National Quality Standard
Professional Learning Program

Planning the program

This e-Newsletter is about planning for children's learning. It follows directly from *e-Newsletter No. 55*, which focused on noticing and recording children's learning. Before educators can plan effectively, they need to know the children well.

What the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) says

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) uses the term 'curriculum' to cover 'all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (p. 9). The *Framework for School Age Care* uses the same definition to describe the program (p. 6).

The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* uses both 'curriculum' and 'program'. Element 1.1.1 asks educators to focus on progressing each child's learning and development towards the five Learning Outcomes when planning the curriculum. Element 1.1.2 states that 'Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.'

Focus for planning

Planning the program is more than completing documentation that is displayed on a wall (or in a journal) outlining what will happen this week/fortnight. It is also about the process you go through to think about, decide and prepare for every aspect of children's experiences in the service.

Since the introduction of the Frameworks, educators have moved away from planning approaches where they planned far in advance, often using formats or templates that involved filling in boxes. In contrast to that approach, some educators, inspired by the emergent curriculum approach, decided that there was no need for planning, and that they could begin with a blank piece of paper and simply follow children's interests. That thinking represents a misunderstanding of the emergent curriculum approach:

'We are the stage directors; curriculum is the teacher's responsibility, not children's. People who hear the words "emergent curriculum" may wrongly assume that everything simply emerges from the children. The children's ideas are an important source of curriculum but only one of many possible sources that reflect the complex ecology of their lives.' (Jones, Evans and Stritzel, p. 5)

According to the *Guide to the National Quality Standard*, 'Planning involves observing, gathering and interpreting information about children to inform the preparation of environments and experiences that engage them and are meaningful for them. It also involves reflecting on and documenting children's experiences and learning' (p. 22).

Quality Area 1 reminds educators very specifically that a learning framework needs to guide all aspects of pedagogical decision-making and everyday work. That means thinking about belonging, being and becoming, the Principles, the Practices and the Learning Outcomes in the EYLF.
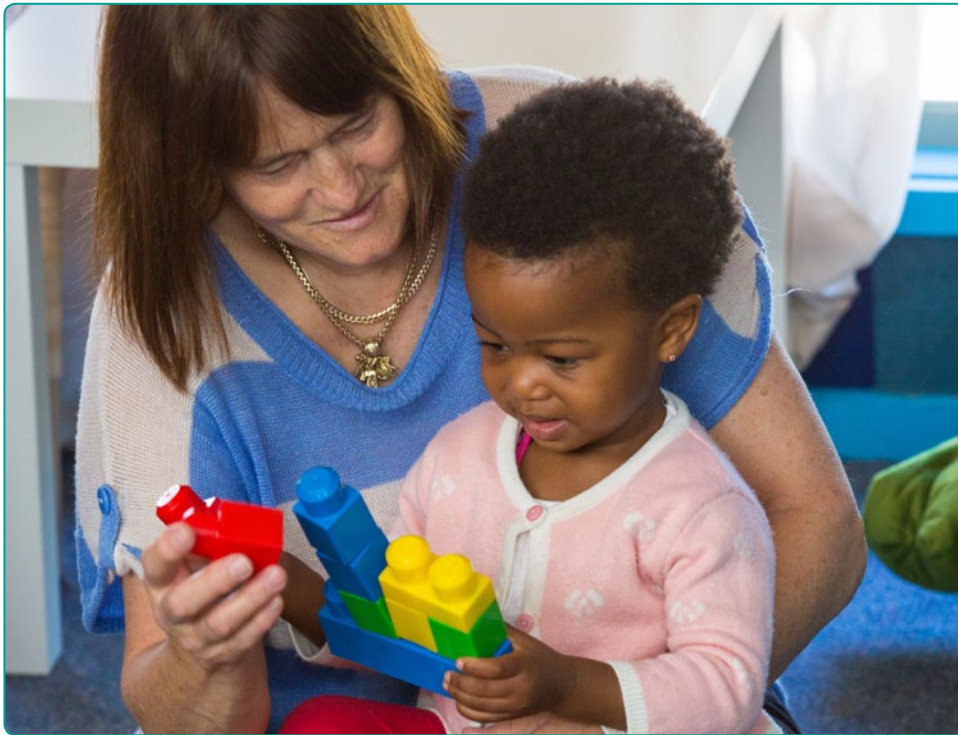
The five Learning Outcomes describe educators' aims for all children. They are long-term goals that each child will move toward at their own pace. Educators use the Outcomes to *plan* for children's learning and development as well as to *track children's progress*.

