

Why is Planning important in Early Childhood Education?

By Michael Hilkemeijer



At the heart of every effective curriculum, is a progressive plan for the learning and development of children in early childhood. In this member's exclusive technology in early childhood education resource, you will focus on programming and planning in early childhood settings in relation to the integration of ICT in early childhood learning activities.

Key teacher takeaways include:

- Understanding what early childhood education is.
- Developing an appreciation about what is planning in early childhood education.
- Why is planning important in early childhood education and for technology integration?
- Reflecting on the reason why is early childhood education important (its role in supporting child ICT capability).

Introduction

What is Early Childhood Education?

Early childhood education encompasses all forms of education including formal and informal from birth to 8 years of age. What highlights the importance of early childhood education itself is that in terms of a child's learning and development, providing a strong foundation is essential to a child's future success. This type of education is fundamental to their learning and can significantly shape their life.

What is Planning in early childhood education?

I begin by addressing the question 'What is planning in early childhood education' and point out that whatever curriculum that you teach within, planning in early childhood education is about laying the foundations for the child's future with the curriculum in the mainstream primary education setting.





It is about setting your environment to maximise the opportunities for learning to take place and about shaping your resources into a plan or 'map' This would typically include materials, spaces, furniture, other staff members, children, and time.

When focusing on the integration of ICT in early childhood education planning is about ensuring that ICT is viewed as a tool to support and enhance teaching and learning and not simply as a skill to be learned and an 'add-on' to the curriculum.

The planning and delivery of the learning programme in ECD in this regard enable you to thread ICT imaginatively through all early learning goals thus enhancing the quality of what is being taught and learned.

What is the Planning cycle in early childhood education?

Case Study: EYLF Planning Cycle

The EYLF planning cycle consists of four key aspects that are highlighted in the diagram below. Each represents a significant phase in planning in early childhood education.

The cycle of planning EYLF

- Observe – the process of gathering information.
- Analyse – questioning what learning and development is taking place to make meaning of what has been observed.
- Plan – planning the next steps to continue supporting learning and development.
- Act/Do – putting the plan into action.
- Reflect – evaluating the effectiveness of the plan.

How does the technology integration planning cycle fit into this?

Planning for integration is ensuring that ICT is viewed by young children as a tool used for a particular purpose and it also involves enabling them to understand and identify the many uses of ICT in their everyday lives. It is the key to making learning effective and exciting in addition, to facilitating learning progression in ICT capability and ICT literacy in young children. When planning the delivery of the curriculum, early childhood teachers traditionally use two approaches:

1. Thematic approach
2. An approach based on the EYLF.

The Australian Early Years Learning Framework reflects and supports programs and planning for technology integration in early childhood education and care settings. This is evident in the EYLF outcomes 4 and 5 where the use of technology is encouraged in the program and planning of learning activities and play. It is essential that documentation is used as an ongoing planning cycle so to keep track of every child's ICT knowledge and skills.

Why is planning important in early childhood education?

The importance of planning in early childhood education is that plans are the key to making learning effective, exciting, and progressive. Its purpose is to ensure that all children enjoy a balanced curriculum. They need to be responsive to children's learning, help you to develop and enrich the best opportunities for children and they should reflect your consideration about how children learn. The key to ensuring that children's learning is effective, exciting, and progressive toward the early learning goals is good planning.

Assessment integrated into the planning of a program in ECD is important because it enables you to partner with families, children, and other early childhood practitioners to plan effectively children's current and future learning.

Whilst the importance of planning based on assessment and observation must be recognised it is important to make provisional, long and medium plans that allow you to gather resources and consider how best to use the available time.

Every plan is, therefore, a working document that will repay your efforts and time in preparing a path for progression.

Strategic planning in early childhood education will help you to develop and enrich the best opportunities for children.

In general, there are several reasons why you need to plan: (Raban, 2010, p31)

- For organisation within the setting, to ensure that you know what you are doing and
- have the appropriate resources available.
- To make your work visible to colleagues, families and other professionals.
- To be able to discuss clearly what you are doing, as well as how and why, with parents and other professionals.



