

## 6: The Planning Cycle

A school-age program encompasses far more than just a list of planned experiences. So when planning, educators need to consider such things as the environment, the routines, the everyday resources, and even the skills and knowledge of the educators who work with the children.

As children explore relationships, resources and experiences in a thoughtfully planned environment, educators move through an ongoing cycle underpinned by reflective practice. It operates as a continuous 'cycle of inquiry' which includes stopping to think about how and why we're doing things the way we are, examining our answers to these questions from different perspectives, and using the deeper understandings we develop as a reference point for deciding what actions or changes we want to make. This current method of ongoing and cyclic planning is demonstrated in the figure below.

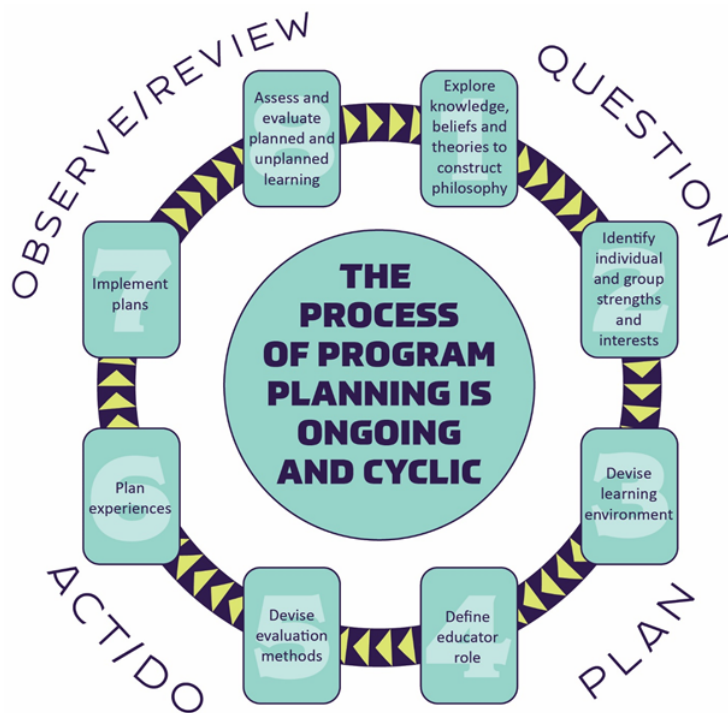


Figure 16.17: The Process of Program Planning in

Ongoing and Cyclic.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Deconstructing the Cycle

#### Question

##### Step 1 - Knowledge and beliefs

At the core of the program, planning is investigating our knowledge and beliefs and the practices that are linked to these. Educators constantly update their knowledge and associated practices by immersing themselves in contemporary research and theory. As everyone has different values and beliefs, educators in school-age care settings must regularly come together to share their knowledge and beliefs to develop their philosophy or enable a team approach. This philosophy or team approach should be based on theory and research, not just personal beliefs.

##### Step 2 - Strengths and Interests

Educators, like the children they care for, are diverse in their education, backgrounds and talents. This diversity means that educators can be responsive to a wide range of children's needs and interests. Different educators will bring different things to the program and there is no one prescribed role. This also models an important concept in school-age care services— that of inclusion: it is a place where everyone belongs.



Figure 16.18: What might be these boys' interests and strengths?[2]

When educators plan by combining children's strengths and interests with their knowledge and beliefs they can formulate both short term and long term goals for the service.

## Plan

### Step 3 - Plan the Environments

Educators should spend time planning their indoor and outdoor environments to achieve the outcomes of their vision, which is aligned with their philosophy and beliefs. School-age care settings should provide choice and flexibility and a range of engaging experiences, which will meet the needs of a range of different children in different age ranges. There should be opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and play. The environment should allow children to feel a sense of belonging, coupled with a sense of autonomy.

### Step 4 - Define the Role of the Educator

Effective educators have a clear vision of their role when working with children. Educators in this context can be defined as practitioners whose primary function in school-age care settings is to plan and implement programs that support children's well-being, development and learning.

In their day-to-day duties, the educator has to undertake many varied roles, and the qualities and skills necessary for these roles, do not always come naturally with all individuals' personalities. Some educators may need some training or development to acquire some of these strengths. Training and practice can help educators develop these qualities just as skilled educators can help children develop these qualities. To be able to develop these qualities, however, educators need guided self-reflection and the support of an educational leader or mentor.

