



PLANNING CYCLE STEPS

Made Simple

Jodie Clarke
The Empowered Educator

Hi Empowered Ed!

I truly hope you find this resource helpful.



A little about me...

Hi, I'm Jodie! I am a Mum in Australia to 3 girls - twins Ruby & Tara and my adult daughter Ashleigh. And I love the possibilities of early learning!

I'm passionate about helping educators **simplify** their documentation and planning and also enjoy more time engaging with the children in their care through **simple** play based activities & environments.

I enjoy creating blog posts, free tools and easy to use resources and training for educators, leaders and coordinators by drawing upon my 30 years experience in this profession.

I know what support educators really need because I have walked in your shoes. This profession is challenging enough so I aim to simplify not overcomplicate! My resources walk through the basics so you can take action.

The Facts.....

- I hold an Associate Diploma in Education (Child care)
- I hold an Advanced Certificate in Child Care
- I hold a Bachelor of Human Services Degree
- I have worked as an Assistant, Room Leader, Director, FDC Coordinator, IHC Coordinator, OSHC Coordinator, Occasional Care Coordinator, Project Manager, Service Manager, Family Day Care Educator, Presenter and Speaker in the Early Childhood and Community and Family Services fields.
- I have been writing and editing my blog now for over 6 years.
- I am the author of many E- Book resources for educators, A Postnatal Depression Workbook (& DVD) and a picture book for children.
- I have developed and presented webinars and online courses to support early childhood educators in their role.

Thanks for placing your trust in me....

Jodie Clarke

The Planning Cycle Made Simple

Working as an early childhood educator is a rewarding job and there are some very dedicated and talented professionals in our field of work but let's be honest...it can be a lot of work meeting programming requirements, Australian EYLF learning outcomes and scheme, centre or coordination unit regulations.

I've learnt it's important to use your time efficiently and ensure you have systems in place that work for you. I know from visiting forums, emails through my blog and messages on my [facebook page](#) that many educators are struggling the most with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) outcomes and fitting in their planning and programming.

Although programming does take time and often has to be completed at night or weekends it *doesn't need to take over* and it certainly doesn't need to be as stressful as I often see educators making it. I think in their quest to understand and ensure they are meeting all requirements, educators are often trying to do more and more to show potential assessors and scheme coordinators that they are fulfilling programming duties.

But try not to fall into the trap of doing a little bit of everything to try and cover all areas which takes a long time and yet often doesn't actually achieve any of the outcomes well. But it does ensure stress! I firmly believe quality is better than quantity when it comes to programming.

Let's step back a little and **explore what we as educators actually need to do to ensure we are programming correctly and meeting the planning cycle steps as well as EYLF outcomes**. I will give you examples below of the documentation and strategies *I personally use* to meet those steps but please keep in mind that this is a system that works for me and won't suit everyone.

This is by no means a comprehensive list, think of it as an overview to use as a launch pad for extension perhaps.

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What do we actually need to do?

Develop Your Philosophy

Develop your own personal philosophy and ensure you understand your scheme philosophy. Keep it simple. Mine is only a few paragraphs...you don't need to write an essay, just list a few of the methods, beliefs and passions that are important to you as a professional working with children in your home and that also reflect the core elements and wording of the *EYLF outcomes*. Refer to it often when programming.

Your Planning

Decide on a program template that suits how you work and understand things. Don't try to copy one you don't fully understand or that takes you hours to complete. Draw up a few drafts to get something you can work with comfortably. I went through about 5 different templates before I settled on the one below.

 Fortnightly Curriculum Plan for Week Beginning

Children attending

Intentional Teaching Opportunities	Children's Ideas & Interests	Individual Focus Activities
Exploring Our World	Inviting our Imagination In	Let's Get Moving

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My Program From..... to.....

Exploring Our World	Inviting our Imagination In	Let's Get Moving
Creative and Sensory Play	Encouraging Identity & Independence	Connecting through Communication

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My Program From..... to.....

Fine Motor/Manipulative	Spontaneous Moments & Children's Ideas & Interests	Intentional Teaching Opportunities
Everyday Experiences	Individual Focus Activities	Family/Leader Input

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Looking Forward to

Reflections from this program plan
(What worked, what didn't, why? Children's voices- what did they tell me?)

