct understanding." Bickart et al. justified that in order for learning to be meaningful, teachers must plan experiences that allow children to *investigate* a problem, *represent* their thinking, and *reflect* on their learning.

During the Investigation Phase of my project, students investigated the topic of playgrounds through inquiry-based discussions, direct experiences, individual and collective artmaking, read-alouds, also shared research and writing activities. In the Representation Phase, students created structures for a collaborative model playground using a wide variety of natural, recycled/reclaimed, and traditional materials. In the Reflection Phase, students reflected upon their own work in verbal and written forms; students also presented their work to the greater school community through an exhibit.

I also used well-documented Reggio Emilia projects such as the "Dinosaur Project" (Rankin, 1998), "An Amusement Park for Birds" (Forman et al., 1994), and the supermarket project (cited in Katz, 1998) as sources to support my planning in each of the phases. Specifics on how I adapted activities from these projects are included throughout my reflection.

## Reflection on Implementation: Investigation Phase

**Segment #1.** During Segment #1, I initiated an integrated pictorial and written reflective activity with students. I began the segment reading *Playgrounds* by Gail Gibbons to the class. I then brought students into the multipurpose room of our school, and rolled out a long sheet of brown butcher paper on the floor. I set down several bins of crayons and oil pastels, and asked students to draw their favorite thing to do on the playground and when finished, write about it. Each student drew their own image on the long sheet of paper, culminating in a collective drawing. The purpose of this task was to gauge student's interest in the topic of playgrounds and have them reflect and gain an increased level of awareness of their thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences on playgrounds. Rankin (1998) documented how Reggio teachers initiated the "Dinosaur Project" in a similar manner. They gathered a large group of students around a table and had them draw dinosaurs as way to reflect on their knowledge about the topic prior to conducting deeper investigation. My reflective, collective drawing activity was successful as demonstrated by how students were eagerly engaged as they drew and asked questions about each other's drawings.

Due to an increased emphasis on Common Core State English Language Arts Writing Standards, I planned Segment #1 to include a writing task. Students authentically addressed the standard W.1. which states that students write

opinion pieces by having them briefly describe their drawings. Based upon my research in the Reggio Emilia approach, I viewed writing as one of children's "hundred languages" or forms of communication that they use to record their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. I also viewed drawing as an important tool to help children rehearse and develop their ideas for writing (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). Often times, children will use a drawing to clarify or enhance what they wrote. For example, a student after drawing wrote: "I like to go on the tire swing. I also (also) like to play with my farins (friends)."

Andrzejczak et al. (2005) studied the effects of integrating visual art creation in the writing process. Andrzejczak et al. concluded that when visual art creation precedes writing, children's writing becomes richer in detail and more intricate. Andrzejczak et al.'s results suggest that by allowing students to create visual images as part of the pre-writing process, this aids them in producing higher quality writing with stronger descriptions and a more developed vocabulary.

My observations during Segment #1 supported the research conducted by Andrzejczak et al. For example, I planned Segment #1 knowing that most of my students would excel in their writing given the opportunity to draw first. During the lesson, I noticed a few students (who I already knew struggled with writing) drew for extended periods of time before beginning to write. I supported their

transition to writing by informally conferencing with each one. This increased their confidence to more rapidly translate their drawing into the written mode of expression.

As a result of allowing them to draw about their most favorite thing to do on the playground, students transitioned to their writing prompt with a clearer purpose. One of the objectives for this segment was for students to “enhance the narrative of a drawing by writing an opinion piece.” I was pleased to find many of my students expanded their writing to include details not depicted in their drawings.

While most Reggio Emilia preschoolers are not yet easily able to represent their observations and thoughts in writing, I capitalized on the 1<sup>st</sup> graders already developing competency in writing. I encouraged them to interweave the “symbolic languages” of drawing and writing in order to produce higher quality work.

**Segment #2.** During Segment #2, I initiated an investigation of our own school playground as the second step in the defamiliarization process. I talked with students about what it meant to observe something and then took them outside to complete an observational drawing of our own school playground. Observational drawings are commonplace in Reggio Emilia schools and are

usually drawn using black felt pens with varying size tips. These drawings help children acquire deeper understandings of specific sites in their environment such as fountains as documented in the Reggio project "An Amusement Park for Birds" (Forman et al., 1994).

