

Using the ECIPs in Lesson Plans



Introduction

Teachers and providers working in early childhood programs are thoughtful and intentional in all that they do with children. They plan carefully for the day so that the children's experiences are meaningful and filled with learning opportunities.

Whether they work with children in a family child care home, a child care center, a community preschool program, or a school-based program, early educators:

- Consider the best schedule for the flow of activities.
- Organize the environment so that it communicates structure and is full of interesting possibilities.
- Decide what materials and opportunities to offer the children throughout the day.
- Think about ways to support as well as challenge the children so that they are successful and assisted toward the next steps in their development.

For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs) should be imbedded into daily routines, group experiences, and play. Teachers and providers intentionally plan for ways to incorporate the ECIPs throughout the day. But for curricular approaches to be effective with young children, teachers and providers not only plan, they also engage in all of the other steps in The Intentional Teaching Process (see Brief #7). They plan, teach, observe, document, and assess. They do so continually with forethought and preparation, and also spontaneously, in the moment with the children. The Minnesota Early Indicators of Child Progress (ECIPs) provide the foundation for the Intentional Teaching Process.

There are differences in planning strategies depending on the setting and the age group. In this brief, we will look at lesson planning for infants, for toddlers, and for preschoolers and assume that teachers and providers will make the necessary adjustments for the particular setting in which they work with children.

Lesson Planning for Infants

Planning for infants is a far more responsive process than only deciding what specific activities or tasks to do with the children.

"Responsive curriculum planning focuses on finding strategies to help infant-toddler teachers search for, support, and keep alive children's internal motivation to learn, and their spontaneous explorations of people and things of interest and importance to them." (Lally 2005)

Lesson Planning for Toddlers

Infant care providers know that their first task with the very youngest children is to establish relationships with each child and his or her family. Infant development thrives when children can “...count on trusted adults to help them gain new awareness of themselves, others, and the world.” (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 53). Planning for sensitive and predictable care allows young infants to build a sense of security that will serve them well as they develop mobility and are able to explore more of their world.

High quality infant care includes continuity of care so that the child interacts with a primary caregiver who knows him well and is able to read his cues and respond to his needs. Caregivers engage with infants through the routines of diapering and feeding, providing comfort when needed, recognizing the best times for sleeping, engaging in ongoing conversations, and providing interesting things in the environment to explore. In addition, family input is necessary, welcomed and respected. Teachers and providers work closely with infants’ family members so that they can know more about the child’s temperament, eating and sleeping patterns, and family culture, experiences and expectations.

Integrating the ECIPs into lesson plans for infants reflects this emphasis on relationships, routines, and family involvement. Teachers and providers integrate the ECIPs as they plan ahead for daily schedules and environmental changes. And they are flexible in the implementation of their plans. Most importantly, they observe each child closely so that they can respond in the ways that are most supportive. As they interact with infants, read their cues, and follow their lead, they recognize when they need to focus on other indicators from the standards. Their familiarity with the ECIPs helps them recognize the ways that young and mobile infants are demonstrating the indicators from different domains as they participate in daily routines and interact with their caregivers and family members. Their lesson plans can include after-the-fact reflections that show this responsiveness and flexibility.

While many of the aspects of lesson planning for infants apply to toddlers, there are differences to be considered for this age group as well. Curricular approaches continue to be based on responsiveness to each child’s unique personality, communication styles, and needs. Even as the toddler develops more independence and mobility, relationships that create trust and security are essential. Daily routines offer many opportunities for interactions that can support the child’s ongoing development and learning. And family input, again, is essential as teachers and providers get to know each child well and support her so that she can grow and develop to her fullest potential. Teachers and providers incorporate the ECIPs in their plans for relationship-building with both children and their families, as well as in daily routines of diapering, toileting, hand-washing, snacks, meals, and rest times.

Because of the growing independence and mobility of toddlers, play and exploration are vital to their learning. Teachers and providers plan for play so children can have many opportunities to pursue their natural curiosity and learn more about the world.

“Carefully plan the classroom to take maximum advantage of toddlers’ natural desire to explore and learn. Create a play environment that offers children interesting places to play, both alone and with their friends.” (Albrecht 2011)

The environment is carefully organized into areas filled with interesting objects to manipulate and explore. Teachers and providers can choose materials and plan for experiences related to indicators in the ECIPs from the various domains. As they interact with children in play, they are flexible in their thinking related to the standards, ready to support the interests of each child. They recognize that toddlers often move quickly from interaction with one object to another. The changing attentions of toddlers may mean that different indicators from the ECIPs are observed based on what the children actually do with different materials. Lesson plans can include after-the-fact reflections about where such changes occurred.

