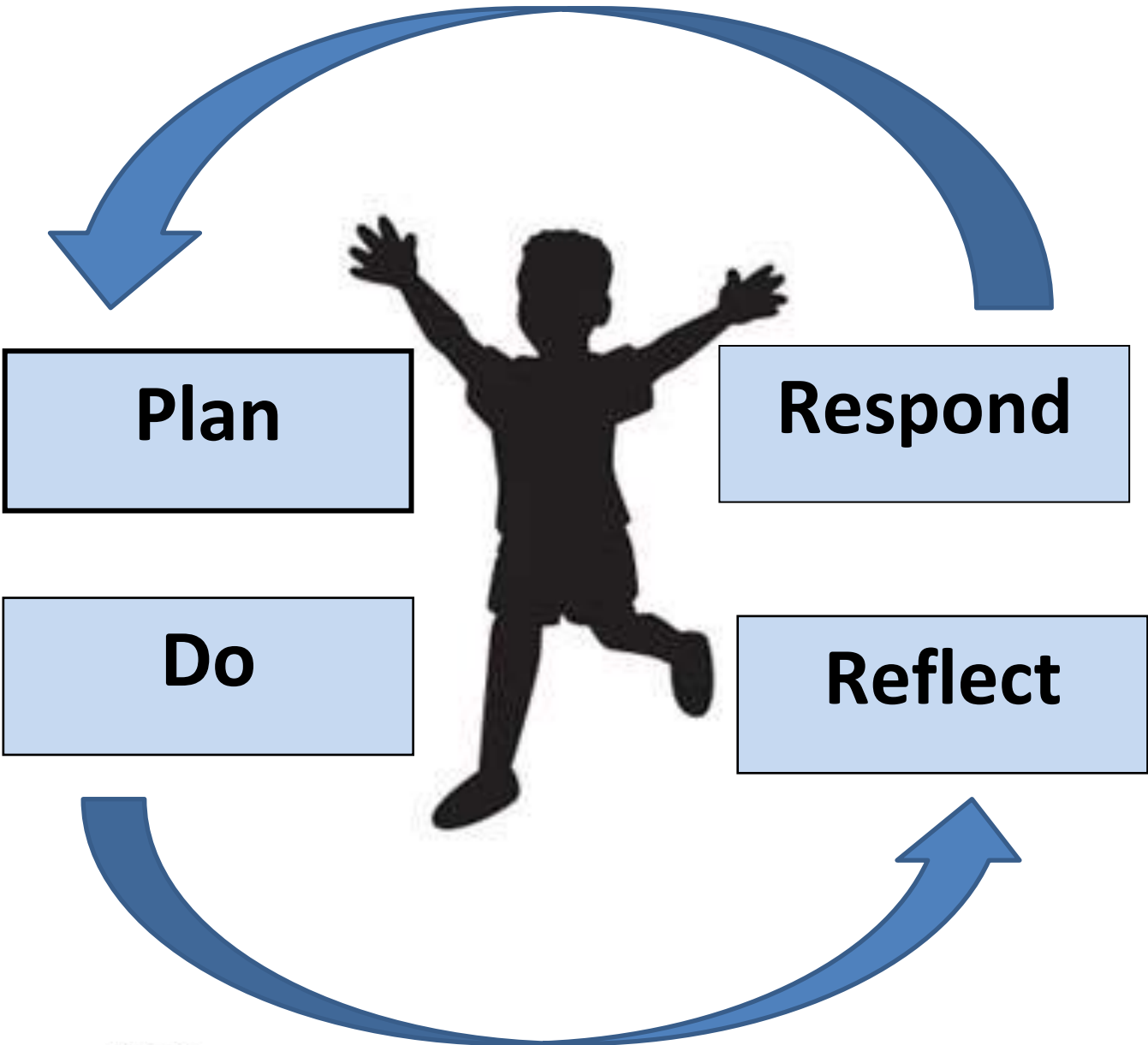


Leading Planning in the Early Years



Introduction

'Leading Planning in the Early Years' has been developed in response to requests from managers for greater clarity in the planning process.