The Common Core Mathematics Standard 1.G. includes reasoning with shapes; I addressed this concept by discussing different shapes and explaining that we would observe how playground structures are composed of these shapes. Students then used black ball point pens to draw their observations on white sketch paper.

It was interesting to see how students situated themselves around various parts of the school playground in order to complete their drawings. Some positioned themselves in the middle of a bridge, or just below the jungle gym, or near the top of the slide examining numerous parts of the playground firsthand. As Szekely (2015) expressed, "what a better place than a playground to study points of view, where climbing up tall structures or moving through tunnels and slides offers a variety of changing worldviews?" (41). Children observed, drew, and verbally described what they noticed about the structures and in doing so, they defamiliarized playgrounds. One student said: "The slide looks like a banana." Another student commented on how the flat platforms located throughout the playground looked like pizza with its holes resembling pepperonis. These

comments demonstrated that students truly were studying the playground by making interesting life connections.

Upon arriving back in the classroom, I addressed a Common Core writing standard, W.2, which states that students write an informative writing piece. Students wrote about what they noticed about their school's playground structures in terms of its shapes and other physical characteristics using their drawings for reference. For example, a student happened to draw our school's jungle gym and referred to the shapes that made up the structure, describing it in her writing: *"The gugle (jungle) gim (gym) had a circle and a skwar (square) olso (also) it had lines.* This example supports the use of visual art to enhance student writing (Andrzejczak et al., 2005). The student's comments demonstrated how they met my goal of describing the playground and analyzing its details.

My purpose for this task was to have students step back and evaluate their playground and appreciate its intricacies and details which normally go unnoticed. I knew that in order for students to build a model "dream" playground, they had to investigate their own playground and study its structures and understand how they are composed. A similar activity was performed by Reggio children who were directed to draw park fountains in order to gain an understanding of how they worked (Forman et al., 1994).

Many disciplines were interwoven *in* and *through* art during this segment. Using an art-integration strategy Marshall (2010) referred to as "depiction," students integrated art with science and social studies by rendering their playground from observation. The activity of observational drawing met the California Science Standard 4.A which states that students should portray features of a thing being described. The writing task met the Common Core informative writing standard and also the California History-Social Science Standard 1.2 which states students should describe the physical and/or human characteristics of places. This task of creating an artistic observational drawing authentically connects different disciplines such as science and math while addressing academic standards within these disciplines.

If I were to complete this informative writing task again in the future, I would further connect the symbolic languages of drawing and writing by having students record facts about what they noticed in the playground directly onto their drawings (Wien, 2008, 44).

**Segment #3.** During Segment #3, students engaged in research about playgrounds. This segment was influenced by the "Dinosaurs Project" (Rankin, 1998) and how Reggio children's interest in dinosaurs led them to seek out a wide selection of related books. The learning experiences in this segment

authentically addressed the Common Core Writing Standards W.1 writing opinion pieces and W.7 conducting shared research and writing activities.

It was during this segment that I proposed the task of building a model playground. I explained that when engineers build a model of something, they first engage in research and learn more about what they want to construct. My goal for this lesson was for students to expand their minds beyond generic familiar playgrounds and introduce them to more innovative designs. This aligns with the theories of Piaget in that for learning to occur children must connect new information to prior experiences.

Utilizing information I learned during EDRL 522: Assessment and Teaching in Reading and Language Arts regarding composing text sets for student use and classroom library organization, I gathered a selection of playground design photo books from the local public library for students to use in the research task. I had students thumb through different books and select and draw four playgrounds which they thought kids might enjoy. I noticed that students meticulously analyzed the playground photographs and carefully replicated the details in their drawings. These observations relate to Vecchi's (2010) discussions on children's great capacity for "projecting themselves into images" (119). I could tell students enjoyed looking at the different design books by the high-level of engagement and conversation with each other about the different playground designs. They

were beckoning others to look and comment; their contemplative expressions with heads buried in books was a delight to behold. While documenting the children's reactions to the playground design books, I reflected on EDRL 522 and the topic of classroom library organization. In future, I will maintain a set of art, design, and architecture books in my classroom.

