

Planning Experiences for Children

By Angela Owens

Planning experiences for children plays an integral role in providing a quality child care service. While there are many variations in the ways that planned experiences will be implemented, all quality services share a common goal: to involve all children in activities and experiences which reflect their interests, personalities and needs, and which foster all areas of human development. Most importantly, effective planning provides children with opportunities to pursue their current interests, to develop new ones and, where possible, to make choices.

The methods for planning, implementing and evaluating experiences for children vary from service to service and often also vary for different groups of children within a service. Such variations are essential as it is important that planned experiences for children are flexible, adaptable and responsive to contextual issues such as the service type, its location, child and family characteristics, staff and carer backgrounds, available resources, group dynamics and the wider community.

A service's philosophy provides an important framework within which decisions are made, including planning for children's experiences. The service philosophy highlights what all service stakeholders believe about the

ways that children do and/or should learn and develop. Some services may also adopt a specific philosophical foundation, for example Montessori or Steiner programs or programs that provide experiences which cater to particular cultural or religious identities.

Regardless of whether a service espouses a specific philosophical foundation as part of its overall operations, it is important that families and where appropriate, children, have genuine opportunities to contribute their observations and feedback regarding planned experiences. It is equally important that services ensure families are provided with meaningful information about their child's experiences and development. This exchange of information helps to promote the best learning opportunities for children as it assists staff and carers to become familiar with each child and their interests.

Planning Flexible Experiences

When planning for children, it is important that experiences reflect the interests and abilities of the whole child, and that they are flexible enough to allow children to engage in them in ways that are meaningful to them. For example, one child may engage in a water play experience by experimenting with pouring water using different containers.

This experience may extend the child's interest, understanding and skills in relation to problem solving and mathematical concepts. Another small group of children may engage in the same water play experience but use the water containers as boats in an imaginative play activity, extending their social, language and creative play skills.

NCAC has developed a general information factsheet for families about planned experiences for children which is available on the back page of this issue of *Putting Children First*. Services may find this factsheet useful to copy for display or distribution to families, to support their communication with families about children's experiences and their importance to quality child care. ■