The Early Years is going through a period of great change – there are many very important priorities competing for attention-

Curriculum for Excellence – how do managers provide a flexible, child-centred provision whilst ensuring experiences and outcomes are being covered and there is clear, evidence based progress in learning?

Early Level Classes – how do those settings who have Early Level Classes ensure all children's needs are being met and all staff are being supported appropriately?

Early Years Collaborative – what impact will the Early Years Collaborative have on settings? How do we combine Curriculum for Excellence with Early Years Collaborative?

Children and Young People Act –how will an increase to 600 hours of early learning and childcare change our provision? What are the expectations of our parents going to be? How are we going to provide increased flexibility?

These are all very important priorities which raise significant challenges for Early Years managers. This guide will focus on how you as manager can work with your staff to build capacity and confidence to embrace developments within the Early Years. The Early Years Service will support you as part of this journey. Exciting times are ahead!



Section One – Plan, Do, Reflect, Respond

Plan

Learning through play is widely acknowledged as a key component of good practice in the early years, both indoors and outdoors.

‘The experiences children have in early life – and the environments in which they have them – shape their developing brain architecture and strongly affect whether they grow up to be healthy, productive members of society’ (Harvard University, 2007).

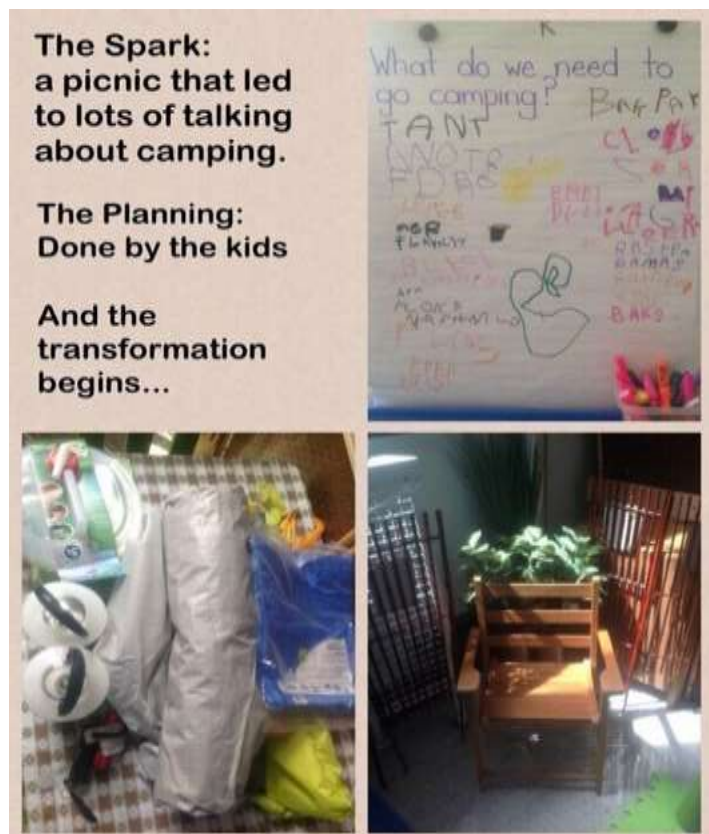
The purpose of planning is to create rich, challenging and meaningful learning experiences for children, taking account of the seven principles of design within Curriculum of Excellence:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalisation and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance

It is important that we recognise that planning and assessment is a process not an end result, that it is neither limited nor driven by paperwork, but is part of an ethos of ensuring quality experiences and environments for children in order that they develop into successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens

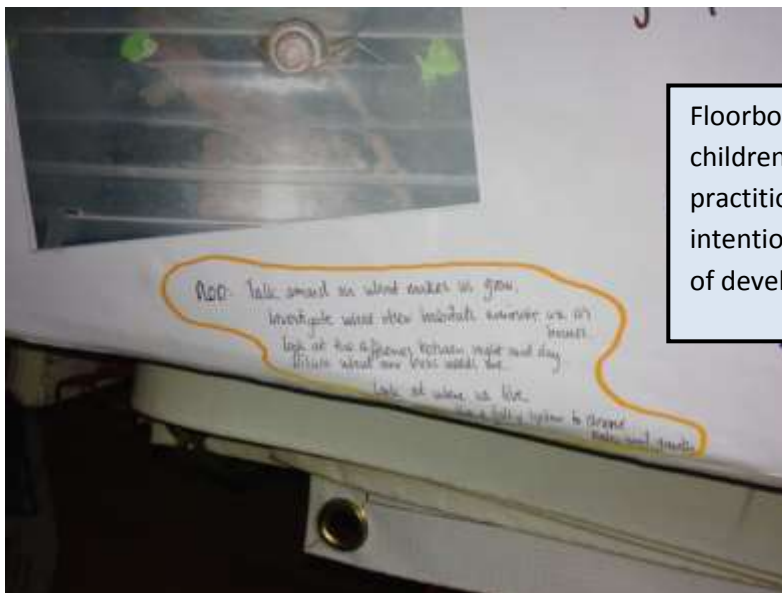
(Curriculum for Excellence, CfE).

Planning display in an Early Years Setting which shares the learning with parents



Core ingredients for effective planning:

- **Child at the centre** – responsive planning. Children must always be the most important influence on plans. Building upon individual talents, interests and needs, your own knowledge of the children and families, establishing strong relationships and connections with them and their wider community.
- **Observations** – reflecting what you seen and heard from the children then using this, with your knowledge of the child to respond promptly and effectively.
- **Clear learning intentions** – addressing gaps in learning and individual needs. Learning to be shared with the children, considering experiences and outcomes and 4 capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Children are the drivers of their own learning.
- **Flexible**, subject to change, can include short -term and longer- term. Longer term may include a significant dates including special events, visits of specialists - these should be flexible, changing and involve children. Short term may include children ideas, short formal group activities relevant to learning, suggested activities, possible resources. Consideration to Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing and interdisciplinary learning opportunities both indoor and outdoor should be given.
- **Cycle of observation, assessment and planning with child at the centre**, no one part stands alone. Everything you do should be driven by the children.



Floorbooks can be used to plan with children – here you can see a practitioner has shared the learning intention, or PLOD – possible lines of development

Do

Create an effective, enabling environment for independent learners

Consider your space and the opportunity to flow from one area to another.

Think about open-ended resources, too much detail limits the imagination.

Does your environment promote the holistic nature of children's learning through curiosity, exploration and interactions with others?



Open ended resources which are easily accessible allow the development of creativity, curiosity and independent learning

Include the outdoor environment - it can no longer be thought of as an added extra but an entitlement for all children

"The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky"

Margaret McMillan



The outdoor environment should also promote open ended activities – there is no need for expensive resources – effective areas can be developed using all sorts of free and inexpensive resources

Build on prior learning and work in partnership with parents

When children arrive at nursery they are already competent learners with 3 years of experiences. Building good home links will impact on children's learning in a positive way.



View children as capable and active learners whose ideas and preferences are valued. Aim high to meet the needs of children who know a lot and have had lots of experiences and good enquiry skills, all children will learn from this.

Have a balance of active learning experiences

Adult-focused activities concerned with **intended learning**

Adult initiated activities concerned with **potential learning** where you may have specific learning intentions in mind when selecting resources but the children take the learning in a different direction and end up with different learning outcomes.

Child initiated activities where children have time and space to indulge in **play** which is freely chosen and self-directed. In high quality play scenarios you will see a wealth of language and communication, social interactions, sharing, negotiating, compromising, emotional involvement, mathematic and scientific application, physical manipulation and creative imagination. Take time to stand back and observe when children are displaying high levels of involvement in their freely chosen play activities and applying their learning. Your observations will inform future planning.