On another occasion, students selected one of the four playgrounds that they already drew and wrote about why kids would enjoy it. As noted in Segment #2, again, student's communicative languages of drawing and writing connected seamlessly as they were able to refer back to their drawings to support their writing. Students also utilized the language of photography, often times referring back to the playground books for further analysis and to support their writing and drawing. I enjoyed observing this interesting triangulation between the languages of drawing, photography, and writing while students were purposefully conducting research. As I observed two students look at a structure they both wanted to draw, one child said to the other, "I can't draw that" and the other replied "Yes, you can, you just draw lines and then circles!" The comment was an indication of this student's capability in constructing knowledge using scientific observational skills and applying the mathematical concept of reasoning with shapes in order to articulate how their peer could breakdown an object into its basic shapes to simplify drawing. This segment was a rewarding experience

supporting Vecchi's theory explaining that when children make connections between different languages (or disciplines) true integrated learning takes place.

**Segment #4.** In Segment #4, I engaged students in a read-aloud of *My Dream Playground* by Kate Becker to help them imagine their own dream playground. I had them critique a photo of their own school playground and discuss what they would change or add to it. I then took their ideas and created a dream playground "wish-list" similar to how the children of Reggio Emilia wrote a wish-list to the manager of a supermarket explaining what changes they would like to make to the site (Katz, 1998, 31). I felt that by having students critique a photo of their own school playground, this facilitated a deeper analysis in the "defamiliarization" process. Students were at a point in the project where they were ready to proceed to the next step using the art-integration strategy of "projection" (Marshall, 2010) and illustrate visions of their own dream playground structures. Student's envisioned a dream playground with various items such long, twisty slides, a swimming pool, and bounce pads.

These segments addressed the Next Generation Science Standard K-2-ETS1-1 for Engineering Design (NGSS Lead States, 2013) that I studied in EDMS 475: Science in the Elementary School. This standard states that students define a simple problem that can be solved through the development of a new or

improved object or tool. Experiences in this segment which met this standard included students' critique of their own school playground and them envisioning how they would change it to create a "dream playground."

### **Reflection on Implementation: Representation Phase**

***Creating a Mini-atelier.*** During the Representation Phase where students built their model dream playground structures, I wanted to create a dedicated classroom space containing a wide variety of reclaimed and recycled materials. This concept was inspired by the large spaces known as *ateliers* or art studios in the preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia. Ateliers are aesthetically pleasing environments where different types of materials are plentiful and accessible to the children (Hertzog, 2001). According to Vecchi (2010) ateliers contribute to how children inherently learn in multidisciplinary and multisensory ways and function as a place where imagination, rigor, experiment, creativity and expression interweave to assist students in their ability to build bridges and relationships between different "languages." The ateliers of Reggio Emilia contain an abundance of recycled materials such as pipes, nets, and small metal and plastic parts to help children construct knowledge and make sense of their experiences (Kang, 2007).

My material collection process began by collecting many unused loose parts originally intended for home repair and construction projects. I was fortunate enough to gather an abundance of diverse materials such as tubing, pipe connectors, cardboard, wire, and miscellaneous metal and plastic parts. I then acquired additional materials such as wood scraps from local Sonoma County recycling centers and hardware stores free or at low-cost. I took advantage of local discount stores to purchase items such as cups, foam blocks, pipe cleaners, and straws. I used a reclaimed materials list from Reggio Emilia's recycling center known as REMIDA (cited in Eckhoff & Spearman, 2009) as a guide (see below).

Natural materials	leaves, small tree branches, pine cones, sea shells, small rocks, sand
Paper	cardboard, corrugated cardboard, Tetra Pak cardboard, wrapping paper, boxes, office pack, news print
Metal	copper, aluminum, aluminum foil, metal wire, florist wire, plates, chains, pipes, drawer knobs, mesh, miscellaneous hardware
Wood	planks, blocks, cork, plywood, wicker, balsa wood strips, popsicle sticks
Cordage	rope of various sizes, laces, jute, colored string
Leather	leather pieces, leather cords
Glass	mirrors, Plexiglas, containers, pendants, balls, polycarbonates (also in colors), bevels
Textiles	apparel, accessories, yarns, bobbins, color swatches, terry cloth
Haberdashery	costume jewelry, buttons, buckles, zippers, ribbon, elastic, lace
Materials with textured surface	soundproofing material, foam coverings, carpet samples, sand paper, upholstery
Plastic	tubes, boxes, bubble wrap, funnels, springs, transparent coils, lids, containers, circuit holders, press scraps, printed circuit boards, photographic film canisters, slide trays, bevels
Marble	cut for mosaics and in small slabs, stones, tiles
Rubber	stoppers, bands
Food containers	plastic, foamed polyurethane, glass, paper take-out
Bottles	plastic, glass
Films	silk-screen, photographic
Polystyrene	food packaging, packing peanuts
Miscellaneous materials	clay, modeling materials, colored sand

Table 1. Reclaimed and/or recycled materials included in art project (modified listing from Reggio Children, 2005).

