



The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program



Planning for learning 2

Setting the scene

On Facebook, in the Forum and at Workshops, educators have asked to see examples of how other educators are approaching planning for and documenting children's learning.

E-Newsletters 8, 9 and 10 responded to these requests for information. This is the second one on 'planning for learning'.

We appreciate the generosity of educators offering examples for this e-Newsletter and recognise that formats and content are in a state of development and review, and need to be adapted to suit different circumstances.

The planning cycle

The *Educators' Guide to the EYLF* (pp.10–11) informs us that planning ideally occurs in a reflective cycle:

The framework supports a model of curriculum decision making as an ongoing cycle of information gathering, questioning, planning, acting and reflection.

Using the Early Years Planning Cycle, the Guide urges us to:

- reflect on our knowledge of each child and their strengths and interests
- question how we can use children's prior learning, together with the Learning Outcomes, to guide our planning
- plan the learning environment, resources, teaching strategies and ways to monitor and assess children's learning
- act by providing experiences, engaging in sustained interactions, model and promote children's learning dispositions.

Karen, at a preschool in NSW, explains the cycle as it works in her setting:

Figure 1: Example of planning cycle

What and how we document can change from week to week. Our general framework looks something like this:

Observations of children: Each staff member has a primary focus group of children whom they observe closely. The observations include jottings, individual detailed observations, individual/small group learning stories, samples of work, photos, etc.

Planning: One morning a week, staff come together, normally over breakfast, to discuss the previous week and to generate ideas for the next. This allows staff to reflect and evaluate, as well as exchange information and collaborate for future provision. This also is a time for primary carers to incorporate specific experiences they think a particular child needs. We jot these ideas down on a 'Future Provisions' planning sheet which has the headings 'Changes to the environment' and 'Intentional teaching'.

Daily program: Each day, two or three staff will write about an experience they were involved in with the children. Each staff member ensures they include the learning that occurred within the experience as well as a link to the EYLF. A written reflection/evaluation is documented in the book each afternoon by staff.

Reflection through learning stories: Educators might record a one-off experience, or some may have lasted over several weeks. These 'stories' are detailed and reflect on the learning that has been observed. They include 'Learning Opportunities' and 'Link to the EYLF'.

And the cycle starts again ...





Educators at this NSW setting then look under the subheadings of the EYLF Learning Outcomes to plan for an individual child's learning and development:

Figure 2: Example of planning cycle for individual children

Data—Nat has been attending LDC for one month and attends two days per week. She will settle with a dedicated caregiver once her mum has spent 15 minutes with her each morning. Mum is expressing her anxiety that her daughter needs to settle more quickly 'once uni starts'.

Current learning—Nat is learning to feel safe in her new environment. In her 3.5 years she has never been left with anyone else before and is being very brave. She is learning that she can rely on other adults, engage with and enjoy the experiences the centre offers, and she is learning that 'mum always comes back for her'. She has also begun to make connections with the routines of the day as she often says 'after afternoon tea mum comes back'. She always does.

Plan future learning—As Nat gains more confidence in her new setting she will begin to make friendships, something her mum is sure will help her feel a sense of belonging.

Act—Continue to have daily conversations with mum about Nat's day and share stories, photos and artwork to connect mum, Nat and the centre.

Engage Nat in small group experiences with other children; sit her with children at meal times where you notice friendships beginning.

Engage Nat in conversations to recall things she has particularly enjoyed 'you can tell mum about that', 'maybe you can play with Mary when you come next'.

Connections with EYLF

- A sense of Belonging
- Principles—Partnerships with families, Secure respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Practices—Responsiveness to children and Intentional teaching

Learning Outcomes

Towards Outcome 1:

- Children feel safe, secure and supported.
- Children learn to interact in relation to others.

Then you go back to data collecting again.

Planning for individual children

Judy, in NSW, suggests some core elements based on long experience of what works for young children and the Principles and Practices of the EYLF:

- Relationships, including reliable and familiar educator/child connections.
- Sustained conversations in which the educator is authentically 'with the child' in the moment.
- Learning environments inside and outdoors, where some things remain the same, so children feel safe, and other things change, so children feel challenged.
- A choice of open-ended manipulative and construction materials.
- Opportunities for role-play and expression, representation and communication through varied art forms and media.
- Sensory experiences with sand and water and opportunities to be physical in space.

'Planning' therefore includes thinking about relationships, routines and resources, as well as experiences which promote learning.