Teachers and providers understand that an important aspect of toddler play involves playing alone or alongside others. They plan for ways to support children as they begin to interact with others and are ready to prevent problems or gently guide when conflicts arise. The social and emotional goals in the ECIPs for toddlers are recognized so that appropriate expectations allow for initial steps in learning to share, wait turns, and get along in a group.

There are delights in planning for and facilitating the play of toddlers. Effective teachers and providers recognize the possibilities for learning and the many ways to incorporate the ECIPs to support children as they play.

“Toddler play can be remarkably sophisticated and provides us with insight into their thinking.”
(Albrecht 2011)

Lesson Planning for Preschoolers

As children move into the preschool years, they are able to participate in a more fully developed schedule of routines and activities. Their increasing independence and capabilities at self-care and interest in social interaction with other children, allow teachers and providers to plan for learning opportunities throughout the day: in daily routines, in play and exploration both indoors and outside, and in small and large group activities.

However, planning for learning and integrating standards in preschool does not mean that all experiences become teacher-directed. Intentionality and planning must still recognize the value and importance of child-directed experiences and look for a balance for the preschool age group.

Ann Epstein (2011) “...advocates a middle ground that combines both child-guided and adult-guided experiences. In this balanced approach, everyone is active. Children’s interests and developmental levels help to shape adult-guided experiences, while adults use their knowledge and observations to decide when and how to intervene in child-guided experiences.”

Striving for such a balance involves knowing children well. Building warm, caring relationships with children

and their families is an important task for preschool teachers and providers. Creating a caring community of learners is also essential so that children learn to support each other, to empathize, to contribute to the well-being of the group, and to learn to resolve conflicts appropriately. Teachers and providers can plan for activities and experiences that focus on relationship-building and invite families to participate and contribute to classroom experiences.

Daily routines in preschool classrooms offer many possibilities for addressing the indicators in the ECIPs. Arrival time can include a daily sign-in or a graphing experience to show who is present and who is absent. Snacks and meals give opportunities for taking responsibility to set a table and use one-to-one correspondence in counting out napkins and cups. Toileting and hand-washing are filled with sequential steps that need to be remembered. Clean-up time provides many sorting and categorizing tasks when the environment is well-organized and labeled.

The ECIPs can be integrated into exploration and play as teachers and providers plan the interest areas and the materials and experiences that are available. Preschool children love to be challenged. Teachers can suggest they use their measurement skills in the block area or their emergent writing capabilities at the art table. Teachers can observe children as they decide what to do with the magnetic tiles or as they put together puzzles. Familiarity with the indicators in the ECIPs helps teachers readily see what children are doing related to the various domains. As teachers interact with children in play, they can scaffold the learning needed to help children progress along the developmental trajectory for a specific set of indicators in the standards.

Preschoolers are ready for engaging, well-planned large- and small-group experiences as well. Group times are generally teacher-led but also include clear routines that help children settle in and participate actively. Teachers and providers can plan group experiences with specific indicators from the ECIPs in mind. And, again, the flexibility of recognizing when children’s engagement goes in a different direction is necessary. For all of the experiences in a preschool classroom, teachers and providers can do intentional planning related to the ECIPs, as well as after-the-fact reflection to recognize the many aspects of learning that occurred.

Conclusion

Effective early childhood care and education is planned and intentional. It is not haphazard or random. And the most successful planning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, is also responsive. Teachers and providers engage in the Intentional Teaching Process where their planning includes observations and adjustments that help children be successful and supported in their learning.

Teachers and providers incorporate the ECIPs into their planning. They turn to the standards to guide them as they consider ways to build strong, warm relationships with children and families, to make the most of daily routines, and to enhance children's play. They recognize the importance of planning ahead and the necessity of being flexible and engaging in after-the-fact reflection.

Intentional teaching involves planning—having a goal and a means to accomplish it. Intentional teaching can also be serendipitous—taking advantage of unexpected opportunities. That means teachers must not only be child development experts in general, they must also understand the specific knowledge and skills appropriate for children to master in content areas such as literacy and mathematics, social and emotional development, physical development, and the creative arts. (Epstein 2011)

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