Table 16.6: Roles of Educators in School-Age Programs

Role	Description
Facilitator	Providing the right amount of stimulus to scaffold children's learning is a skill. Educators must, at times, also facilitate professional learning at meetings and engage with families to organize their involvement
Communicator	School-age care is a social setting. Effective communication is critical with a range of stakeholders, including children, families, other educators, schools and communities.
Coach	Educators assist children to develop a range of skills and provide opportunities for children to practice and perfect these. Educators are both intentional about this role, but also recognize and use teachable moments.
Mediator	School-age care settings are play-based with many choices, which invariably leads to disputes and differences.
Director	Although educators are primarily facilitators, there are times when clear direction is more appropriate. This includes situations that involve safety issues and other situations where there may be non-negotiable issues (such as bullying).

Role	Description
Model	An educator is always modelling. Children notice everything: learning is their job and they learn from everything you do and everything you don't do, everything you say and everything you don't say. Educators model skills from conflict resolution to hand washing and sun safety measures.
Planner	Educators must plan programs, budgets, professional development and communication systems.
Nurturer/Supporter	Educators celebrate or acknowledge each child's participation, efforts, gifts and talents, affirm children's sense of belonging, and provide physical and emotional support.
Advocate	Educators support children's right to play and advocate for appropriate space, facilities and resources
Observer	Educators combine what is seen and heard with what they know about the children. They observe the program, as a whole, identifying what is working and what needs improvement or adaptation.

#### Step 5 - Devise or Be Aware of Evaluation Methods

Knowing what evaluation methods you are going to use up front enables educators to have clear direction on what they are doing and why. Programs may have tools or processes that are required or you can use the five outcomes outlined in this chapter.

Evaluation is important because it enables educators to collaborate with children and examine the program with the outcomes in mind. This allows us to go deeper to discover how the programs are contributing to children's well-being, learning and development.

#### Step 6 - Plan Experiences

When planning experiences for children in school-age care settings, it is important to consider the outcomes (those listed in this chapter and/or those in the program's mission and philosophy). You must start with considering what your end goal is. There does not need to be a set curriculum to follow (although some programs may have this). But it is important that what is planned is responsive and allows for flexibility and creativity.

Settings may use a variety of approaches or theories (such as Multiple Intelligences, Emergent Curriculum, Reggio Emilia, or theme-based planning) to plan their experiences. What is important, however, is that educators recognize that best practice program planning is underpinned by the components of contemporary theory and research, educator skills and knowledge, collaboration with children and partnerships with family and culture.

At all times, the child must be central to program planning, so devising experiences around children's needs and their interests is a good starting place. One of the best ways to ensure curriculum is developmentally appropriate is to use an emergent approach. 'In an emergent approach the sources of curriculum are:

- children's interests such as discovering birds making a nest
- educators' interests such as artworks
- developmental tasks—emergent curriculum is responsive to children's development and learning
- things in the physical environment, including manufactured and natural resources
- people in the social environment, including staff, families and community members
- curriculum resource materials that can be adapted'

Children need stimulation and scaffolding in their learning and interests and this is where effective educators can work closely with children to notice their emerging interests and further this interest through responsive planning. Noticing the cultures and issues in the community are also stimuli for planning experiences.

#### Planning with a Holistic Approach

School-age care educators take a holistic approach to their roles and responsibilities recognizing the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. They focus attention on children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual well-being as well as cognitive aspects of learning as it pertains to lifelong learning.

Our image of the whole child influences every interaction and experience. This image encompasses physical, personal, social, emotional, cultural, spiritual and cognitive aspects of the child.

A holistic approach does not prioritize one aspect of development or learning over another: it is the connectedness of body, mind and spirit, all of which are equally important. Nurturing the whole child is an important role for school-age care educators. Taking a holistic approach also means considering and incorporating into the program the culture of the families that it serves.

## Act and Do

### Step 7 - Implement Plans

Time to put the plan into action. Educators actively engage with and support all children to fully participate in a range of experiences. Educators should listen carefully and respond to children's voices and accommodate for spontaneity, natural curiosity, individual needs and interests.



Figure 16.19: This educator is engaged with these girls that are completing puzzles.[3]

## Observe and Review

### Step 8 - Assess and Evaluate Planned and Unplanned Learning Experiences

When reviewing and evaluating the program, it is important to assess both the planned experiences and unplanned experiences. After all, by definition, the program constitutes all of the interactions, experiences, routines and events.