Planning with children

At Corowa Preschool in the Albury District of NSW, educators have developed a format for planning future experiences with children.

Shelly explains how it operates:

I go into the planning session having selected photos and comments that have the potential for follow-up in the learning program. My possible plan is displayed on the Smartboard and discussed with the children. A colleague records children's ideas and they're added to the planning sheet. Parents, as well as children and educators, can see where the program has come from and where it is going. Everyone is motivated and learning is relevant!

My comments are in black; the children's in blue.



Figure 3: Planning with the children

Planning with the children

Date: Wednesday 4th May

Is there anything from the last program plan that we didn't do? Do you still want to do it?

- Weddings from around the world
- Zumba on Fridays
- Write to Lydia's cousin in England

Reflecting on what we have done ... Where now?



Following our interest in the moon and space, we set up some space play. Do you want to continue with this? Change/add anything?

Connor: Add a space rocket

Mick: We need it to be dark

Connor: We need walls and a roof so it's dark.

Perhaps we could take the space place indoors and set up a dark area. They'd love torches!



We raked the leaves and tried to dig up the tanbark. What other jobs need doing in our yard? E.g. Possums still eating our vegies.

Shelley: We need to finish the tanbark.

Liam: We need a robot to dig the tanbark if it's too hard.

Shelley: Yes, we might need a machine. We could ring Ava's dad. He has a rotary hoe.

Mick: I could help look up the numbers to ring him up.

Connor: You can find numbers on the computer.



Brielle: 'That tree's bald?' A discussion on Autumn leaves followed (with Cassie.) We could find out more about Autumn.

Liam: She means the tree doesn't have any leaves on it.

Books, discussions and Autumn leaves in our artwork will help develop our understanding.



We really enjoyed the blubber, but it wouldn't come out of the containers. Perhaps we could try sand moulds? Other ideas?

Felicity and Tahlia trialled the sand moulds through the session today. They both thought the moulds worked better.

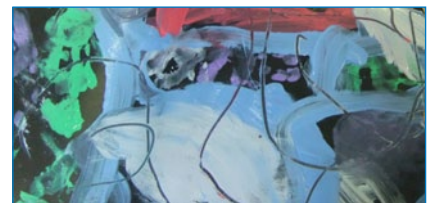


Brodie made a picture using the Autumn leaf. Is this something you would like to do? What else can we do with Autumn leaves? Spencer and Angus drew the leaves and the veins. Perhaps roller painting over leaves would show the veins more.

Connor: Collect some leaves in boxes. We could paint them.

Mick: You need leaves so you can stick them on paper.

Remy: You can make collage!



Connor discovered that you can make an etching in your painting. Connor might tell us how he did this. We could do foil etching or black card etching.

Connor: I used a texta to draw over the paint. The black was from the cardboard.

Liam: That's a good idea.

Connor thought we should do black card etching.

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Figure 3: Planning with the children (Continued from previous page)

Other ideas from children:

Tunnel ball—Olivia learned this at 'Net, Set, Go!'



Lots of children all replied 'Yes!'

Remy: And netball. I know about netball.

Adelaide: And poison ball.

Mick: If we play tennis we need to make a big yard (maybe totem tennis would work).

Connor: Golf.

Kyron: And footy (perhaps these last two things can happen in RSL Park).

Mick: Yeh.. You need a big footy oval and stuff to play with.

Lydia and some friends used tissues with the tongs in the home corner 'cause we don't have any playdough! Do you want playdough?

Remy: Purple

Brielle and Tahlia: Pink

Josh modelled the sad soldier that he saw at the war memorial. We also saw a memorial plaque in the park for a soldier that died in WW2. What can we do to learn more about this? (Google war memorial on computer in Mary's office?)



Josh: He was sad because the other people killed his friends.

Adelaide: We could look it up on the smartboard.

What else? E.g. Focus areas, Parent/Guardian ideas

Our parents told us that Tyler, Felicity, Brielle, Olivia & Corey went camping.

We've started with our tent to follow up on this.

We'll do more next week. Any ideas?

Tyler went fishing when he camped. Tahlia also went fishing.

Connor: We could go fishing, but we need water. We could pretend.

Rhylee: We've got that red boat (in the shed).

Jade: We need a fishing net.

Emma C: We could tell spooky stories!

Kyron: We could have a fire, but it might spread all over the yard. We'll need a drum.

Abbie: We'll need some sticks and marshmallows for dessert.

We have also learned that Emma M saw Rio at the movies.

Tahlia, Lydia, Olivia and Eve saw Hop.