- To make sure you are developing a wide range of experiences for children through a variety of opportunities, both indoors and outdoors.
- To enable you to respond to each child as an individual, by reflecting on what you know about the children and what you identify for your teaching through documentation.
- To promote learning and development by supporting children's individual strengths and abilities as well as those of the group.
- To ensure you are maintaining appropriate challenges and stimulation for the children and supporting their active learning, while enabling them to experience success and achievement.
- To introduce new ideas and experiences.
- To help support any interests and strengths in children's experiences and learning.



What is the Importance of Technology in Preschool Activities?

The importance of technology in early childhood education lies deeply within the following reasons for its use:

Reason 1

Firstly, young children are already being exposed to ICT tools and as such it already has an effect on them and on the environment and people that surround them. ICT tools are becoming a ubiquitous component of the physical and social world. It is an important part of the private and work-life of most people, including young children.

Reason 2

This relates to the many opportunities and potential ICT delivers to the teaching and learning of the curriculum.

In early childhood, it can:

- Support and enhance learning and play experiences.
- Support and strengthen your professional learning as an early childhood teacher.
- Support and strengthen your relationships with parents and other people connected to your early childhood education centre.

Reason 3

Many curriculums are now supporting the integration of ICT across the education sector from early childhood to tertiary. Research shows that the delayed attention to ICT in early childhood has given the sector an advantage that while in the past attention has been given towards getting ICT infrastructure into schools without pedagogical support, the reverse is now occurring.

Reason 4

ICT supports metacognition or 'learning to learn'. It means knowing that you know and it provides the foundation to what an ICT capable child is.

Reason 5

The use of ICT in early childhood education supports many opportunities for creative development with young children. Through the use of ICT in role plays, they will employ imaginative thinking.

Reason 6

Language development is greatly enhanced when ICT is employed in learning environments. ICT tools and resources such as word processors may appear to be very basic, but remember the power of word processing is in the ease in which children can easily edit and change their writing whilst developing their language and literacy skills.

Reason 7

Children can increase their world knowledge through the use of modern technology such as the Internet.

Reason 8

The many features that ICT brings with it in the learning environment will in the end improve the fine and motor gross skills of children.

Reason 9

Mathematical development is also enhanced as a result of the visual images which computers can provide.

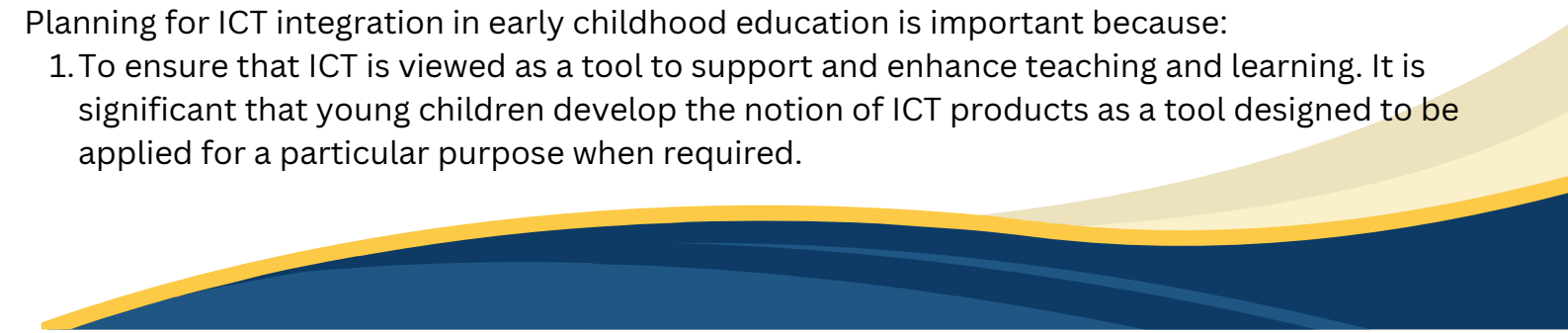
Reason 10

One of the many benefits that will come with the use of ICT in early childhood education is collaboration. This alone helps to build language with children in addition to developing their social skills.

Importance of Technology Integration Planning

When it comes to technology use, planned experiences in child care and education are essential so that you can build on their home experiences and promote a lasting learning progression in their technological literacy.

