

WHY PLAN?

The question in the title is not uncommon. As one educator said, 'We don't plan. We just put out a few things and see what the children are interested in. The last thing they need is regimentation.'

In services with school-age children, doubts about the need to plan often come from a view that older children need nothing more than a place to relax and spend time with their friends, especially in care that happens before and after a structured and demanding school day. All that is necessary is a comfortable space, some things to do – books, some sports equipment, craft materials, board games – something to eat and drink, and adults who supervise. While it is definitely true that children's services for school-age children need to provide a relaxing social experience for children, not planning is settling for mediocrity.

Sometimes the objection to planning comes from concerns about its outcome. Many people think that planning results in inflexibility and lack of choice – making children participate in particular experiences at a certain time. This view is that planning interferes with responding to children's moods, energy levels and interests. This is a very limited view of planning.

Planning that has those results is not desirable. Sensible planning achieves quite the opposite. It increases choices, supports flexibility and responsiveness and generally ensures a better experience. Planning is simply thinking about what you want to happen and why and making preparations, just as you would for a holiday or dinner party. Another idea about planning is that it addresses only special experiences or particular times. It is important that educators are clear that what they are planning for is comprehensive and broad, that it includes attention to much more than a few special experiences.

Planning needs to incorporate attention to at least the following:

- ▶ Children's relationships, communication and interactions with educators and with each other, ensuring adequate supervision
- ▶ The indoor and outdoor environments, materials, equipment and experiences that are available all of the time
- ▶ Special materials, equipment and experiences
- ▶ Special events, such as excursions, projects, visitors to the service
- ▶ Daily routines (arriving, leaving, setting up, packing away, toileting, eating, transitions from one part of the session to another, or one space to another)
- ▶ Links with families, the school/kindergarten and the broader community

- ▶ Organisation of time
- ▶ Ways of empowering children to take responsibility and leadership roles in various ways

In other words, the focus of planning should be the whole service – the entire experience for children.

Outcomes for children's wellbeing and learning

The national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the Framework for School Age Care (FSAC) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) provide a foundation for educators in Victorian children's services scaffolding children's learning and development. These are companion documents that complement each other. They examine the relationship between the **principles** that underpin **practices** and the focus on **outcomes** for children's wellbeing and learning.

The five outcomes in these frameworks are designed to capture the integrated and complex wellbeing, development and learning of all children (FSAC, 2009, p. 18). The outcomes are broad and observable, and the role of the educator in curriculum decision-making can have vast effects on children's learning and development in relation to the outcomes. For example:

- ▶ When educators encourage children to collaborate with peers and educators to plan programs, children develop their autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency, which engages children in having a strong sense of identity. (Outcome 1)
- ▶ When educators plan experiences and provide resources that broaden children's perspectives and encourage appreciation of diversity, children respond to diversity with respect, which engages children in connecting with and contributing to their world. (Outcome 2)
- ▶ When educators collaborate with children to plan and document their achievements and share their successes with their families, children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing, which engages children in having a strong sense of wellbeing. (Outcome 3)
- ▶ When educators plan environments with appropriate levels of challenge where children are encouraged to explore, experiment and take appropriate risk, children use a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating, which engages children in becoming confident and involved learners. (Outcome 4)
- ▶ When educators allow children to direct their own play experiences with their peers, children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes, which

Benefits of planning

Thoughtful planning:

- ▶ Ensures that daily practice is compatible with the service philosophy, goals and policies
- ▶ Involves preparation, resulting in having what you need on hand and being organised
- ▶ Prepares staff for different possibilities – different weather conditions, different ‘group moods’ and energy levels
- ▶ Ensures that children have choices
- ▶ Helps educators focus on individual children, leading to greater responsiveness to each child, rather than the group
- ▶ Allows connections with children’s cultures, communities and families and incorporating something of their lives outside the service in the program
- ▶ Leads to balance in the experiences and opportunities offered – a balance of familiar and new, challenging and easy, active and quiet, individual and social, those needing close supervision and those who don’t – and ensures that all areas of wellbeing and development are catered for
- ▶ Makes it more likely that there are links between what happens on a daily basis and children’s interests and abilities
- ▶ Encourages educators to think not only about responding to signs of interest from children but also about broadening their horizons, initiating and introducing them to new experiences and opportunities
- ▶ Guides educators in relation to their roles and responsibilities
- ▶ Allows incorporation of ideas and suggestions from children and families

This last point is an important one. Having a planning process enables educators to engage children in the program in thinking about their experience and making constructive suggestions about improvements.

Encouraging children to share their ideas, discussing them, and taking them seriously is a powerful way of showing respect to children and working in partnership with them. Operating without a plan or with a very limited plan is not likely to support authentic collaboration with children.

Services must plan in order to be accountable to their funding and managing organisations. One of the most important arguments for planning follows from the accountability requirement. Planning and preparation are a necessary demonstration that what is happening in a children’s service is intentional and purposeful.

If children’s services are professional services and are viewed as such by the community, then educators need to demonstrate that they not only have thought about what they are offering children, but just as importantly, why they are offering it. It isn’t sufficient for educators to just say ‘we do it because the children like it’.

The planning process is as important as the plan that results. Involving all staff as well as the children in the service and finding ways to demonstrate valuing of everyone’s contribution is a great way to engender feelings of ownership and belonging.

And remember, a plan is only a best guess of what will work. Most good plans are a foundation for making decisions and alterations as you go. Good plans are plans for alternatives and contingencies. Keep in mind as you engage in planning that the most important reason to plan carefully is that it helps to ensure that children have a good experience in a children’s service.

Further Reading

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

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2012, *Educators’ Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2009, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework for all Children from Birth to Eight Years*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

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

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2010, *Educator’s Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT.

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (No. 69, 2010).

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (No. 653, 2011).

Contact

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