



Supporting children's learning in the early years

Planning in teams

Narrator

At St Thomas Centre Nursery in Birmingham, artist Rod Burley works with a group of children in the nursery unit. Rod works as a peripatetic practitioner throughout the local area. Today the children are presented with the challenge of building an ambitious structure with a range of materials. Working alongside Rod, there's scope for experiment, discussion, and creativity. Potentially this activity develops knowledge and skills across all curriculum areas.

Rod

Well this is something that I've done with other schools in different situations and I've found that it's a good idea for giving the children the opportunity to explore twisting and joining without having something that's formal and prescriptive. So they're able to develop different techniques that they can use in other activities such as weaving, when they're in other years.

Narrator

So how does Rod plan for this kind of experience?

Rod

I don't plan rigidly because I think if you do have that sort of planning, the activities do become prescriptive and very often it's counterproductive and the children don't engage in it at all. So, I create something which I feel reflects the needs of the staff here, colleagues here, and the children, so that they can be involved with that exploration, and they have something which they can revisit and they can develop. So my plan is about setting parameters if you like but those parameters are very flexible.

Narrator

In the babies' room the children are exploring paint, how it feels, and how it makes marks. The staff organise regular times to discuss the next steps in their planning.

Teacher

They've done painting today, so we could extend their experience of painting and take them into the stone playroom to give them a different concept cos they can use the bigger easels, cos the painting's gone really well today hasn't it, they've really enjoyed it. They've explored the paint the texture.

Teacher

I think it would be interesting to compare it using the easel cos they'll, well those who can stand will be standing up.

Teacher

Cos it's at their level ...

Teacher

And they might possibly use the brush thing cos today

Teacher

Cos I don't know if it was cos the paper was placed on the floor, maybe they'll ...

Teacher

Well it'll be interesting to see cos the paper's gonna be on the wall isn't it, well on the easel, it's going to be upright.

Teacher

Yeah, it'll be a you know face view.

Teacher

He may want to do more.

Rod

I think I'm going to see if this fits on here. Look how this has bent round.

Narrator

The pyramid structure is growing and changing as the children try out ideas, talk with Rod, and observe each other. The practitioners at St. Thomas Centre have been influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy. This approach emphasises the ways in which children can express their ideas through many forms of creativity.

Rod

Reggio has been influential for me in terms of my own art practice. I haven't been there, I confess I've got things second-hand but it's still been valuable for me to see. I saw the touring exhibition that was put on by colleagues here and Reggio obviously, and I thought that was excellent art practice. The children were collecting visual information, they were collecting information from different sources, first-hand, secondary sources, and then they were allowed to explore and then finally produce some stunning work.

Narrator

Noting down what the children say and do, and how they respond to activities, informs future planning.

Teacher

Was Mia and Elise and Hay Yung and Ishmael all working very hard, all concentrating, lots of language going on, and Mia was saying I've twisted it I've done it. And Ishmael got upset cos he'd broken it and it's broken now, I can't do it. So there was lots of interaction going on with Rod as well, lots of chat.

Teacher

Were they able to actually they were attaching things weren't they Julie, were they able to ...

Julie.

With support, yeah, with support I think, and Rod was helping cos you were working with Rod as well wasn't you.

Teacher

Yeah. I mean Elise could Elise could thread those fasteners from the garden centre, the green fasteners, I think they're quite useful. And Ishmael could do it, took a bit of practice cos there were two holes and they were experimenting with both of them, but as a fastening device I think they're quite useful. And I think we could probably use them again in a different situation. One problem with it was the structure was getting kicked down towards the end.

Teacher

Yeah it was very unstable. They did practice a lot of joining techniques, and in discussion with Rod, it was suggested that we could use perhaps rolls, big tubular rolls, plastic rolls, with holes drilled through and withies soaked in water, and we could adapt that with the clay so the plastic tubings could go in the clay which ties in with Mia's interest when she was working with the cardboard rolls. And perhaps have those in clay and then attach the withies in through the holes and then the plastic pipe cleaners that they were using, not plastic the furry pipe cleaners, those could go through. You could put the plastic clips through, so they could actually ...

Teacher

So they're going to combine the clay, and the structure ...on a smaller scale as well.

Teacher

On a smaller scale, yeah, and that will be indoors and also Rod's gonna go to the resource centre to pick up netting and also those plastic tubings.

Narrator

At Castleton Playgroup in Newport, South Wales, practitioners make an early start on their planning.

Jane Bradley

The planning for today's session started ooh back in July last year, with the staff getting together to make up our long-term plan, and we get together, we decide what topics we're going to have, are there any festivals which need to be included in our plan. We have a plan which we follow a medium-term plan which states activities and what we need to do for that term. And then from there it carries on to our short-term plan which comes down to a week by week, and that's half-term when the staff do that. And then down to a daily plan, it's all got to be very flexible. The activity in the farm shop this morning was meant to be a weighing activity, but the children involved me in a different way, and so we went with the flow, and it turned out to be a counting activity and an activity to see how many and, how many more do we need, and that sort of thing.

Narrator

And there are always unforeseen events which haven't been planned for, but which just have to be included, like a camera crew coming into film.

Jane Bradley

The main activities today revolved around the filming. We felt this was too good an opportunity for the children to miss, to be able to look at the cameras, have a little look through the viewfinder, have a look at the microphones, and just generally to have the experience of a proper television camera. Which is something that they probably will never ever have, in their lives, I certainly have not had that. So we thought right, if it was alright with the people we would let the children have a go. But this was a flexible activity we hadn't planned this back in July, because this only came up in March. The children made cameras today, they were shown a camera, and people talked about the camera to them, and then they were asked to go away and make their own camera, physically. Be something like they saw, or it could be their own, whatever they wanted to do. Playgroup is all about is their own creativity.