"In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" Vygotsky

"Play creates a brain that has increased flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life " Lester & Russell, Play Strategy for Scotland, 2008

Practise effective questioning

Children's questions should be encouraged and a genuine interest shown in their interests. Practitioners should offer encouragement, clarifying ideas and asking **open questions** to support and extend children's thinking and help them make connections in their learning.

Track children’s learning through meaningful assessment

Are children involved in their own learning - do they know their strengths, progress and next steps?

Evidence of children’s learning should come from a range of sources. Profiles should show the child’s learning journey through what children, say make write and do. Use photographs with annotation and dates to highlight the precise context of the learning and make sure observations are significant and linked to progress and learning.



This floorbook shows photographs of the children sharing their learning about growing. They are finding out about snails. Children’s comments are also captured – “You know something? They eat and drink lots to get big and strong.” This kind of evidence helps plan for relevant next steps in learning.

The Leuven wellbeing and involvement scales are possibly two of the most important quality indicators for any setting. These scales can be used as part of your routine – observing involvement and wellbeing provides a wealth of information on a child’s learning and development. More information on how to use the Leuven Scales is included at the end of this booklet.

Children who have high wellbeing and high involvement will be working at the very limits of their capabilities - they will be happy, confident wee people who are engaged in activities, motivated and appropriately challenged. This is a universal way to look at quality from birth. The opposite would be unhappiness and boredom and a need to assess ourselves and the provision we are offering.

We should support and challenge each other regularly through reflection and peer assessment to take collective responsibility for the provision of a high quality Early Level experience. Time to reflect and time to talk with colleagues should be made a priority within each day.

Reflect

To look carefully at what happened, sort out what is really going on and explore in depth, in order to improve, or change for the next time. - www.qmu.ac.uk/els/docs/Reflection



Here the practitioner has captured points in relation to the children's learning to reflect upon and to take forward next steps. The children had been discussing the learning on this page of their floorbook. The practitioner has not recorded comments in a formal way, but the outcome will be as effective for the children.

Reflection should be an everyday process. It can be hard to reflect when we are caught up in an activity so it is important to stand back and take time to observe. In larger units staff can agree times to observe and who will observe and what to observe. It is just as important in smaller units to take this time, perhaps when children are involved in free-choice activities. As part of the working day we should all ask ourselves:

What went well?

What didn't?

Why?

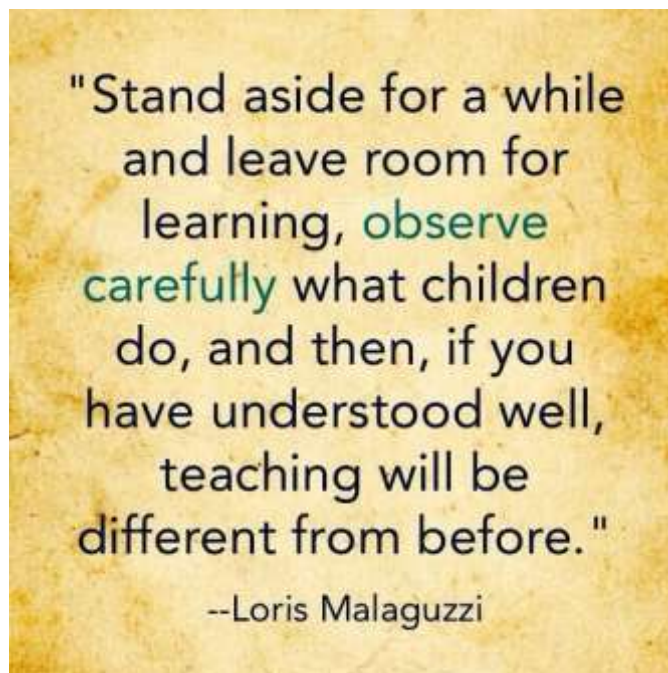
What do I need to do to plan for next steps?

