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Child Centred Programming and
Planning in Family Day Care

What are we trying to do in FDC?

Being an educator in Family Day Care is increasingly complex!

At one stage the main goals for someone working in FDC were to keep the children they were caring for safe so they could be returned to their families at the end of the day and to make sure they were happy while they were with us.

Now, things have progressed.

An educator's role is still to keep children safe and happy but also to make sure they are learning while they are in our care.

We know that a human learns more in the first five years of life than they do at any other time in their lives, and if they are going to spend time in Family Day Care it is important that during this time they learn as much as they can.

Children need to learn new skills and knowledge and build on the skills and knowledge they already have. They need to learn through play because we know that play is the most important way for children to learn, as supported by the *Early Years Learning Framework*: "Play can expand children's

thinking and enhance their desire to know and learn" (page 17).

They need us, as educators, to give them the resources and experiences that will help them learn the most.

**In Family Day Care,
we are supporting
children in developing
all skills and assisting
in their learning.**



What is planning and programming?

Planning and programming is what you do as an educator to work out what you are going to do with the children while they are with you.

What is the difference between curriculum, planning and programming?

These words are used so interchangeably in education and care that it is no wonder that everybody is a bit confused as to what they all mean!

For the purpose of this topic – *Child Centred Planning and Programming*, we will define the words like this:

- ▶ **Planning:** the process of designing experiences and activities aimed at developing and extending a child's thinking, skills, interests, and abilities. (Educators sometimes call this process “programming”.)
- ▶ **The program:** a written version of the plan.

- ▶ **Curriculum:** ‘all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur at an education and care service’. (This definition comes from the *Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 45; adapted from Te Whariki).

This is telling us to remember that children also learn from things that we do not plan for – such as how we relate to the children, how we carry out routines such as nappy changing and those things that occur in a child's day that we haven't planned for, but just happen.

Educators are asked to plan for children through a constant process of thinking clearly about what experiences they are providing for children and why.

Because parents must be able to see the program for their child, it needs to be documented in some way. This might be on paper, on a written program displayed on a wall, or via a computer program.

Where does the cycle of planning fit in?

The assessment and planning cycle process includes: observation, analysing learning, documentation, **planning**, implementation, and reflection. In this topic we are concentrating mostly on the actual planning part of the planning cycle.

“Every educator plans what they are doing with their children in some way or another. This topic is about making the way you plan, child centred.”



What are the different ways we have done planning and programming in FDC before?

Some educators have been Family Day Care educators for over 30 years! They have seen many different methods of curriculum planning come and go in Family Day Care.

As we learn more about children and how they learn and as the expectations of educators change, so do the methods of planning for children.

Since the introduction of the National Quality Standard, it has been made clear that curriculum development and planning/programming in education and care is to be **child centred** and based on ‘**each child’s current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests**’ (Element 1.1.2). Child centred curriculum planning is at the very core of the EYLF and MTOP and at the core of the National Quality Standard.

So, how did we use to do planning?

There are probably as many different methods of planning as there are educators and educational theorists, but some of the older methods include:

- ▶ **Theme based** – based on topics chosen from different sources such as upcoming events, cultural holidays, seasons, etc. The educator would plan and prepare their program in advance, and it relies a lot on the educator directly teaching the child about the theme.
- ▶ **Boxes** – a paper-based programming method that would provide a variety of activity areas to educators (e.g., music, art, literacy, dramatic play) and an educator would choose an appropriate activity for each area and offer them all to the children to engage in. This often involves the educator thinking up “new” activities.
- ▶ **Developmentally appropriate practice programming** – educators were taught that children develop in general, sequential and predictable patterns in physical, social, emotional and cognitive areas. Educators would use this information when they were planning activities and structuring the environment. (Of course, children do not all learn and develop predictably!)





How do you plan?

How do you plan as a Family Day Care educator?

- ▶ Do you get out of bed each morning and quickly throw an idea of the day together before the first children arrive, adapting as the day goes on?
- ▶ Do you set up the same basic activity types each day – an art space, a literacy activity, a movement activity?
- ▶ Do you set learning goals for each child and spend time working out activities to help each child meet those goals?
- ▶ Do you plan a program breaking it down into month-long activities for the entire year?
- ▶ Do you sit down once a week and plan on a blank program sheet?
- ▶ Do you never actually plan in advance but write up what you do once you have done it?
- ▶ Do you observe what children are interested in and then come bursting with new ideas, changing things daily?

- ▶ Do you allow free play every minute of every day but try and make sure you have time to throw in plenty of questions to stimulate learning?
- ▶ Do you just know what the children you care for like and make sure you do some of this every day?