Many of the materials supplied to the ateliers in Reggio Emilia originate from REMIDA, a recycling center located in the region—roughly 200 manufacturing companies donate discarded materials for use by local teachers and artists (Vecchi, 2010). During my search for materials I began to “rethink” everyday objects I normally would throw away such as paper towel rolls, tissue boxes and colorful plastic lids and caps as possible items to use in my project. After admiring Kang’s (2007) photos of how Reggio schools beautifully organize materials in clear containers, I organized and sorted my materials into several plastic containers and glass jars in preparation for student use.

The material collection process was an interesting venture as I allowed the materials to “speak” to me. The Reggio approach believes in allowing children (and adults) to “listen to materials” (Tarr, 2008, 22) and find a purpose within each material. For example, as I looked at materials such as a clothes dryer vent tube, I thought about how students might use it to create a playground tunnel or how they might use different sized cardboard panels to construct slides.

I took note of Staley’s (1998) suggestion to include parents when implementing the Reggio approach. I wrote a letter to parents explaining the project and invited them to donate materials.

Creating a mini-atelier was a worthwhile task that I will continue to duplicate throughout my career. Bevan et al. (2015) suggested that educators who wish to create “environments of making” (32) will have to transform classrooms and other settings to support the development of a maker community, such as dedicating space for projects to be left out and areas for specialized tools to be sectioned off. My mentor teacher gave me permission to transform the classroom’s large library area into a mini-atelier and I organized materials by category throughout all areas of the space. Using empty shoeboxes donated from parents, students used them as containers to “shop” for materials. Sharp objects such as adult-sized scissors and wire cutters were sectioned off in a nearby cabinet out of the sight and reach of children. I made use of available counter space to store student’s material boxes and in-progress structures each day. Labels with student’s names were attached to minimize confusion later.

After reflecting on the creation and implementation of the atelier, I would make some changes on future projects. I would be more explicit in explaining to students that they are only to gather enough materials that they think they need and to put back any materials they do not use. I would also spend more time modeling how to effectively apply glue (especially wood glue) to minimize mess. I would also like to set up a designated area in the classroom where students could retrieve glue and tape. During the creation process, I had limited rolls of

tape and glue for twenty students. Initially students relied on me when trying to find the glue and/or tape. I resolved this issue by placing a clear bin with the available tape and glue at the back classroom counter and told students that when they are not using these materials to remember to put them back. Also, motivated by the Reggio notion of “bringing the outdoors in” (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007) in future, I would also like to include natural materials such as multicolored rocks, twigs, and leaves in the mini-atelier.

I found that planning and constructing a mini-atelier is a key requirement when embedding art into the curriculum. Malaguzzi recommended widening the kinds of resources and materials available to children. He was certain that “the wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences” (Malaguzzi, 1998, 56).

***The Process of Construction.*** It became apparent while observing children construct their model playground structures that every child is truly *competent* and capable of achieving feats far beyond the adult’s frame of thinking. Carla Rinaldi (2012), former teacher and director of the municipal preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, stated that a child is born competent—even if they cannot speak, they can have a “hundred languages” to communicate. There was a diverse range of students in my class with varying levels of English proficiency,

accelerated learners, and some who required special services for autism, speech, and other learning disabilities.

During the construction process, all of my students demonstrated high-levels of critical thinking and creativity, building sophisticated structures and taking risks with unfamiliar materials. Students who usually struggled in English language arts or math instruction thrived during the Representation Phase of my project. These students developed competency by expressing themselves through the complex symbolic language of sculpture/construction. They used a wide assortment of open-ended materials including pipes, cardboard, foam, and tubes to communicate and make their imaginative ideas visible. They not only developed a newfound competency in using materials, but they also made connections between different disciplines such as mathematical measurement and engineering design. Students worked with varying sized and shaped materials to cut, tape, and glue in constructing their model playground structures. This speaks to the rigorous learning capabilities which students can achieve through art-embedded learning experiences regardless of ability level. All students developed an inspiring ability to focus and act purposefully, qualities I rarely observed prior to my project.