Notes and observations should be manageable. Practitioners do not have to write a lot but it is important to record what is relevant and to keep notes informative and the meaning clear. Each nursery can develop their own methods of recording, perhaps in a journal, on sticky notes, etc. These notes and any evidence (formal and informal observations, children's work, colleagues' comments, children's comments) should be used during reflection and in discussion during staff planning meetings. In single practitioner settings this discussion could take place with other staff or professionals involved in supporting the children. This professional dialogue can help to analyse the experiences provided with a clear focus on how the children interacted with the learning experience and how they developed their learning rather than focusing on enjoyment.

'The initial observation is the starting point for further analysis concentrating on pupils with lower levels of well-being and / or involvement. This analysis should inform educators about the quality and suitability of their work and it should provide some sort of framework for

intervention toward individual pupils.' **Ferre Laevers Emotional Wellbeing and Involvement Scales**

Practitioners should be clear what learning was intended for the children and share these intentions with the children, then ask each other was this learning achieved and if not why not. It is important to be honest and to be even handed in coming to a balanced judgement of what has occurred, focusing on achievements and next steps. This means taking everything into account, not just the most obvious. This will help to develop a problem-solving approach, rather than avoiding thinking about difficulties. Reflection involves an element of drawing conclusions in order to move on, change of approach, strategy or activity in order to plan how best to take each child's individual learning needs and interests forward and so encourage all children to reach their potential.



Respond

How we respond to children sends messages of how they are valued and links closely with how we take the outcomes of observations forward.

All practitioners have a responsibility to provide effective learning activities which give learners choices around tasks and activities and create active learning opportunities in a challenging and supportive climate.

Education Scotland

We can empower children when considering Possible Lines of Development by letting them know you have listened to their ideas and are providing for them. The use of a Floor book completed with the children is a good way of doing this.

Responding to outcomes of observations can give the children “ownership” of the environment by changing or adding to aspects of the provision.

There may be a need to provide opportunities for children to be more physically active.

An area may not be interesting enough, in which case consultation could take place with the children as to how to change/add to it so that they, or a puppet would like to play in it?



Here the practitioner has worked with the children to try out an unusual material and method within a familiar setting to motivate and stimulate the children to think differently – leading to creativity, problem solving and lots of discussion

Respond by considering the learning needs of the children and how best to meet them at this time.

- **Differentiation of activities** i.e. providing more time to explore and investigate for some children who are not ready to move on and providing more challenge and opportunities for depth of learning for others.
- **Focusing observations** and reflection on progression of skills in one area e.g. Social skills/turn taking.
- **Use of the Leuven wellbeing and involvement scale** with a particular child.
- **Use of GIRFEC process** to support individual children whose learning needs are more specific or cannot be met solely within the setting.

Section 2 – Sharing Practice

In the last section we explored the features of an effective Early Years setting where the children are learning in effective enabling learning environments and practitioners work with their children and colleagues to facilitate effective next steps in learning.

The next section of this guide will provide examples of how you can take forward the planning process within your setting. Every setting is different – your children, staff, parents and environment will all create a unique setting, which should be reflected in your planning process. There is no expectation that you should use the examples shared - however, you may find it useful to think about practice which colleagues have taken forward successfully in their own settings – we all like a starting point!

The Planning Process – an example of how this can be developed-

Planning for a longer period of time-

During each session, practitioners update an audit to make explicit the balance of outcomes and experiences explored, and also to reveal gaps to be addressed. Practitioners use their professional judgment and evidence of assessment to decide whether children have had a rich enough learning experience.

This audit is fully updated at the end of each session, which in turn informs the practitioner and children of priorities for the session ahead.

These priorities are taken into consideration when the practitioner is working with the children to create a longer term plan of activities for the session ahead. Another important element to take into consideration at this point is the setting year and the events which arise on an annual / biennial basis – Red Nose Day / the pantomime / the fete, etc.

Another important element to consider are events special to the setting and its community – centenary of the church / visit by a famous local / commemoration of a famous local / Olympics / royal wedding etc. These events work with the setting in its planning as much as possible for rich learning experiences rather than ignoring or thinking of as an ‘add-on’.