None of these methods are right or wrong! But some are definitely more likely to end up with children learning and some of these are much more child centred than others.

Remember that the main thing we want is for children to learn while they are in our care.

Children learn when they are playing, experimenting, asking questions, observing, when they are taught, when they experience things and in a million other ways.

But we know children learn more easily by playing and by experimenting through play than by any other means.

What do the Learning Frameworks and the National Quality Standard and the Regulations say?

The *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), My Time, Our Place (MTOPI)* and the National Quality Standard lay the foundations and expectations for us to use child centred curriculum planning.



The Early Years Learning Framework

The EYLF says that:

“Viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities for educators to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn. This requires educators to respect and work with each child’s unique qualities and abilities.”

What does this actually mean?

1. Children can work out what they want and need to learn
2. Don't have preconceived ideas about what children can do and learn

Standard 1 of the NQS

Standard 1.1 of the National Quality Standard requires that the educational program enhances each child's learning and development. The Guide to the NQF puts it this way:

“With guidance from the educational leader, educators: ...

- ▶ **develop the educational program based on their knowledge of each child so that the interactions, experiences, routines and events that each child engages in are relevant to them, respectful of their background and recognise and build on their current strengths, abilities and interests**
- ▶ **ensure that the interactions, experiences, routines and events included in the educational program maximise opportunities for children's learning”**

What does this actually mean?

1. What you plan for children to do must be based on what you know about each child

2. Each part of your program must be designed to help children learn

Elements 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 of the National Quality Standard

Element 1.1.1 demands that an approved learning framework guides the development of the curriculum and Element 1.1.2 demands that an educator's program is child centred.

- ▶ **“Element 1.1.1 Approved learning framework - Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.**
- ▶ **Element 1.1.2 Child Centred - each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.”**

What does this actually mean?

1. Think about the outcomes of the EYLF/MTOP when you are planning for your children

2. Make sure when you are planning you think about what each child likes, knows, and can already do

R73, R74 and R75 of the Education and Care Regulations

The regulations and the law demand that as an educator you follow an approved learning framework (e.g., the EYLF or MTOP).

Regulation 73 demands that as an educator you offer an educational program that contributes to the following outcomes for each child—

- ▶ the child will have a strong sense of identity
- ▶ the child will be connected with and contribute to his or her world
- ▶ the child will have a strong sense of wellbeing
- ▶ the child will be a confident and involved learner
- ▶ the child will be an effective communicator.

Regulation 74 demands that you document for a child under school age:

- ▶ assessments of the child's developmental needs, interests, experiences and participation in the educational program; and
- ▶ assessments of the child's progress against the outcomes of the educational program

And for a child over preschool age:

- ▶ evaluations of the child's wellbeing, development and learning.

Regulation 75 and 76 demands that

- ▶ information about the contents and operation of the educational program is displayed at a place accessible to parents and information about the content and operation of the educational program and the child's participation in the program be given to a parent on request.

What does this actually mean?

1. Your program has to help your children meet the outcomes of EYLF / MTOP and be based on what you know about each child. It has to be relevant to them, respect their background and be based on what they can do, what they know and what they are interested in.
2. You have to assess each child's progress and participation in the program
3. You have to have a written copy of the program and children's assessments available for parents.



What is child centred planning and programming?

Child centred planning means planning that offers children the choice of:

- ▶ what they play
- ▶ how they play and
- ▶ who they play with.

It means as an educator letting children start and direct their own play – you are there to assist and guide them rather than directly teach them.

Child centred planning recognises that children learn from what they do, from what interests them, and from testing and trialling things.

Think about a baby learning to pull themselves up. You know that they learn this by repeatedly trying. By trying and falling, and trying and falling, until they get to the stage when they can do it – at least for a few seconds. You also know it's the first step to them eventually walking. So, what do you plan for the baby learning to pull themselves up? You don't sit them down and teach them how to pull up. But you might make a

mental note to have stable furniture around that they can pull up on and then spend time applauding them each time they try. The baby eventually learns to pull themselves up from doing what interested them and from testing it.

Child centred planning is also about making sure that each child's:

- ▶ current knowledge
- ▶ strengths
- ▶ ideas
- ▶ culture
- ▶ abilities; and
- ▶ interests

are the foundation of the program.

To plan like this, you need to **know** each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, cultural abilities and interests! Luckily, Family Day Care educators know these things about the children they care for!



The regs, law, EYLF and MTOP and NQS demand one thing in common – that your programming be child centred – that it be based on your knowledge of each child.