Plans need to include child-led and initiated learning as well as educator-supported and initiated learning opportunities. The quotes that follow support this balance:

> *'Planning therefore, is a mix of what educators notice children are ready to learn and what children are personally interested in pursuing.'* (Kennedy and Barblett, p. 5)

> *'Some things worth knowing may never "emerge" from children's expressed or unexpressed interests.'* (Kennedy, quoted in *EYLF PLP e-Newsletter No. 14*, 2011, p. 5)

> *'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.'* (Connor, *NQS PLP e-Newsletter No. 14*, 2011, p. 5)

What educators plan for

In addition to experiences that help children progress toward the broad goal or learning intent, educators plan for:

- indoor and outdoor environments so that, for example:

    - materials are displayed in inviting and accessible ways for children to choose and extend their interests

    - there are adequate resources and play spaces for the number of children

    - children's and families' cultures are acknowledged

    - there is a balance between active and quiet experiences

    - specific resources to follow up individual children's interests are available.

- experiences that build on children's interests

- individual children's learning and development

- all aspects of the day (arrivals, settling, eating, resting, toileting, transitions, groups).

Deciding on goals

In the past, many educators used broad goals, often linked to developmental domains, as a focus for planning. Now, many educators choose one or two group goals or learning intentions, based on an EYLF Learning Outcome, as a broad focus for their planning. These goals take account of the context of children's lives and of the community.

Reviewing the detail of the statements about the Learning Outcomes in the EYLF can help educators identify areas of learning where children need support. For example, when several children have recently commenced at the service or moved to a different room, the learning intention or goal might be 'for children to feel safe, secure and supported' (Learning Outcome 1.2). Educators would then plan ways to support children to feel a sense of belonging.

Examples of approaches to planning the program

Jenny Allen is the Educational Leader at Central Carlton Children's Centre. Jenny's long-term goal in 2013 is 'for children to become independent thinkers and learners and for adults and children to share their thinking and learning, building a community of lifelong learners.' She uses the EYLF to identify key learning areas to achieve this goal: wellbeing, learning, identity, sustainability and environmental studies, the arts, science and technology, mathematics and literacy. Jenny decides on objectives or intentions for each learning area and links them to the relevant Learning Outcome. For example:

IDENTITY

For children to develop a sense of autonomy and a sense of agency and begin to work cooperatively with others.

MATHEMATICS

For children to begin to understand key numeracy concepts— for example recognise numerals and count the number of objects to match the numeral (one-to-one correspondence), spatial concepts, sorting and categorising, patterns.

She writes these objectives/intentions on a whiteboard and plans experiences based on them. She records child-initiated and led learning as it occurs. Photographs of the board are a permanent record of the planning.

Jenny said, 'The whiteboard makes the teaching and the learning more visible for families and we have found that they are more willing to write comments directly onto the board. We wonder if it has something to do with the fact that a comment on a whiteboard doesn't seem as permanent as writing on a paper document.'

Recording their intentions and using the whiteboard have evolved over the last six months, as the team continually reflects on their approaches to planning and documenting the curriculum.

Alison Bradshaw is the Director at North Fitzroy Childcare Co-operative. She has been leading educators in reflecting on how they plan. Alison believes that the beliefs, values and principles in the philosophy guide every aspect of decision-making. In reviewing their philosophy statement, they are discussing beliefs about how children learn and how different theorists have impacted on their thinking and practice. This review is likely to lead to changes in the way they plan and document children's learning.

The team chooses a group goal based on a Learning Outcome as the broad focus for their planning. Through group reflections, educators decide whether they will continue with that goal or choose another one. Educators plan ways to support children's progress in relation to the broad goal. They also incorporate supporting individual children's interests, learning and development and group interests.