Planning for ICT integration in early childhood education is important because:

1. To ensure that ICT is viewed as a tool to support and enhance teaching and learning. It is significant that young children develop the notion of ICT products as a tool designed to be applied for a particular purpose when required.
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1. So that young children identify and find out about the everyday uses of technology in their lives.
2. Technology in early childhood education refers to planned educational experiences to introduce young children to technology situations and encourage positive technological experiences.
3. Other reasons why it is important for you as an early childhood educator to plan for technology integration whether it is intentional or in play-based learning.
4. Enables digital technology to be viewed as a tool to support and enhance teaching and learning.
5. Quality of what is taught and learned is further developed.
6. Effectiveness of the learning process is increased.
7. You become a more responsive educator.
8. Help children identify with technology in their lives
9. Encourages children to observe and talk about ICT
10. Develops their ICT capabilities and digital literacy capabilities.

Using ICT as a tool

The ultimate aim of any educator who intends to integrate technology in early childhood education is to develop ICT capabilities. This is only achieved when ICT is integrated into meaningful and purposeful contexts as tools are normally designed to be applied for particular purposes. As a result, the quality of what is taught and learned is further developed in addition to the effectiveness of the learning process being increased.

Responsive educator

Additionally, planning enables you to become a more responsive educator because as we know children enter your learning environment with levels of ICT capability and so planning enables you gain an appreciation of where they are and to build, respect and value their expertise in technology.

Identifying technology

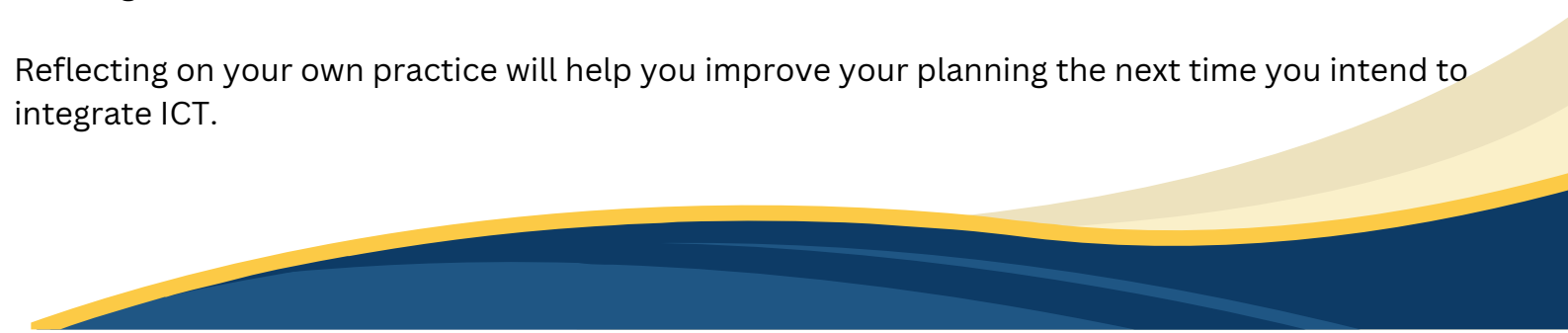
When you plan for technology integration you are helping children in your care identify and find the uses of technology in their everyday life. You can encourage them to observe and talk about the use of ICT in the environment on local walks, for example. Children should be finding out and identifying the uses of technology in their everyday lives, and they should be using computers and programmable to support their learning.

Helps to reflect

Having a reflective practice is important in early childhood education. It allows you to improve your teaching practices.

To select evidence for accreditation in the APST, you are required to provide critical reflections on and analysis of practice in ICT integration in early childhood education. For example, standard descriptor 2.6.2 requires a critical reflection on the use of technology and its relevance for children's learning. 3.4.2 requires a critical reflection relating to the use of ICT resources with young children and standard descriptor 4.5.2 requires a discussion on the purpose of ICT in your early childhood learning environment.

Reflecting on your own practice will help you improve your planning the next time you intend to integrate ICT.