As I learned during the UCLA course, EDUC 125: The Role of Play in Early Childhood Education, children's play facilitated by open-ended materials helps

them develop competency of subject matter (Nell et al., 2013). Drew & Rankin (2004) claimed that the variety of forms and different kinds of materials transcend the boundaries of artistic and scientific creations. They also discussed how playing with open-ended materials can lead children to authentically engage in many subject matter experiences such as literacy by using descriptive language when talking or writing about their creations. Drew and Rankin also suggested that when children are given the opportunity to organize and deal with a range of materials, they develop competency in mathematical language, producing patterns, rhythms, building, combining shapes and creating new forms. This was confirmed by my frequent documentation of how students met part of the Common Core Mathematics Standard 1. MD. which states that students measure lengths indirectly. They were intently focused during the building of their structures, problem solving and figuring out ways to cut or combine two or more materials and create new forms.

During the Representation Phase, students who typically struggled during direct math and language arts instruction or required special services, sustained their engagement throughout the entire construction process and were even reluctant to leave the classroom when it came time for their daily "extra support" lessons. My English language learners thrived as they were able to freely practice and develop their speaking and listening skills (a key standard supported by the

Common Core English Language Arts Standards) by talking with peers and adults about their structures and the materials used. My accelerated learners were challenged beyond their current abilities and motivated to solve more complex design problems requiring a great deal of thought and analysis. One student who was one of the highest achieving students in all areas of the curriculum surprisingly struggled to develop and construct her idea for a tire swing. With additional support from peers and myself, she was able to successfully complete her structure, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural learning theory indicating that children of all levels of ability should have appropriate social scaffolds to learn and accomplish tasks.

Providing students with experiences in the symbolic languages of sculpture/construction and open-ended materials, enhances their abilities and confidence. Students created structures that surpassed my expectations. The way in which children made connections between the different disciplines through the symbolic language of construction confirmed Vecchi's theory that learning is activated *in and through* artistic processes.

Rinaldi (2012) expressed that we always talk about the weak child, the incompetent child, for which we need to fill full with knowledge like an empty vase. It took the experiences that occurred during the Representation Phase to substantiate the falsities that underlie this shallow educational belief. My beliefs

now strongly resonate with Rinaldi and her philosophical advocacy that even though every child is different and learns in their own way, *all* children are competent. It is even more powerful that I can now ground this belief, in embedding art into the curriculum, to evoke a greater sense of competency in children with diverse needs and also facilitate their ability to learn by making connections.

**Collaboration.** The idea of collaboration is emphasized in the Reggio schools (Kang, 2007). Throughout the Representation Phase, I learned that implementing project work of any kind requires a great deal of “reciprocity,” an overarching principle of the approach. According to Hewett (2001) the Reggio idea of reciprocity relates to the act of collaboration that must occur in project work – all teachers and students are partners in the learning process.

Reciprocity was demonstrated when myself and instructional aides managed small groups of students in painting the backdrop and base for the model playground as well as assisting students during the construction process. This highlights another one of Staley’s (1998) suggestions for implementation of the Reggio approach, which encourages teacher-partners. While I could have managed these tasks alone, I was able to more effectively support students by having additional adults in the room.

Another aspect of reciprocity that was addressed during the course of my project was my utilization of classroom meetings, an instructional strategy covered in EDEC 532: Social and Moral Development in Early Childhood Education. DeVries & Zan (2012) discussed that classroom meetings are group times focusing on how the classroom operates with regard to interpersonal relationships. They also state that common classroom meeting topics should include group decision-making. I actively involved my students in deciding how we should paint the plywood base and paper backdrop for our model playground. I asked them what we should include and wrote down their ideas on chart paper. After creating a list, I went through it and narrowed down the ideas that would work best. I then drew sketches of what the base and backdrop might look like incorporating those ideas. This experience highlights the importance of reciprocity in that neither I nor my students dominated the decision-making process; through discussion and lively debate, we established by joint participation a short-list of ideas to include on the base and backdrop.