Can we create any movie characters with collage materials?

Adelaide went to Sydney to the Easter show.

Mick went to the Dubbo Zoo.

Would you like to use animals with the blocks to show us what you saw?

Keeping outcomes in mind

The EYLF (p. 46) defines a Learning Outcome as:

A skill, knowledge or disposition that educators actively promote in early childhood settings in collaboration with children and families.

This means that educators have the responsibility to provide environments, materials and intentional interactions that develop, enhance and extend children's learning in the five key areas regarded as the foundations for young children's current and future learning.

'Planning' therefore, is a mix of what educators notice children are ready to learn and what children are personally interested in pursuing.

At St Stephens Children's Centre, Bellevue Hills NSW, for example, educators work hard to keep in touch with what's happening in children's lives outside the early learning setting. There is a policy of 'freeing up' educators so they can chat with families as they bring and collect children.

Barry knows that Nikki's dad is sailing to Australia from Fiji. So, he puts up a map of the world and talks about how far the sailor has to go, how long it will take and which parts of the world he might see. Other children come up to the map and start pointing to where their family came from and where they have relatives. Barry thinks 'This is great. It fits with our desire to build a strong sense of community and to help children understand their world.'

Barry sets out to plan future experiences around the 'social' and 'geographic' aspects of Outcome 2: *Children are connected with and contribute to their world:*

- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups.
- Children respond to diversity with respect.



The National Quality Standard Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12) requires educators to encompass both of these dimensions—the educator’s responsibility for Learning Outcomes and the motivational power of children’s interests—when planning quality learning programs:

- **1.11:** *The Early Years Learning Framework* (or other approved learning framework) guides curriculum decision making and enables each child’s learning in the five outcomes.
- **1.2.1:** Each child’s current knowledge, ideas, culture and interests provides the foundation for the program.
- **1.2.2:** Each child is supported to participate in the program.

These two perspectives are evident in the example below:

Context

Possums Preschool has a longstanding interest in sustainability. Following the discussion on recycling (e-Newsletter 8), educators decided to introduce a worm farm.

Learning focus

The focus for educators is Learning Outcome 2 and its key component:

Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.

When examining the worm farm, children asked questions such as:

- > Do worms like sunlight?
- > Where do they go when it rains?
- > How big do worms grow?
- > Where do the food scraps go?

Learning goals

Educators believe they can achieve *their* goals for children to learn how to investigate systematically (infer, predict, hypothesise and check) and to develop increased understanding of the interdependence between land, people, plants and animals through exploring the *questions children posed* and some that educators suggest.



In summary—planning with intentions

I guess what we’re trying to say is that all planning does not and cannot come from the children; educators have long-term goals, short-term aims and on-the-spot intentions for the group and for each child. They build on children’s prior learning and their current interests and provoke new ideas and projects that will challenge and extend children’s existing understandings about the world.

As early childhood educator Anne Kennedy says:

Some things worth knowing may never ‘emerge’ from children’s expressed or unexpressed interests. International findings (e.g. EPPE) (Sylva et al., 2004) reinforce the need for a balance between child-led and adult-initiated learning.

Informed adults want children to learn about important ideas such as equity, sustainability and fairness for example; or key concepts in numeracy, literacy or science. You might learn these things through ‘discovery’, but you might not; and it would take a long time!

In ‘socio-cultural approaches’, the educator does not ‘stand back’, but acts as an ‘expert learner’; initiating, collaborating and responding according to what’s happening in children’s learning.

One of an educator’s key roles is ‘noticing’—noticing what each child can do, what they are nearly able to do and areas where they may struggle, so that help is provided in a sensitive and timely manner. Having ‘noticed’, educators need to ‘recognise’ the learning that is taking place and ‘respond’ on the basis of their professional knowledge and experience.

Educators’ documentation then, ideally, is a combination of ‘reflections’ on what has happened and ‘thinking ahead’ to how best to encourage and enrich future learning possibilities.

‘Planning’ and ‘assessment’ are obviously closely connected, but they are not the same act. We have to analyse and interpret our documentation in order to assess what learning is occurring and then to *plan* how to support further learning.

Future e-Newsletters will focus on assessing for learning and include examples of educators’ reflections on what they ‘notice’ and how they document, analyse and assess the learning of individual children. Future e-Newsletters will also try to capture the learning of children under three and how educators working with mixed age groups deal with assessment.

Jenni Connor

Early Childhood Consultant and EYLF PLP Writer

Acknowledgements

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