Setting the scene

On the EYLF PLP Forum and on Facebook, early childhood educators are raising the question of ‘How to plan with the EYLF Outcomes in mind and how to record children’s learning in manageable ways?’ The challenge arises because many educators are just coming to know the EYLF Learning Outcomes, trying out formats for planning programs and beginning to identify what children do as evidence of learning in relation to the EYLF Outcomes.

And from 2012, educators will be required to use the EYLF and its Outcomes to meet the National Quality Standard (NQS).

NQS Quality area 1, for example (draft, 2011) sets the following expectations:

1.1 The Early Years Learning Framework (or other approved learning framework) guides curriculum decision making and enables each child’s learning in the five Outcomes (p. 5).

1.2.3 Each child’s learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluating children’s learning (p. 7).

Educators—some of whom are used to planning and observing in relation to ‘developmental domains’—now need to use EYLF Outcomes as key reference points against which children’s learning progress can be identified, documented and communicated to families, other early childhood professionals and educators in schools’ (EYLF p. 17).

No wonder there is a plea for ‘a template’ to use for recording children’s learning!

Thinking about the issues

IT was like that when NZ first started with Te Whāriki. We all had to develop our own style. I know it seems hard at the start, but each place is different and you can interpret the Outcomes in so many ways. I guess … you just start by reflecting on what the Outcomes mean for you as an educator … and how you can fit them in to the way you observe the child and the goals you have for them.

So, it’s important to get to know the Outcomes and not to treat them as ‘checklists’. The key is to start with the child, or group of children, noticing what they are coming to know and do, looking at where that fits with Outcomes and planning to extend that learning. For example, if we see a child beginning to stand, hold onto a chair and take a few steps, we would note it as evidence of progress in Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing. We might also note that they feel safe, secure and supported (Outcome 1) and are developing dispositions such as curiosity … (Outcome 4). We might take their hand and support them to explore the new world that becomes visible from an upright position and celebrate with them and their family about these exciting learning developments.

Educators comment that the burden of documenting children’s learning can seem quite overwhelming in a busy day in an early learning setting. Everyone wants to ‘do the right thing’, but no one wants staff to feel exhausted or to waste effort.

Perhaps it’s important to work out first, ‘what’s worth documenting’ rather than trying to record an event or experience that might, on reflection, seem trivial and not have enough substance to inform future planning.
Anne K commented that:

… documentation has little value in itself until it is analysed or interpreted by educators, families and children or other professionals who might be working with a child; the analysis then forms the basis for future planning …

She suggests that:

Thoughtful and reflective educators go back and forth from planning, documenting and then re-planning: thinking about whether to offer the same learning experience, to modify or change it, re-thinking what you are planning and whether it’s likely to meet the emerging needs of an individual child or group of children …

As Anne S explains:

The EYLF doesn’t prescribe a particular way of writing up plans. Rather, it encourages educators to think together about how to document plans in ways that encourage aligning practice with the big ideas of the Framework.

Maybe we are saying that while there’s no one best way, there are ‘better’ and ‘less helpful’ ways to write up plans, and that whatever way is used, it helps if the focus is on children’s learning in a fairly direct way.

A preschool in NSW has generously contributed an example of their planning and documentation for a particular day. See Figure 1: Daily Program.

### Daily Program

**Date:** Friday 18th Feb 2011

**Exercise:** Recycling

As an extension from our story and group discussion on sustainability, we focused on Recycling at Possums.

What can we do to make a difference?

‘Recycling means we can use it again’, said Banjo.

How can we protect our environment?

‘Stop cutting down the trees’, said Enya.

‘If we throw things into the sea, fish might get stuck’, said Ava.

We observed the children’s knowledge of recycling by playing a game where they had to choose two pieces of rubbish (cleaned) and identify which bin it needed to be put into. Organic/recycling for paper plastic with the correct symbol and general garbage. Our friends showed excellent knowledge and recall skills.