I was impressed with how clearly they articulated their thoughts on how to paint the base and backdrop. For example, after noticing an idea written on the list to paint a rainbow on the base and backdrop, one student exclaimed to me and the whole-class: "Why do we need a rainbow on the base if we already have one on the backdrop?" Upon making this remark, many other students spoke up

in agreement. This experience supports Malaguzzi's (1993) theory of an "education based on relationships" in that we established a shared learning community, constructing knowledge within the context of child-child and child-teacher relationships.

Elements of "emergent curriculum" (Jones, 2012) also supported the theme of collaboration throughout my project. I implemented student's proposals to paint garden insects such as lady bugs, butterflies, and worms on the playground base; also to create "kids" from wooden clothespins that would be placed on various playground structures. I assumed the role of "foreman" during the project work, listening to the children's creative proposals and deciding whether or not they would contribute to the greater good of our project. Malaguzzi (1994) expressed that the child's thoughts should be taken seriously and respected; therefore, the act of listening to the child should serve as the focus of teaching. The act of listening to children's ideas strengthened the reciprocity between the children and myself resulting in an enriching learning experience for us all.

**Documentation.** During the execution of my project, I used the Reggio-inspired documentation process. In Reggio, teachers assume the role of researcher through the act of documentation (Hewett, 2001). Documentation occurs when teachers study children and collect student work samples at various

stages during a project in attempt to understand children's thinking and learning processes. Documentation may include photographs of children working, "artwork," videos, and transcribed audio recordings of their conversations as they engage in collaborative interactions with peers and adults (Seitz, 2008).

Documentation evidence is displayed through many formats, including class books, portfolios, bulletin boards, digital slide shows, and other creative products (Wien, 2011).

I initially planned to document student activity using photography, note taking, video and audio recording, but found all those mediums challenging while managing a class of twenty students. I experimented with various types of documentation, but relied heavily on taking photographs of student actions and listening closely to how they were processing the learning tasks, jotting down snippets of their comments. I kept in mind that "an effective piece of documentation tells the story and the purpose of an event, experience, or development" (Seitz, 2008, 88).

Initially, the documentation process was daunting as I was not sure exactly what to specifically document; however, as I learned in EDUC 571: Research Paradigms in Education, often times themes to research emerge once one begins to listen and observe. For example, during the Representation Phase, I was fascinated with students' competence in utilizing a wide variety of materials and

started to document how individuals and groups collaborated to solve problems during construction.

I used student writing samples as an authentic source of documentation as most 1<sup>st</sup> graders were capable writers. I also took notes regarding their interesting oral comments such as when a student described the slide as a banana during the Segment #2 observational drawing task. This documented comment helped me understand how students were engaging in the process of “defamilairzartion” of playgrounds, and looking at it from their unique perspective.

During the final stages of my project, I collected and analyzed all sources of documentation to create what Vecchi (2010) called “mini-stories” (134). I prepared documentation posters for each of my segments, consisting of photographs with related transcripts of children’s comments. Each of my posters displayed a synthesis of the learning that took place. Loris Malaguzzi believed that a title for documentation displays should be “a condensed thesis” (Wien, 2011). I created catchy titles for my posters such as “Imagination Meets Innovation” to capture the context of the construction phase of the project. As a final documentation project, I assembled a class photo book for parents to purchase showing the entire project evolution.

### **Reflection on Exhibition**

Following project completion, I organized an exhibition at my school, inviting families to view and reflect on their children's remarkable accomplishments. I prepared invitation cards which were sent home to parents informing them of the exhibit. The exhibit took place on Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and included the posters from each of my project's segments as well as student work samples. The large model playground along with a backdrop was proudly displayed near the entrance to the room. My documentation posters were arranged in project sequence and hung around the room providing parents with a rich "visual education" (Vecchi, 1998, p. 141). On the documentation posters, I also included the academic standards which were addressed during the project to show the school community, especially teacher colleagues and administrators, the academic rigor involved.

I was moved by how students guided their parents around the exhibit room, enthusiastically talking about their drawings, writings, and how their model playground structures worked. Parents were deeply engaged in their child's learning efforts. Vecchi (2010) expressed that a final exhibition is essential for communicating with the public and reminding the community to participate and be involved in education as it "cannot be just for teachers to reflect on" (165). The

exhibition further ignited my passion for the Reggio approach and art-embedded project work; it was the ultimate showcase of student's learning made visible.