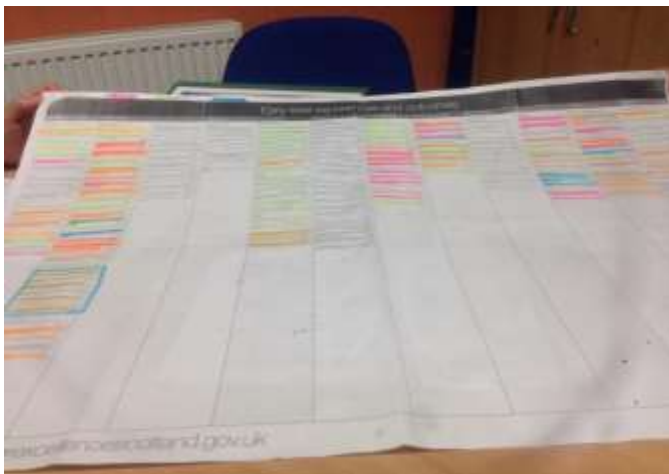
Summary

- Audit to identify priorities within the experiences and outcomes – though not letting this overtake the direction children choose to take their learning – there is a balance of child led and adult led planning
- This information is used intelligently to help create a cohesive long term plan which includes breadth and progression. Practitioners work with children and parents to explore ideas and opinions

- Local events and the setting year are considered when planning
- The long term plan is explored to highlight opportunities for developing and applying literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills



This is a very simple way to track breadth within Curriculum for Excellence – the experiences and outcomes, capabilities and attributes have been added to the back of a floor book and dates have been added when the children have explored an area of the curriculum within their learning.



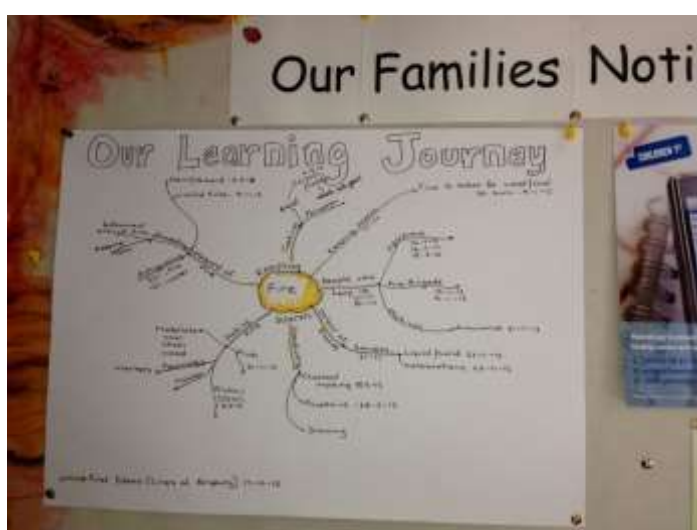
Another setting has used the Early Level overview to highlight aspects of the children’s learning as it has been experienced. Neither of these methods are onerous or complicated, but they ensure there is breadth and progression within children’s learning experiences

At this point staff are clear about priorities for the term ahead, as are the children. Everyone is clear about **what** they are about to explore and develop; now they need to plan **how** they do it.

The first step is to brainstorm with the children. This can be done in lots of ways, using a variety of methods. One of the most effective tools is a large ‘floorbook’, made easily using A3 bound coloured paper. The children discuss and write down ideas, comments, suggestions, questions, and what they already know about the learning they are about to explore.

Parents are also involved in this process – either by working with the children in the classroom, or by being consulted via personal learning plans, at home.

Using these ideas, the children and practitioner then create a learning overview. This enables the reader/user to see how the learning is connected to ensure it is coherent and relevant – creating links in learning. This enables the children to develop and apply their learning across a range of meaningful contexts. The practitioner also uses this tool to ensure there are sufficient opportunities for the development of experiences and outcomes. The learning overview is then used as a communication tool for sharing learning with home – a copy is sent home in the PLP for children to discuss with parents, and for parents to contribute ideas and suggestions. The overview also goes on display as an A3 copy in the setting to share within the wider community.