Ideas for next plan:
(Ideas for extensions of learning from the observations, reflections and children's interests noted during this program)

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I needed to try them out and see how it all came together before I was happy to move forward confidently. ***Keep in mind that you are not just doing all this work just for a CDO, assessor or parent to see.*** Most won't have time to read them at great length but **you will!**

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I do a program *for my own benefit first and foremost* so it needs to work for me as well as to show how I am meeting regulations and EYLF outcomes. **Don't fall into the time consuming trap of writing a fancy program for others that doesn't actually make sense to you. Don't feel you need to link every single one of your activities to an outcome...**it will be obvious to those who need to know and if you have a thorough understanding of the EYLF you won't need to be continuously writing links to outcomes down.

On the template above you can see that I prefer the old style box method of planning. It's how I was first taught many years ago and it is how I am most comfortable. You don't need to throw away all that you have previously used or learnt just because the EYLF is new to you...what you need to do is *modify*.

After reading through the EYLF document I devised area headings for each box that directly relate to outcomes and the terminology...so I know that if I have all of those areas filled in I am covering all outcomes. I don't need to add links. Some weeks the program will focus a little more on some areas than others but this is ok. It depends on the children's emerging interests and our current learning focus and it is the ongoing learning that is important to show across all of your programming.

I display the first 2 pages for parents on my noticeboard and the **third page has space for me to reflect on the week's activities briefly**...what worked, what didn't, moments that stood out, activities I could extend on and ideas for next week's planning. This reflection takes me 10 minutes and also provides a clear link to the next program.

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I know that if I have all of those areas filled in I am covering all outcomes. I don't need to add links.

You don't need colour coding, tricky symbols and complicated linking systems to demonstrate your planning for individual children and groups is focused on the 5 learning outcomes. Your activities will do that, your environment will do that, your parent communication and your individual child records and documentation will do that.

But you do need to read the EYLF and think about the activities and environment you plan and present to the children. You need to show *spontaneous activities* that have occurred during the week, *intentional teaching opportunities*, space for *parent feedback or questions*, some *activities that have developed from the children's interests* (things that you noticed last week), and *individual focus activities* (from your observations and analysis – see below). How you do this is up to you.

I'm not going to go through all the different methods as I'm sure you have explored most of them already at length! But remember to **find or develop a template that works for you**. Decide whether it is a **weekly, fortnightly or monthly program** and don't be afraid to go back and re edit areas that might not be working for you.

I'm a writer so I find it easy to fill in the form I have devised. I tend to write more than I need to but it makes sense to me and only takes me around 15 minutes and then another 10 minutes to do the reflection and forward planning.

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Observing and Recording

Again work out what suits you and how you work rather than what you have seen others doing. I take a lot of digital camera photos and find them a wonderful prompt when I get the time to sit and reflect on individual and group learning, interests and achievements.

The idea of individual records is so that you can identify and note strengths, interests and goals. There are many ways of doing this including... *Formal Observations Learning Stories Photo Collages showing the process of an activity, interest or strength with or without text Portfolios containing information about each child's personality, interests, needs, artwork and activity examples, documentation of learning and progress achieved. Mind maps And many, many others!* What is important to know is that you don't **HAVE** to do any of those things listed above. *It is not a requirement, there is no regulation that states you need to use these documentation formats and if you do with what frequency. Yes you read that right I promise!*

What you do need to demonstrate is **written evidence of a *planning cycle* which can show you are observing, noticing, recording, planning and evaluating.** There also needs to be **written evidence of children's progress towards the Learning Outcomes.** But once you have your own system in place it's not as time consuming as it seems. If you have been in early childhood for a while you will have learnt to observe and evaluate according to children's developmental stages and progress. This can still be important but the EYLF asks us to consider the child's strengths and what they can currently do rather than their deficits which I find so much easier!

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Once you identify a strength or skill that is of particular interest to the child or you as an educator you can then plan to extend or challenge this strength through your planned activities rather than noting what they can't do according to developmental checklists and plan to 'improve' their skill or developmental level which could often be rather limiting to both the child and educator.

I have heard some educators express concern that we are no longer focusing on developmental stages and something 'might be missed' but all educators should still have a **good working knowledge of developmental milestones and early childhood development and stages** so this will also continue to **inform your practise**. Just in a different form.

I personally don't have time to be constantly taking notes, I prefer to be fully engaged with the children and take lots of photos of special moments and general play. I use photos later when I have child free time to really reflect and as the basis for my parent communication, my observations of their learning, my critical reflections, my forward planning and as a way to bring my cycle together. You can see some examples of how I use photos in my planning below.