The day after the exhibit, I had students engage in a reflective writing activity, asking them to describe what they enjoyed the most about the project. If it were not for time constraints, I would have engaged my students in more reflective activities such as asking them to write about how their structure worked. Also in future, I would spend more time teaching presentation skills to my students (which are supported by the Common Core English Language Arts Standards) in order to help them better articulate concepts of their work to peers and family members at the exhibit.

### **Conclusion**

This Reggio-inspired project, demonstrates that embedding art into the curriculum supports developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education as determined by the National Association for the Education on Young Children (NAEYC). During the course of the project, I furthered children's developmental progression by expanding their symbolic and representational capacities, using various modes and media to convey meaning (NAEYC, 2009). Students used "symbolic languages" (Vecchi, 2010) including drawing, painting,

sculpting/construction, and writing to represent their ideas and concepts about playgrounds.

One of the philosophical foundations and lifelong goals backed by the National Coalition for Core Art Standards (2014) is "The Arts as Communication" in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. In today's technology-driven multimedia society, the NCCAS acknowledges that the arts provide children a powerful and essential avenue to expressing, conveying, and informing life experiences. Viewing art as communication I feel is an exciting postmodern paradigm shift for arts-integration in early childhood education. It validates what the Reggio Emilia approach has been practicing for decades also it may convince early childhood educators to take a more serious approach to embedding art into the curriculum.

The postmodern way of viewing art supports my art-embedded curriculum model based on Marshall (2005) as it shifts the focus of art education away from its formal concerns and focuses on art and artmaking as a medium of communication and meaning-making that "crosses disciplinary boundaries to reveal conceptual connections, and locates art in context with other disciplines" (227). Students used the visual art processes such as drawing and sculpture/construction to naturally make connections to other disciplines while meeting content area standards in Common Core English Language Arts and Mathematics as well as Science Standards. Drawings of their own school

playground communicated their knowledge of scientific observational skills, mathematical reasoning with shapes, and social studies by describing places in the community. Another example are student's model playground structures and how their construction capabilities communicated concepts of mathematical measurement, engineering design, and provoked oral language skills as they built and articulated their creative plans to peers and adults.

My project validated the Reggio philosophical belief in the "competent child" (Rinaldi, 2012). The sophisticated work that students completed during the course of my project exceeded my expectations. Despite the range of diverse learners in my class, all students developed an increased confidence and thrived during the project. Providing students with the freedom to create with a wide range of visual art processes and open-ended materials demonstrated how every child is truly "able" to learn.

My project had a positive impact on my school principal, my mentor teacher, the parents of my students, and of course, the students. My school site is still a developing project-based learning school and my playground project was the first official one to be exhibited to the greater school community. The principal of my school remarked that "these types of projects are the ones that stick in kids' minds for the rest of their lives, more so than any day to day math worksheet." My mentor teacher's perception of project-based learning changed

from initially hesitant to 100% positive after watching the development, stating that she “thought kindergarten and first grade was supposed to only get students ready for project-based learning.” She initially did not think that project-based learning was possible with very young children. Parent comments about the project included: “I thought it was way cool!! I love the kids’ imaginations and ideas!” *and* “Not a lot of first grade classes get to do this.”

The students’ written reflections after the exhibit detailed what they enjoyed the most about the project. Common themes centered on how they liked showing their structures to their families and friends. Another was how they enjoyed building their structures and discussing what materials they used. One student touched on the theme of collaboration in explaining how her friends helped her construct a tire swing structure.

It was clear from their comments that implementing art-embedded projects with the guiding Reggio philosophy had an overall powerful, positive impact on the school community. I will continue to refine the development, implementation, and documentation of project work in the future. I hope to create at least one large-scale or two smaller-scale projects every year. I would also like to involve parents and the local community in building a robust mini-atelier. I will keep in mind that implementing Reggio-inspired project work involves “little money and a lot of fantasy” (New, 1990, p. 6).

This project served as a testament to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Students successfully demonstrated the skills of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). Rinaldi (2012) expressed that a big secret which makes children special is creativity. She believed that teachers cannot organize an "hour of creativity," it is an integrated dimension of children's thinking. This guiding vision is one that I will keep in mind throughout my career as an educator.

As a result of this project, I have several long-term goals that I wish to pursue. One of them is to eventually gain a Ph. D in Curriculum & Instruction; another is to visit Reggio Emilia, Italy. Ultimately I would like to establish my own school overseas, with learning based on an art-embedded curriculum approach.

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