Links in learning experiences are shared with parents and the wider community on this notice board – once again this tool is not complicated or onerous, but shares the learning and encourages participation. It also supports the practitioner to make links for application of skills within a range of contexts.

Next the practitioner makes use of a planning template which ensures development of breadth, challenge and depth. Learning intentions and success criteria are identified, and as the learning progresses, regular evaluations inform the next steps within the learning. This is a reflective tool which is both a medium term and short term planner, as it identifies *what* the children are learning, but as each activity passes, the *'how'* may change to reflect the needs and wants of the children.

Step Two Summary

- Practitioner and children make use of the long term planner to identify learning for the term ahead
- Practitioner and children brainstorm their ideas and prior learning using a tool such as a floorbook
- This information is used to create a learning overview, displaying the links between each of the curricular area
- Learning overview is shared with home
- Practitioner identifies learning intentions and success criteria which are reflective of progress made within the learning

This is an example of how one setting has created a template to take forward learning in literacy – experiences and outcomes are identified through the audit and learning intentions and success criteria are developed with the children. Evidence is clear through what the children say, write, make and do, and is shared within their PLPS.

I enjoy exploring events and characters in stories and other texts sharing my thoughts in different ways **LIT 0-19a**

I explore sounds letters and words, discovering how they work together and I can use what I learn to help me learn to read and write. **ENG 0-12a**

As I listen and talk in different situations, I am learning to take turns and am developing my awareness of when to talk and when to listen. **LIT 0-02a**

- We have been reading one book every day and discovering the story inside and how a story goes from the first page to the last; from left to right.
- We are learning lots of nursery rhymes and songs and have been talking about all the different sounds the words make, and how some words can sound the same.
- We are making up our own stories and rhymes and are taking turns to share them with each
- We are learning to listen whilst others are speaking and to take turns when speaking in groups

Self-Assessment

Practitioner Assessment

○	I can tell the story inside my book	○
○	I can say and sing nursery rhymes	○
○	I can take turns to talk when I am in a group	○
○	I always listen quietly when someone else is talking	○

Something I have learned/improved on:
 Something I will improve next time:

Comment/ Next steps:

Step Three – The Review Process

As each child develops their knowledge and skills within their learning, the practitioner is making use of formative assessment to identify outstanding aspects within their learning. These outstanding aspects are noted through observations and reflection, and next steps are identified.

Step Three – Summary

- Formative assessment is used to identify outstanding aspects in learning. This will identify next steps
- Practitioner discusses findings with a colleague to share the standard
- Child and practitioner work together to identify next steps in their learning

Section Three - Monitoring and Evaluating Learning

As a manager, it is your responsibility to ensure provision within your setting is of a sufficiently high standard. We have explored the features of a high quality learning environment in this guide, and of ways to take this forward in your setting. In this section we will look at a tool which you can use in partnership with your early years staff to monitor and evaluate the learning within your setting. This tool is based on professional dialogue and development – in many ways this tool is more effective as a process rather than an end product. By supporting practitioners to take ownership of their development this will lead to a much more motivated and skilled team, leading to better outcomes for our children. The tool also supports your team to audit development and should be done in partnership with improvement plan developments. This tool is not the only way to monitor and evaluate learning. It is also a tool which can be adapted to suit your environment.

At the beginning of each term, the practitioner is given a copy of the ‘Learning Evaluation Template’.

This template lists-

The Four Capacities	Self -Evaluation
The Seven Design Principles	Assessment
Outdoor Learning	Children Leading Learning
Personal Learning Plans	Play
Questioning/Effective Intervention	Responsive Planning
Observations	

Practitioners use this tool to audit their practice to ensure there is a balance of experiences for development within each term. The practitioner and manager agree on a focus for the term ahead. Throughout the term informal visits are made to a learning area and the manager observes activities. Both the practitioner and the manager make notes based on the agreed focus points. At the end of the term, there is a meeting between the practitioner and manager to discuss notes made. They then agree on three action points for the term ahead, as well as focus points from the above list.