CHILD OBSERVATION Name: Tara Date: 18.9.14 Location: Backyard activity table

Age at time of observation: 4.2 yrs



Tara's Learning Journey....

Tara is showing an increasing interest in building materials and exploring how things work. In this activity she explored nuts, bolts and nails and found out what happened when she applied the large magnet to the tray of bolts... "They sticking cause they metal and gold!" Tara showed me how she could pull them off with her fingers and then place them into the sorting tray beside her. "You need to put them into big, small and little" She spent quite some time picking up the metal objects and sorting them into the tray while talking about what she was doing. When I asked if she could pick up the wooden discs with the magnet she responded "No that one doesn't work". Tara used her play to investigate and explore and was able to persevere and experience the satisfaction of an achievement when using the magnet and sorting. She returned to the wooden disc a number of times and told me "it doesn't pick it up cause it's not gold you know" after her third try. She demonstrated that she was using reflective thinking to consider why things might happen and continued to explore the materials and investigate as she worked. Tara told me "I might pick up some rocks with the magnet tomorrow, that's a good idea".

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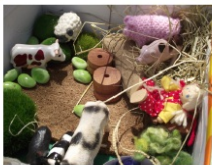
My advice would be not to get caught up in what you 'have' to show, not to get down about the time it takes you away from the children and play, not to overthink the process. Just do what you can manage in a way that makes sense to you. Sometimes I don't get to my observations until the weekend but a quick scroll through photos or the daily communication forms I write for parents prompts me to remember something I wanted to acknowledge and extend upon.



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Child Name: _____ Observation Date : _____ Educator : _____



What story do the photos tell us?

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Who's Playing Today?
Ruby, Tara, Tessa, Alex (welcome Alex!)





Our Day
30.1.14

What learning evolved today through activities & play:

We welcomed Alexandra to our group today and made sure she had lots of fun! Tara, Tessa and Alex were very involved in the sand and water cooking in the outdoor kitchen. They made so many creations I had to add another table for them to work on! **This activity encouraged the use of fine motor skills, social interaction, communication, self help skills and the use of the imagination.**

Alex enjoyed mixing up some baby food with sand and coloured water and then feeding the baby in the high chair. She was very engrossed in this activity and didn't stop until the bowl was empty! **This activity allowed Alex to engage in role play and use lots of communication with her baby.**

Tessa and Ruby spent a lot of time using the wooden beads to thread necklaces. Tessa looked through the box and found all the 'really small' beads and then began looking only for the red beads. **This activity encouraged eye hand coordination, use of the pincer grip, self help strategies, problem solving and creative thinking and size and colour recognition.**

We all danced the Wiggly Woo using coloured scarves and played the dance and freeze game to music. **This activity got our gross motor muscles working and encouraged listening skills, colour recognition and the concepts of fast and slow.**

We played a clap and count game and took it in turns to choose a number from the feltboard. **This activity encouraged number recognition and order as well as challenging our listening skills!**

Ruby, Tessa and Alex concentrated very hard on making playdough creations using different materials such as cutters, knives (play only), straws and pasta shapes. **This activity encouraged the exploration of creativity and self awareness as well as fine motor skills, communication, turn taking and social play.**

Where this might lead us:

- I will extend the outdoor cooking activity by adding some herbs and leaves from our vegetable garden which the children can help me to pick.
- I'll extend on the interest shown in counting by adding some counting games and songs to our program next week.



From the children:

Tara said "I'm making some coffee cereal for my baby" Yummy!

Tessa said "I need my shoes and this princess dress cause I'm dancing now" And she was!

Alex said "I'm doing red painting now" Very important work it was!

Ruby said "I need to cut dolly's hair cause she's at my hairdresser shop now" I got a little tidy up myself at the girls beauty shop!

A very busy day and all 4 girls played well together while still exploring their own creativity!





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Remember to take into account **how often a child attends your service and their current needs**. I know you already know the children in your care well and if I asked you what they are currently interested in, doing well, having some trouble with or asking questions about I know you could tell me so let that be an indicator of what you can record.

You don't need to be constantly writing and assessing or plastering sticky notes everywhere no matter what people might tell you! You just need to be looking and documenting when something really stands out to you over a period of time.