#### Learning Areas and Outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EYLF Outcome 5</th>
<th>EYLF Outcome 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children as Effective Communicators</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children are connected with and contribute to their world</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This is evident when the children use descriptive language and engage in discussion</td>
<td>• This is evident when the children show increased knowledge of, and respect for their natural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental awareness discussion</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Extension:

We will provide the children with three rubbish bin choices during meal times and talk about recycling at home.
Getting started

Neville, on the Forum, offers a practical suggestion for getting started using the EYLF and its Outcomes for planning and recording children’s learning:

I think maybe you have a starting plan, using your existing system and seeing how it links to the Principles and Practices of the EYLF, and then to the Outcomes. Maybe, with your team, you could … see what you capture and what you have missed and then how to bring them all together.

A family day care educator offered an example of working from getting to know the Outcomes. Educators and families explored each Outcome, finding pictures in magazines to represent their interpretation. They created picture boards which they discussed and added to. They now use the picture boards to make sure the program provides for learning across all five Outcomes.

Many people on the Forum talk about ‘mapping’ existing practice against the EYLF, looking for connections, gaps and silences and using the EYLF as a ‘lens’ through which to review practices we have begun to take for granted—Why are we putting out clay or playdough? What do we think children will learn from it? Should we change the materials, or add to them to make a familiar experience valuable in learning terms, not just ‘novel’?

At a setting with children from 14 months to three years, an educator commented:

The children like to go to the sandpit when they first arrive. Finding familiar resources there gives them security, but they tend to use the buckets and trucks in the same way every day. We need to think what equipment we could add, or conversations and other experiences we could provide, that would make this play and learning richer. Could we take them to see real trucks and roadworks?

Providing for learning

Taking things slowly, giving staff time to become deeply knowledgeable about the EYLF and its Outcomes has been Judy’s approach at a long day care setting in NSW. Judy’s staff began this year, just taking a couple of Outcomes and developing a monthly plan around them, focusing on educators’ provision. See Figure 2: Monthly Plan.

Figure 2: Monthly Plan

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome 1. Children have a strong sense of identity – children need to feel safe, secure and supported.</td>
<td>For children and families to settle or re-settle into our program.</td>
<td>Educators support those children who need more individual support.</td>
<td>To give children comforters as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To develop relationships with all families, especially new families, and connect them to the centre’s community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educators to introduce parents to each other and relief staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monthly Plan: The Early Years Learning Framework

Belonging, Being and Becoming
Staff make notes throughout the month on the plan and then review it as a staff team each month to decide if they and the children are ready to move on.

Other settings are experimenting with a Weekly Program Outline which specifically records both what was planned and what actually happened. See Figure 3: Weekly Outline.

In the weekly program in this long day care setting, the learning experiences are planned to build on children’s interests, foster high-level thinking and contribute to long-term goals. The Learning Outcomes form part of thinking about provision, and learning is ‘mapped back’ to Outcomes where there are obvious connections; it is much more than a ‘labelling exercise’. See Figure 4: Program (p. 5).

Conclusion

This e-Newsletter has begun a discussion about some issues around planning for and recording children’s learning. It provides some examples of how educators in different settings are approaching the task of reflecting the EYLF in these important documentation tasks. The next set of e-Newsletters will continue this conversation, talking about assessing and recording individual and group learning and gathering examples from the early childhood education community, so that ‘educators help educators’ on this new, exciting journey with the EYLF.

As an educator in Queensland said:

We need to learn to record the learning, not the activity. It’s helpful if we can record learning once for several audiences—children, families, colleagues. We get used to working ‘iteratively’—we observe children, notice some learning needs and some progress, provide experiences, observe and record what happens and think: Well, that didn’t achieve what I thought it would! What will I do next? It’s a kind of ‘backward mapping’.

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- Lady Gowrie Child Care, Brisbane
- Possums Community Pre-School, NSW
- Wiradjiri Preschool Child Care Centre, ACT
Program

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children feel safe, secure and supported
- Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency
- Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities
- Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation
- Children respond to diversity with respect
- Children become aware of fairness
- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing
- Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

Outcome 4: Children are involved and confident learners
- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators
- Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes
- Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
- Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work
- Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.
Program focus: ____________________________________________________

Program beginning: ________________________________________________

Program ideas, suggestions and possibilities from children, teachers and families:
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Ideas to support ongoing projects:
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Resources:
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