As well as the shared dialogue between the practitioner and the manager, staff meet on a daily/weekly basis to discuss outstanding aspects in the setting. Each term, there are dates in the diary set aside to focus on peer observations as part of improvement plan priorities.

Areas to be developed over the term are highlighted in blue

Name		Term		Session	
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Challenge & Enjoyment	Breadth	Progression	Depth	Personalisation & Choice	Coherence	Relevance
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When focusing on learning opportunities ensure the environment provides for challenge & enjoyment, and depth is evident in experiences. (have example e.g outings).

Successful Learners	Effective Contributors	Responsible Citizens	Confident Individuals
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Skills Development:
Assessment is for Learning – AifL strategies sharing learning intentions with children
Opportunities for celebrating learning, identifying effective next steps.
Children being independent learners within their learning environments

Here manager and practitioner can make notes on the highlighted areas over the term to discuss together at the end of the term



Literacy	Numeracy	Health & Wellbeing
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Explore ways of ensuring numeracy is evident throughout the room (does this need to be more specific, please see action plan overleaf)

Other Curricular Areas:
Technologies – find ways to introduce/extend technologies in the environment (same as above)

Outdoor Learning	Personal Learning Plans	Questioning/Effective Intervention	Observations	Learning Environment
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What are you looking for, What are you going to do with it – the So What?

Self Evaluation	Assessment	Play	Responsive Planning	Children Leading Learning
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How are you planning for periods of time during the day when children are able to play spontaneously? How are you using this time to plan effectively for next steps?

Action :

1. 7 principles – Challenge and Enjoyment – differentiation in activities
Depth – extending the learning in areas chosen this term – numeracy, technologies & music
2. 4 capacities – Successful learners
Assessment is for Learning - learn and use AifL strategies, sharing learning intentions with children
Peer and self-assessment – talking about learning and next steps
3. Curriculum areas – Numeracy , Technologies and Music
Numeracy – numeracy area in place then extend into other areas, develop measuring box
Technologies – use of BeeBots/lego/camera safely and effectively
Music – music, range of instruments and investigate use of voice
4. Observations: significant – Chris Miles booklet: The cycle of observation, assessment and planning - pg 14-
Does it tell me something about this child/children that I didn't know before?
Does it show me that something has changed for this child?
Does it show me that this child wants to know something?
Does it show me that this child is worried about something, or having difficulty with something?

Making time for observations, free flow time

Play – time/routine/environment, depth of learning.

Action points are agreed through professional dialogue between the practitioner and the manager. These action points can be developed over the term ahead, to be reviewed at the next meeting.

Signed:
Practitioner /Class Teacher

Signed:
Manager /Head Teacher

Date:

Monitoring and Evaluating of Learning– Summary

- Focus points from the Learning Evaluation template are agreed between the practitioner and the manager
- The manager makes a series of short informal visits to the setting to observe evidence of the focus points through activities/PLPs/children’s work/plans/ chats with the children about their learning
- At the end of the term the practitioner and manager discuss outstanding aspects within the identified focus points and action points are agreed
- New focus points are identified for the term ahead

Conclusion

In this guide we have covered-

- The features of an effective Early Years setting within the Early Level
- Different approaches to planning effectively within your setting
- Monitoring and evaluating learning and development within your setting

Use this guide to take forward developments within your setting. It is not designed to be followed in a prescriptive way, but does give you a starting point – you now have the ingredients for what makes a successful Early Years setting, and now it is over to you and your team to move forward together to develop your setting – staff, children and parents working in partnership to give our children the best possible start in life...

‘To make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in by improving outcomes, and reducing inequalities, for all babies, children, mothers, fathers and families across Scotland to ensure that all children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.’

Ambition of the Early Years Collaborative

...and we have been given permission to make the changes needed-

‘We have the power and the permission to improve the life chances of a generation.’

Derek Feeley- Director General Health and Social Care, Scottish Government.

Argyll & Bute Early Years Service

May 2014