

Planning for 8 – 12 year old children

by Dr Anne Kennedy

When planning for older school age children there are some matters for educators to consider that are particular to this age group. The ideas discussed in this article are consistent with the Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes in the *National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*. The significance of relationships for learning, holding high expectations for every child and responding to children based on reflective practice are as important when working with older children as they are for very young children.

The characteristics of 8 to 12 year olds

The age range from 8 to 12 years is typically identified as the period of 'middle childhood'. This is a period where children consolidate, extend and refine the skills, understandings and values they have been learning from infancy.

There will be variations in how individuals in this age group develop and in the rate of development such as the onset of puberty which can occur in this period or in the adolescent phase. As in previous life periods, some children will need additional support to achieve particular development or learning outcomes. Each child will demonstrate different strengths and competencies across and within the different domains of development.

While there are individual differences, there are agreed general characteristics of middle childhood which have practical implications for planning, as discussed below.

Growing capacity for autonomy and independence:

- Planning with children will support their sense of independence and respect their agency
- Plan opportunities for children to make choices and decisions about the experiences provided and how the environment can be set up to allow for an area which they can identify as 'their space'



- Encourage older children to manage some aspects of the program independently, for example, running a hobby club.

Increased physical stamina and competence:

- Observe and document the children's physical competencies to plan experiences which can reinforce and extend their skills
- These experiences will be different from the ones that are available for younger children and from the activities where children of different ages can participate in together.

Enjoyment of complex and competitive games:

- Use their interest in games to discuss the importance of being fair and inclusive and how to negotiate solutions with others
- Balance the risk of an over emphasis on competition by planning for some games that require cooperation to succeed.

An improved capacity to initiate and maintain friendships, socialise and to work with peers:

- Plan experiences that foster a sense of belonging and contributing to the group. For example, make a large mural using different art media.

A strong interest in popular culture:

- Listen to, observe and talk with children to identify their popular culture interests. Reflect on the ways you could use these interests productively, rather than banning or ignoring them
- Work with children and families to develop rules for using popular culture experiences in the program. For example, some pop song lyrics are inappropriate, but they could be re-written by the older children.

Confident communicators:

- Provide daily opportunities for children to enjoy conversations with peers and adults
- Think of ways older children can model effective communication for younger children in the program.



Improved capacity for initiating interests, problem solving and abstract thinking:

- Identify children's interests as a starting point for planning the program
- Support children's exploration of topics that interest them over longer periods of time using a range of strategies or resources which they can use independently or with minimum adult support.

Interested in things that are different or novel:

- Reflect on the way your program can balance the need for routine experiences offered every day or week (predictability), and the enjoyment of novel and different experiences which provide physical and cognitive challenges appropriate for the skill levels of older children.

The importance of contexts when planning for older children

There are a range of programs offered in outside school hours services. Programs can be based on:

- Recreation, leisure or play experiences
- Hobbies
- Clubs
- Expressive art experiences
- Domains of development
- Enrichment and prevention – 'safe havens'
- Mixed approaches incorporating some or all of the above.

Whatever type of program is provided, it should reflect the contexts of the local community so that children and families feel a sense of connectedness to the service. Planned experiences which reflect community contexts will be more meaningful and relevant for the children. In a rural service, for example, the local agricultural show might be a catalyst for planning experiences related to that event.

Conclusion

Planning for children in middle childhood is not about providing a set of activities which are pre-designed by others, or making outside school hours programs look like classrooms. Quality planning is based on:

- Responsiveness to children's strengths, interests and needs
- Critical reflection that asks questions such as, 'Why do we do things in a particular way?'
- Contexts for the service and the local community
- Thinking carefully about timetables, routines and ways of grouping children can improve and sustain children's enjoyment in their learning within the service
- Meaningful consultation and planning with children, families and community members
- Flexible approaches which offer choices and provide interesting challenges within a safe environment.

Children attending outside school hours care services have a right to participate in planned programs which are aimed at 'supporting development in a broader sense, giving children space, time and resources for play, creativity, friendships, their own interests and explorations' (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.155) ■

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance

Principles: 4.2, 4.3 and 5.1-5.4

References and further reading

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