“In early childhood education curriculum, children construct their own knowledge from their experiences and interactions with the world around them. Educators foster children’s growth and development by building on children’s interests, needs and strengths within a safe and caring environment.”¹

1. [Child-Centred Curriculum Planning \(0-5 years\): Self-Guided Learning Package](#)

When your planning is child centred

When your planning is child centred:

- ▶ it's based around play
- ▶ it's based on the needs, abilities, and interests of the children you care for
- ▶ it's set up in a way that children can initiate changes to it
- ▶ it values the culture of each child and what they have learnt from that culture

The environment and experiences you provide for children match their developing skills and interests.

They enable children to:

- ▶ choose what they do and when they do it
- ▶ initiate and direct their own play
- ▶ engage in open ended experiences where they can be creative and solve problems
- ▶ develop their independence
- ▶ direct their own learning and reflect on their own learning.

Why is it important?

Why is it important that your planning and programming be child centred?

1. Because it is now understood to be the best way to plan and program in early education.
2. Because the child owns their own learning process. When you follow a child's interests the learning is more meaningful, and children learn more deeply.
3. Because it is the basis of the curriculums you must follow – the EYLF and MTOP
4. Because it is required in the National Quality Standard:

Element 1.1.2 Child Centred – each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program

What would you see children doing in FDC when an educator was implementing child centred planning?

When an educator is implementing child centred planning and you went to their service, the children would be deeply engaged in play. You would see the children playing together or as a group but they would have chosen to do this activity at this time by themselves – the educator would not have set up one activity for all children to do at a set time.

The Guide to the National Quality Framework says that you would see children:

- ▶ “initiating and contributing to play experiences that emerge from their own ideas and interests
- ▶ repeating, revisiting and adding to projects or experiences that they have initiated
- ▶ developing strong foundations in the culture and language of their family and in that of the broader community, without compromising their cultural identities

2. [Guide to the National Quality Framework](#).

- ▶ indicating their deep involvement in experiences that are rich and meaningful to them through verbal and non-verbal responses, and sustained concentration
- ▶ exploring ideas and theories in play by using their imagination and creativity
- ▶ engaging in play during long periods of uninterrupted time.”²

The Reggio Emilia approach to early education is a child centred approach. In Reggio Emilia, children are the main initiators of the learning process. Children are viewed as inspired by their own interest to know and learn – and as such can construct learning on their own based on what they want to learn. Children are seen as active collaborators in their own education.

How does play fit in?

Play is at the core of child centred planning and programming because we know that it is through play that children learn the most. Giving children opportunities to learn through play enables them to determine what they want to play with and with whom, for how long, what the rules (if any) will be, what the point of an activity is, and what the world they are creating through their play looks like. It enables them to repeat actions until they have mastered them. It enables them to experience joy in their learning. It puts each child at the centre of the action. It is truly child centred.

Establishing experiences where children can engage in play is planning in a child centred way. Think about:

- ▶ Sensory play (sand, water, mud)
- ▶ Dramatic play (dress-ups, a home corner, dolls)
- ▶ Water play
- ▶ Sand and dirt play
- ▶ Physically active play (obstacle course, climbing, running, jumping, dancing)



- ▶ Manipulative play
- ▶ Block play
- ▶ Books and story play
- ▶ Musical play
- ▶ Art play – drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, finger painting
- ▶ Construction play

All of these play experiences can be very much child centred.

The Early Years Learning Framework and My Time, Our Place tell us that:

“Play provides a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds as they engage actively with people, objects and representations.”

They also tell us that:

“Play is a context for learning that:

- ▶ *allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness*
- ▶ *enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity*

- ▶ *enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning*
- ▶ *assists children to develop relationships and concepts*
- ▶ *stimulates a sense of wellbeing.”*

They also tell us that: *“Play and leisure activities provide opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other’s thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children’s thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways, play can promote positive dispositions towards learning. Children’s immersion in their play illustrates how play enables them to simply enjoy being.”*



Planning your environment

As an educator you plan the environments that children learn in. You set up your house and garden so that children can play. You choose what is in those environments.

In child centred planning you need to make sure your environment allows children to engage independently in activities. Your environment needs to assist children to explore and learn, rather than hindering them.

“Some reflective questions to consider when planning the environment:

1. What are the interests of the children?
2. Does this environment enable children to discover, create, improvise and imagine?
3. Does this environment encourage children to explore and solve problems?
4. What are the children looking for each day and at different times of the day?
5. Are children offered opportunities to play by themselves, or as a group?

