

PLANNING FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Series editor Jennie Lindon

Ourselves and our bodies

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

By Rachel Sparks Linfield

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.

play. Models can be a friend, taken for walks outside, or simply be someone with whom to play and share things.

Responding to children's and babies' interests

When preparing the resources to use for the collages, painting and model making, did children show a preference for a particular material, colour or resource? For some children producing a realistic model will be the focus and further resources may be needed for a stripy jumper, spotty tights or auburn hair. Others may be more interested in detailed decoration and want ribbons, lace and feathers to enhance their models. Some models will become very real to the children. A fascination for turning cereal packets inside out may also lead to models of buildings and transport.

Using tape can be frustrating for young children but masking tape, which can be torn or easily cut if the tape end is stuck to a table top, can produce pleasure as it is used both to join things and to cover items such as plastic yogurt pots for painting.

Observations about the similarities and differences in people's appearances may lead to research about people's appearances and also how they change as they age. "Did Giles' Gran always have grey hair?" "Why is Ethan's hair curly but mine is straight? Will it ever be curly?"



Time for you to think



Which children were keen to paint? Who wanted their painting or model to look like a particular person? Who used scissors well? Who liked turning boxes inside out? How could this skill be used in further experiences?

Did anyone show confusion over the names of colours or body parts?

Did anyone's model become a valued friend? How was it used? How could the models be developed further? Did anyone not like seeing themselves in a mirror? Why?

Listening to children and talking with them

When the youngest children, with limited vocabulary, make their models and collages, or paint their pictures, comments from adults such as "You have painted lovely blue eyes" or "Would this wool be good for doing brown hair?" will reinforce body part vocabulary, as well as show the children that you appreciate what they are doing. Pointing may be a sitting toddler's way to request, or to show pleasure in the part they are doing. If one points to the space where eyes would go a "Yes, that's where your eyes go. Which of these paints shall we use? Yes, let's use blue", will help to develop vocabulary.

For three to five-year-olds the time spent producing their pictures and models will give opportunities to develop and reinforce words for colours, materials, shapes, sizes and practical skills as well as helping the children to think about body parts.

As children engage in the learning experience, listen to the words children use and, if given, the reasons for why they make their choices. For example, "Tissue paper goes soggy when I glue it. I'm going to use wool for the hair instead." This shows awareness of properties of materials and ability to reason. "I like yellow. My person has yellow eyes and yellow hair", is a child whose preference for a particular colour overrides the desire to be realistic.