

# PLANNING FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Series editor Jennie Lindon

# Gardening and growing

How to plan learning opportunities that **engage** and **interest** children

By Alistair Bryce-Clegg

BIRTH  
TO  
FIVE

## Contents

Planning to make a difference for children	2	Learning about garden chorus	20
Learning about garden treasures	8	Learning about seasonal scent	22
Learning about outdoor art	10	Learning about texture trail	24
Learning about 'real' experiences from favourite stories	12	Learning about dandelion magic	26
Learning about growing from a seed	14	Learning about things trapped in ice	28
Learning about size and scale	16	Learning about sprouting socks	30
Learning about things that are safe to eat in your outdoor space	18	Final reflections	32
		Finding out more	32

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# Planning to make a difference for children



## A child-friendly approach to planning

Young children benefit from reflective adults who plan ahead on the basis of knowing those children: their current interests and abilities, but also what they are keen to puzzle out and learn. Each title in this series of 'Planning for the Early Years' offers a specific focus for children's learning, with activities for you to fine-tune for young girls and boys whom you know well. These adult-initiated activities happen within a day or session when children have plenty of time for initiating and organising their own play. Your focus for the activities is short term; plan ahead just enough so that everything is poised to go.

Thoughtful planning ensures that children enjoy a variety of interesting experiences that will stretch their physical skills, social and communicative abilities and

their knowledge of their own world. A flair for creative expression should be nurtured in early childhood. The national frameworks recognise that creativity is about encouraging open-ended thinking and problem-solving, just as much as opportunities for children to enjoy making something tangible. Plans that make a difference for young children connect closely with their current ability and understanding, yet offer a comfortable stretch beyond what is currently easy.

Adult-initiated activities build on children's current interests. However, they are also planned because familiar adults have good reasons to expect that this experience will engage the children. Young children cannot ask to do something again, or develop their own version, until they have that first-time experience. The best plans are flexible; there is scope for the children to influence the details and adults can respond to what actually happens.

## Responding to children's and babies' interests

As children realise what is happening to the bean, it may inspire them to want to try and grow other plants from seed.

Look for seeds in the food that you are eating. Challenge the children to find the seeds in fruit like apples and oranges and in less obvious fruit like bananas and Kiwi. Look at the bits of food that you would normally throw away. Are there any pips or seeds in it?

Citrus fruit pips grow relatively quickly on a warm window sill if they are about an inch deep in compost.

If the children show an interest in growing more seeds, let them tell you what you need to help the seed to grow. It is important that you follow their instructions – especially if they are wrong. If the seed does not grow then there is lots of powerful learning in investigating why.

Add an extra 'bean bag' to your washing line but this time make sure it has water but no light. Add another that has light but dry cotton wool.

Give the children time to think and talk about why the seeds aren't growing rather than you just telling them. You can help to shape their thinking by asking lots of open questions; "I wonder why these ones didn't grow?", "Did they have everything the same as the other beans?".



## Time for you to think



- Were the children involved enough in the preparation of this activity? Was there enough opportunity for 'hands on' participation?
- Did the beans grow in the bag? If not, why?
- Did I allow the children to look for answers rather than tell them?
- Could I have linked this activity to any other area of learning, including home-setting?
- How can I keep their interest in 'growing'?

## Listening to children and talking with them

As children are experiencing anything for the first time they can be prone to misconceptions and getting the process wrong. They are more likely to understand that their seed needs water to grow if they discover it through a real experience rather than just being told it is a fact by an adult.

If during this activity a child tells you something like; "That bean did not grow because it was planted on a Tuesday and beans only grow if they are planted on Thursdays!", then it is important to take their reasoning (days of the week) and use that to help the child disprove their own theory. You could label all of the bags on the days they were planted and then ask the child what they notice.

When they have reached the conclusion that it is not to do with days of the week – don't tell them the answer – let them explore their next theory until they get it. By doing this we are showing the children that their ideas are valued and listened to and we are also teaching them how to think around a problem until you find a solution and not just wait to be told the answer.

If a child plants some cress and sees it grow in two days and thinks if they plant an apple pip in two days they will have a tree, let them try it and then help them to investigate why it didn't work.