6. Are children offered opportunities to learn new and interesting skills in a safe and supportive environment?
7. Can children choose from a range of materials and equipment, and initiate their own play?
8. Are children offered the following range of balanced experiences within the curriculum?

- ▶ Art and crafts
- ▶ Physically active play
- ▶ Science, maths and technology
- ▶ Language and literacy experiences
- ▶ Construction and games
- ▶ Dramatic and imaginative play
- ▶ Music and movement
- ▶ Sensory play (water play, sand play)
- ▶ Nature and environmental experiences”³

3. [Child-Centred Curriculum Planning \(0-5 years\): Self-Guided Learning Package](#).

Setting up experiences

As an educator you choose what experiences children engage in by setting them up and selecting the materials.

In child centred planning, children must have different options of experiences to engage in at any time and that they have been established remembering the importance of play.

“Some reflective questions to consider when planning and implementing experiences:

1. Is this experience based on the children's needs and interests? Have children been actively involved in the planning?
2. Is the focus on the process, rather than the product?
3. When and how should the experience be introduced?
4. What age range/developmental level is the experience suitable for? How can it be modified or extended to suit all interests and skill levels?
5. What space, materials and equipment are available and needed for this experience?
6. How will I present the experience to encourage children's involvement and engagement?
7. What limits are appropriate for this experience?
8. Is the experience open-ended, flexible and does it provide children with choices?
9. How will I be involved in this experience?
10. How can I extend or modify the experience?
11. How can I document children's interactions and learning during this experience?
12. How can I assess this experience?⁴

4. Questions from [Child-Centred Curriculum Planning \(0-5 years\): Self-Guided Learning Package](#).

Documenting your program

As we explained earlier, the Regulations demand that your program be documented, and displayed for families.

- ▶ This **does not mean** it has to be put up on a wall and changed each week (but you can do this if you want).

You can use computer-based programming and planning techniques as long as you can show these to parents on request.

- ▶ This **does not mean** you have to do everything on your program and cannot do spontaneous activities.

Lots of educators adapt and change their program as they go to meet children's emerging interests.

- ▶ This **does not mean** that if you have a written program, you are doing everything you must do.

You must be able to show the full cycle of planning. You need to show that you:

- ▶ **Observe** and **collect information** on the children
- ▶ **Analyse** what you have observed

- ▶ **Plan** for further learning
- ▶ **Implement** what you have planned
- ▶ **Reflect** on how it went!

What is the best way to document a program?

Wouldn't it be easier if we were just given a template to fill out or a computer program to use to document your program? It might be, and some Family Day Care services do provide these for their educators.

But just as there are thousands of different educators, there are also a thousand ways of planning your program, then documenting it so that it makes sense to you and to the families of the children you are caring for.

With child centred programming your documentation has to show that the things you have planned come from children's current interests and knowledge.



A word on children's interests

Often we are taught that we need to note children's interests and extend on them. But we always need to make sure that we know what a child's interests actually are.

Say the child seems to have a fascination with caterpillars. We could believe that that is what they are interested in and think we need to extend their interest by looking at the entire life cycle of a caterpillar.

This may well be what their interest was, and as an educator you have extended that interest the right way.

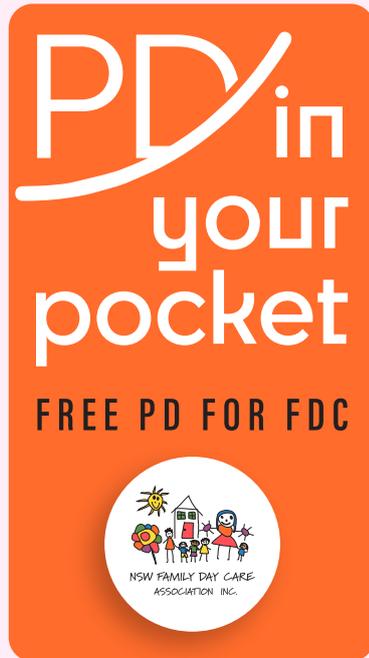
But what if their interest wasn't on the caterpillar itself, but on where it lived?

What if the child's interest was really about homes? Or what if the child was interested in movement and finding out if having so many legs helped the caterpillar move further or faster? If either of these were the case, then helping them learn about butterflies would fall way short of their actual interests.

Family Day Care educators get a lot of time to intimately get to know each child they provide care to, often over a number of years. How can you use this opportunity to ensure your programming is centred on what you know about your children? What you know about their interests and what you know about their skills?

How can you, as a Family Day Care educator use your deep knowledge of each child and their real interests and skills to help them learn?

This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Child Centred Programming and Planning in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

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“Children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves.”

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