The reason for observing and documenting regularly is to *ensure no one child is being overlooked so don't go overboard with the frequency*. Don't write an observation just because you as the educator need one for this month. It's a waste of your time and the child's. If you feel your scheme has this expectation of you then question it from an informed position, understand why you are doing them and explain your process.

Use what you see each day and already know to inform your documentation and grow from there. *Be able to explain your system and the reasoning behind it to others.*

Analysis, Reflection and Evaluation

I need to see things **clearly set out** to be able to make sense of a planning cycle. I don't like to clutter my program or my individual and group observation forms with lots of links and reflections so I devised a separate form to tie my observations and planning template together. I used to keep it in my programming folder until completed for that child and then slip it into their personal file folder – now I just save it in a computer file as part of each child's 'digital learning portfolio'. This might seem like too much work to you but it's how I need to document to allow my system to be efficient, useful, show clear links, critical reflection and above all **not waste my time**.

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Ok...stay with me! So you have a **planning template** you are filling out weekly, fortnightly or monthly, you have decided on a method or two (or 3 or 4, whatever works for you) for **documenting individual and group learning**....now you need to show *how your individual and group observations inform your forward planning*.

I use the form below to tie everything together easily. I simply tick the observation format I have used in the left column which might also include the daily reflections I send home for parents as they always include the children's voices and moments of importance and learning. I then write a **brief analysis** of the learning evident from this observation and then add a few ideas to extend on this skill, learning or new interest. Pretty simple really and doesn't take much time.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING – ANALYSIS AND FORWARD PLANNING RECORD

Child Name: Date : Educator :

Ob Format Used & Date	Analysis of Learning	Future Planning Ideas	Program Date	Planned Activity Evaluation

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INDIVIDUAL LEARNING – ANALYSIS AND FORWARD PLANNING RECORD

Date : Child's Name :

Format & Date	Analysis of Learning	Future Planning	Program/Plan Date	Planned Activity Evaluation
Daily Reflection "Our Day"				
Formal Obs Or Learning Story				
Photo Collage Obs				

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Observation for Georgie 5.3.14

Georgie approached the table with cleaning foam in her hand. She has shown some resistance to get her hands messy in previous sensory activities. After pressing her hands on the table she kept turning them toward her to investigate. She said 'yuck' and after 2 more times she washed them in the bucket of water. As she washed she found the sponge and took it back over to the table to begin cleaning as she came close to but not touching the coloured foam.

Individual Learning - Analysis and Forward Planning Record
 Child's Name: Georgie
 Date: 9.3.14

Format & Date	Analysis of Learning	Forward Planning	Planned Activity/Challenge
Daily Reflection "Our Day" Formal Obs Or Learning Story Photo Collage Obs	Through this new by Georgie demonstrated an interest in play investigating, exploring, touching, squeezing, adding colour to 'clean up'. Teaching new behaviours but not wanting to engage for too long. Expressing emotion and using communication to show discomfort with the sensory experience. A growing interest in cleaning her environment in 'helping' tasks.	Showing foam with dish mops and sponges. Add colour to 'clean up'.	Georgie was using her dish mops on the table and got very absorbed in the task and asked 'yuck' when she washed her hands. She then said 'yuck' when she washed her hands. She then said 'yuck' when she washed her hands.