Evaluation methods should have been established in step 5, so it is a matter of gathering the information and undertaking critical analysis and reflection to understand what this means and implement change as needed.

Evaluation should not simply consist of individual written work. Group reflection and discussion is a critical component of evaluation that then leads onto the next step in the cyclic process. Children should also play a critical role in evaluating aspects of the program including routines, experiences and resources.

Some questions to consider during this process include:

- How did the planned learning occur? What learning occurred?
- What unplanned learning occurred? Is this unplanned learning desirable? What does this mean?
- In what ways are you listening to your culturally diverse families? How are you demonstrating cultural competence?
- Consider time, space, resources:
  - Do we need more resources, either human resources or material ones?
  - Did we allow enough time? Was it the right time of the day?
  - Was there enough space? Was it the right space?
- What would have made it a better learning experience?
- How can we build on this?
- Does this experience tie in with any other experiences that were planned or unplanned?
- How do we/can we gather feedback from children, families and other educators to help evaluate the learning experiences?

### Vignette

Recently our team was called on to practice being more reflective. We chose to reflect on our current sign in process.

We brainstormed and reflected on our current 'signing in' practice, which was as follows:

- educator sits at the staff desk and signs children in as they walk through the door

- other educators are greeting children at the door and asking children to put bags away in the bag area, with one educator waiting in the kitchen ready to serve food and remind children to wash their hands
- children walk in and greet the educator; normally the educator is busy signing
- some children come in all at once
- educators try to sign in as fast as they can: it can feel rushed, as there is often a line up
- some children say hello, some don't
- educators feel rude sometimes when they don't get to say 'hi' to all children initially
- late bus children arrive at 3:50pm: educators feel like these children aren't getting a nice greeting bags get left on the floor
- children sometimes hang around the sign-in desk wanting to talk to the educator
- signing in gets put on hold when the phone rings, or a parent wants to pay fees, then children get missed.

After analyzing our thoughts and reflections, we were concerned that this routine was not promoting a positive atmosphere where children felt welcomed, unhurried and valued.

We discussed the fact that some children are asked to move away from the sign-in desk because it is crowded. We are aware some children may not be getting sufficient attention. We want to make each child feel that they are welcomed when they arrive, so they feel a sense of belonging when they walk in the door. We also talked about how to get away from the 'line up' as it reminded us of being at school.

We want the children to feel that the after school care setting is different from school. We wanted to get some ideas from the children about signing in and how we could improve the transition from school to care.

An educator then held a meeting with the children to ask whether they had any ideas on how to make signing in fun and easier for them. The children came up with:

- signing ourselves in
- one sign-on for under-nines and one sign in for over-nines
- if you don't say 'hi' to the educator and get signed in, you go back out and try again
- sign your name on the white board
- stick your own piece of paper on your name to say you are there
- tick your own name off.

Once we had gathered this information, we decided to involve the children by signing their name in on the white board, as the white board is quite far away from the staff desk. It allows the children to walk in, say 'hi' to all the educators, put bags away, then make their way to the white board and write their own name on it.

We tried the new system for a week. An educator wrote on the white board before any of the children arrived: 'New sign in. Write your own name'. The educators voiced some concerns: 'What if it doesn't work? How will the shorter children reach? What if there is a line up?'

On the first day, the first child arrived and the educator explained the new system. He raised his eyebrows and said 'OK', then wrote his name and the time he arrived. The other children seemed happy to copy what the children in front of them were doing. They seemed to enjoy having the responsibility of signing themselves in. The educator in the quiet area would then check the board and sign off the children on the daily booking sheet.



Figure 16.20: The children signed themselves in using the white board.[4]

When the children got picked up, they would go to the white board and wipe their names off to say they have left or they would write 'left' next to their names. Overall the children enjoyed this system and the signing-in process was less crowded. It allowed educators to talk to each child as they came into the service and it promoted continuous flow.

As the week went on the children were walking into after school care with a smile, saying 'hello, I know what to do' and they would go to the white board and sign their name. The sign-in educator supervised while taking the time to have a conversation

with all children, asking them about their day and following up on conversations from previous interactions. The children reported that they liked the new system better.

As a result of this change of practice, we have decided to continue the process this way. It has improved and relaxed the process, the room is quieter, and runs smoother. The children seem to co-operate more with the process because it is up to them to complete the task.

## References

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