Sometimes planning is based on an educator's interests or input from families. For example an educator had a strong connection to ANZAC Day and wanted to introduce it to children, linking it to *identity* and connecting to *community*. She invited families to contribute photographs or memorabilia to share with the children. This resulted in a display of medals, photos and uniforms that inspired great interest and discussions. This focus has extended to a general focus on grandparents and great-grandparents.

They document the program through notes about children's learning, a web to record children's evolving interests and general reflections and ideas for planning. They display this information for everyone to see.

Jo Nunn is an early childhood teacher at the University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre.

She believes that the environment is a crucial starting point for planning as 'the environment is our biography—the events and surroundings shape who we are'. She uses reflective practice to design both the playroom and the outdoor spaces to encourage partnerships for collaborative learning among children, educators and the community.

They decide on objectives or intents within each Learning Outcome area and include specific experiences in mathematics, literacy, sustainability, 'the art culture' and families. They analyse documentation about each child's interests and learning in relation to the Learning Outcomes and plan to support further progress.

They ask questions to guide the planning, for example:

- What are our intentions?

- How will we incorporate intentional teaching for both individual children and group learning?

- How will we assess each learning intention/objective?

- What do we want the children to know about, understand and be able to do through their ongoing learning?

They have identified the following principles as the 'tools' needed to make the program happen:

- the documentation and learning provocations arising from children and educators collaborating

- the learning and teaching strategies for each experience

- the resources and assessment documentation they will use.

They also place great importance on discussing the context for learning experiences with children so that they can be co-constructors of their learning. They reflect with the children and each other on the implications for further learning. Jo said, *'It is through the collaboration and the partnership … that we can … design our curriculum and programs to respond to the richness of the lives of children and families'.*

Summing up

Questions in *e-Newsletter No. 16* (Connor, 2011) to promote reflection about planning are worth revisiting:

- To what extent do your planning processes ensure that you incorporate the Vision, Principles and Practices of the EYLF?

- In what ways can families contribute to your planning and programs?

- How is their input visible in written plans and in what happens?

- How are children's ideas and points of view heard, respected and reflected in what happens?

- In planning the program, do you use a holistic approach to children's learning? (Does it nurture children's physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning?)

- Is the program responsive to what is happening in children's lives and expanding and building on their learning outside the setting?

- Does your planning encompass 'all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events … designed to foster children's learning and development'? (EYLF p. 45). For example, does it enable planned, intentional and spontaneous teaching?

- Does the written plan show how educators will differentiate the program or experiences for individuals or groups of children (adaptations, extensions, additional resources, support from other professionals)?

Two additional important questions to consider are:

- Is there planning to support children's progress in the areas described in the Learning Outcomes?

- How is *planning* evident on your program/curriculum that is displayed for families? In other words, are your *intentions* evident or is your documentation just describing what happened?

Heather Barnes
Early Childhood Education and Care Consultant and Trainer

Biography

Heather Barnes is based in Victoria and works as a consultant and trainer. She travels all over the country delivering professional development training sessions to educators. She is a passionate advocate for the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the stronger focus on quality improvement that is a key aspect of the *National Quality Standard*.

Coordinating Editor

Anne Stonehouse

Biography

Anne Stonehouse lives in Melbourne and is a consultant in early childhood. She was a member of the consortium that developed the national *Early Years Learning Framework*.

References

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2011b). *Guide to the National Quality Standard*. Sydney, NSW: ACECQA.

Connor, J. (2011). *EYLF PLP e-Newsletter No. 14. Planning for Learning 2*. Canberra, ACT: ECA.

Connor, J. (2011). *EYLF PLP e-Newsletter No. 16. Reviewing Practice*. Canberra, ACT: ECA.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2011). *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.

Hydon, C. (2013). *NQS PLP e-Newsletter No. 55. Noticing and Recording Learning*. Canberra, ACT: ECA.

Jones, E., Evans, K., & Stritzel, K. (2001). *The Lively Kindergarten: Emergent Curriculum in Action*. Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Kennedy, A., & Barblett, L. (2010). *Learning and Teaching Through Play. Research in Practice Series*, Canberra, ACT: ECA.