

PLANNING FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Series editor Jennie Lindon

Storytelling and storymaking

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

By Judith Stevens

BIRTH
TO
FIVE

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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.

Learning about finger rhymes and action rhymes

In a recent survey (Booktrust, 2009) only just over a third of parents surveyed stated that they regularly use nursery rhymes with their children, while almost a quarter admitted that they have never sung a nursery rhyme with their child.

First hand experiences with finger rhymes and action rhymes will give children lots of opportunities to play with words. One of the earliest forms of storytelling is the

What do you need to do beforehand?



Many practitioners are very familiar with a range of rhymes which are appropriate for babies, toddlers and older children. But some adults have a limited repertoire and so, if this is the case, it is important to become familiar and confident with the rhymes which will be introduced to children.

Some early years teams choose to develop 'core rhymes' to support early literacy and numeracy. Practitioners select about twelve rhymes which are suitable for babies and young toddlers and ensure that every child in the group has lots of opportunities to revisit the rhymes again and again. When a child moves to a group of older children, there needs to be continuity and progression, so some of the same core rhymes will be retained, with some more complex rhymes added to extend the collection.

It is always a good idea to have the words of the chosen rhymes available for families and practitioners, so that everyone uses the same starting point. Some settings may find a digital recording of the words being spoken clearly may be supportive for some families, particularly those with English as an additional language or who do not read in any language.



stories told through rhymes – the story of Humpty Dumpty falling from the wall or Incey Wincey Spider climbing up the water spout and being washed down by the rain.

Plan to introduce a new rhyme to a pair or small group of children. This activity is suitable for younger children, although babies will be responding to the rhyme rather than joining in with the words. With very young babies, it may be more appropriate to use just fingers, making contact with the baby, rather than using props. For the youngest children, this activity can require no resources other than an enthusiastic, caring practitioner and a comfy corner to settle and share the rhymes.

An opportunity to learn about finger rhymes and action rhymes

Young children who regularly share rhymes with their family will respond readily and may already be familiar

with a wide range of rhymes. Other children may have limited experience of action rhymes or may only have heard rhymes on CDs, with no idea that there are actions which can accompany the rhyme.

Children benefit from the opportunity to explore rhymes with adults and other children. Perhaps they have recently been fascinated by a spider or a ladybird in the outdoor area, so a familiar practitioner has decided to introduce 'Incey Wincey Spider' or 'Ladybird, Ladybird'. Or perhaps children have enjoyed making cups of tea in the home corner so 'I'm a Little Teapot' seems to be a timely rhyme to introduce.

Young children develop an understanding of 'onset' and 'rhyme' that is an essential part of phonological skills, which underpin literacy through playing with words in traditional and contemporary rhymes. For example, the onset of the word 'star' is 'st', the onset in 'car' is 'c' and the rhyme of both words is 'ar'.

Action rhymes give children lots of opportunities to explore ways in which their arms, hands and fingers move and develop the fine motor skills so vital for later handwriting.

Responding to children's and babies' interests

The introduction of the rhyme 'Incey Wincey Spider' could be inspired by children spotting a spider in the outdoor area or one child's particular interest in a spider hand puppet or soft toy.

Listening to children and talking with them

When we are listening to children and talking to them, we are observing different aspects of their use of communication and language: listening and attention; receptive language; expressive language and social communication.

We make judgements of a child's stage of development through a process of ongoing observational assessment. This observation involves noticing what children do and say in a range of contexts including joining in with new rhymes and playing and innovating familiar rhymes.

Time for you to think



Did you choose a rhyme which appealed to the children and did they respond in the way you expected? Did any of the children ask specific questions about the rhyme or make interesting comments? Did any of the children with limited vocabulary use new words or show that they understand unfamiliar words through their actions?

Are you familiar with the most popular rhymes? A recent survey across the UK showed that the six top rhymes are:

- Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
- Incey Wincey Spider
- Round and Round the Garden
- Baa Baa Black Sheep
- The Grand Old Duke of York
- If You're Happy and You Know It.

For all young children, the rhyme is best introduced with the words and accompanying actions, encouraging the children to join in with both. For very young babies, the rhyme may be best introduced using 'tickling' movements on the baby's hand and arm. Practitioners know individual children best.

Make sure children have opportunities to repeat and revisit the rhyme, but be very aware when interest is waning and move onto something else. Introduce more finger plays and action rhymes to the children.

We sometimes make assumptions about children's receptive vocabulary. If we don't have a piece of real drain pipe or an image, do children know what a 'spout' is? Sometimes we play board games, or even a chalked game in the outdoor area to support the rhyme – but what does this say to children about the spider climbing 'up' the spout if the counter, puppet or even child pretending to be a spider is actually moving 'along' the track, rather than 'up' the spout?

For very young babies, we should be noting how they gaze at faces and copy facial movements. Are they enjoying the interaction? Are they using voice, gesture, eye contact and facial expression to keep attention? It's important to respond to the baby's interest – if they look at the spider puppet, say 'yes, a spider, a wiggly spider'.