5.3.14

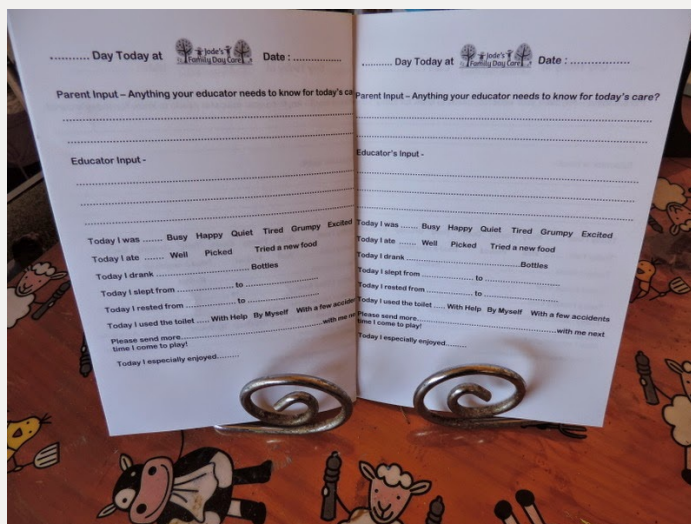
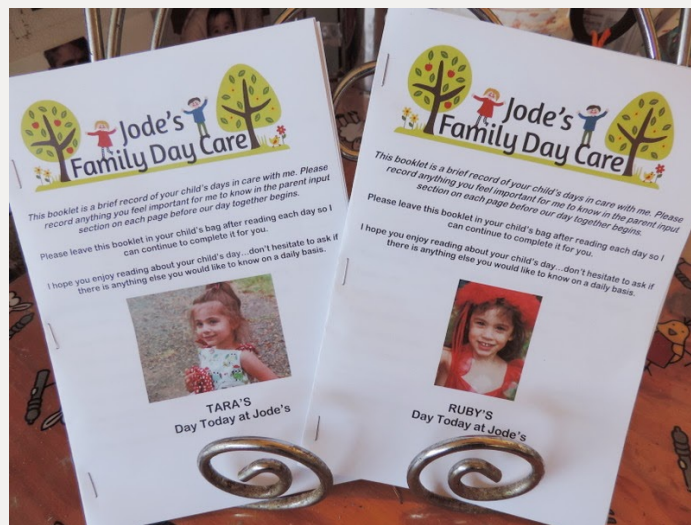
I then write in a date I plan to add this activity to my program template (and add this to the child focus box on my plan with a link to the obs date) and later come back and reflect on the planned activity briefly. This might not happen straight away but it does happen eventually!

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Environment and Evidence

I don't have lots of little boxes that tell everyone I am linking to certain outcomes. I have a **wide variety of planned and spontaneous activities occurring in my program,**

I have an environment indoors and outdoors that reflects children's current interests and developmental levels, I have a comprehensive parent communication system in place which offers opportunities for parent feedback and program input, displays of children's artwork and photos of past and present activities, evidence of welcoming children and helping them to belong when they attend my service.



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My Day Today		Date
My Day in photos	How was my day today?	
	Today I was.... Happy ☒ Busy ☐ Tired ☐ A little sad	
	Today I ate.... Well ☐ Just picked ☒ Loved eating	
	Today I drank.... bottles. Today I slept from to Today I rested from to Today I used the toilet By myself ☐ With help ☐ With a few accidents ☒	
Educator Notes Next time I come to play please send more.... My favourite activity today was....		

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My Day Today at Jode's

Name Date.....

Message from Jode.....
This space is to add a general message about anything of concern or a special moment or a reminder or something to do with the child's day and wellbeing.

Today I was.... Happy and busy

Today I ate.... Well, loved the cakes she "made with grandma"

Today I drank n/a **Bottles**

Today I slept from 12.30 **to** 2.30

Today I used the toilet All By myself

Next time I come to play please send more.... Spare clothes please

My favourite activities today were....
Sensory play with the rice, bowls and spoon
Spray bottle painting and mixing colours to make new ones
Singing songs to the toddlers using the finger puppets




Our Day Today

Favourite moments




What learning evolved today?

Children's Voices

Where might this lead us?



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I offer activities each day that I know will promote learning for each particular group but I also plan additional activities, intentional teaching opportunities and interactions that form the basis for individual development and learning. My documentation merely helps me plan activities for learning efficiently and effectively and helps to demonstrate over time the children's ongoing learning while in my care. What I'm trying to say is your *environment, everyday planning, parent communication, health and hygiene practises and interactions with the children* are just as important in the context of *evidence* as your planning cycle and documentation are so if you are getting stressed about the planning, work on your other areas first and gradually tie it all together in a way that suits you and the children..not an assessor or coordinator.

Please remember that this is just my interpretation of planning, programming and documentation as a home/family day care educator, what works for me may not for you or your scheme may have more specific requirements of you. Hopefully you will feel more confident to ask for clarification or support if you don't understand their expectations though!

What I can tell you for sure is that I have been on visits with assessors over the years and what they will look at first and foremost is your interactions and activities with the children, parent communication methods, the materials and resources you have in your environment, evidence of a strong commitment to outdoor play and sustainability, photos of previous play and learning activities and a clear planning cycle that works well for you and shows a pattern of children's ongoing learning. Not pretty portfolios, reams of scribbled notes, fancy charts, colour coded programs and lots of ticked boxes.

Take the stress off your shoulders and get back to doing what you do best....helping children in your care to *Belong, Be and Become!*

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