Provides evidence of Teacher Practice when applying for Accreditation

If you teach within the EYLF, providing excerpts from a planning for learning and play may demonstrate how you would:

- Utilise ICTs to enhance learning - This would support the standard descriptor 2.6.2.
- Show that you have selected ICT resources to engage children in meaningful learning across a wide range of contexts – this would support 3.4.2 and;



- That have created and maintained a safe learning environment with ICT – this would support standard descriptor 4.5.2

You could even provide evidence of planning to support your observations of children's technology interests and abilities.

All this evidence of planning would support your efforts in progressing in proficiency levels in the Australian Professional Standards for Early Childhood teachers.

Final tip

Your approach to planning should always be flexible and responsive to children's learning needs with technology and planning ensures that children's learning is effective, exciting, varied and progressive.

Ensure that all children enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum in a plan that should prove to be useful to you and to your children.

And remember that it is a working document that should repay your efforts so remember to be concise.

Planning is particularly important when incorporating the use of ICT into the curriculum. As new technologies emerge, you must continually adapt and make changes to successfully integrate them into the curriculum. It is for this reason, that out of all the curriculum elements, ICT has the greatest amount of change.

This means that the skills and needs of the children in your care must be updated as the other skills become outdated. When planning your ICT provision in early childhood education you will also have to take into consideration the Early Learning Goals as noted in the EYLF. Your provision for ICT will need to show as well where continuity and learning progression exist within it. Continuity describes those aspects of a child's experiences that stay the same regardless of their age. In other words, you would be looking at the significant features of ICT that occur on a regular basis throughout a child's time whilst in your care.

Even in the foundation stage of learning from F-2, there are key points to consider when planning for ICT use. In order for the full potential of technology to be harnessed, you need to remember that it is the student who should always be in control of the technology. Not the opposite.

You need to plan and prepare for this in light of the fact that there will be individual learning styles to need to meet. Key areas such as interactivity, provisionality, capacity and range, and speed and automatic function, should always be an important checklist when considering the advantages that ICT can bring as they form the pedagogical basis upon which your lesson should be based.

Your planning in early childhood education should always be seen as a flexible, working document. Nothing should ever remain static especially when considering the integration of technology in the early years curriculum. The important thing to remember is that every child in your care has the right to enjoy learning through the curriculum and to also ensure you are capable of meeting their needs.

11 Steps for the Curriculum Planning of Tech Integration

Children in preschool and kindergarten, not to mention those in Foundational education should be finding out about and identifying the uses of ICT in their everyday lives in addition to using programmable toys and computers to support their learning.

The following early childhood curriculum approaches will enable you to maximize the use of technology in early childhood education.

- Plan for Progression in ICT capability

Progression not only occurs in the classroom with lesson-by-lesson but also from year to year and even from unit-of-work to unit-of-work.

- Plan for the continuity of ICT capability throughout the school

This requires more than a single effort of person - it is a whole-school approach and ensures that a child's capabilities in ICT continually build upon as they move throughout their school career.

- Plan for Outcomes

For those in Early Childhood, it means ensuring that you are using the EYLF outcomes - particularly 4 and 5 - to plan your learning outcomes. Foundational teachers that may extend to Year 2, should use the Australian Curriculum outcomes in the Learning Areas.

- Plan for personalised learning

Individual learning plans (ILPs) helps individual children achieve specific outcomes. You need to ensure that you are clear which learning outcomes you are working towards and why. What does the child understand now? How can you extend this learning? It has also meant being connected to a child's experience of the world.

- Plan for ICT tools and Resources

Selecting the right ICT tools and resources is just as important as matching them to the intended learning objective. Factors that you need to consider include the 8 principles outlined in our early childhood online course. How do bee bots help to achieve outcomes?

- Plan for the next session

Long-term and medium-term plans need to be considered. For long-term plans it is best to break into four subheadings such as resources, strategies, supporting learning, and organisation. Involve the whole staff because patterns in learning settings can inform your choices.

- Plan appropriate ICT activities

Exposure to ICT will not develop a child's capabilities in ICT. Don't reinvent the wheel and remember, copying type finished work into a neat version is NOT an appropriate activity for them.

- Plan the Learning Environment

The setting itself will have an impact on how you plan and also how will be able to employ your formative assessment measures in projects.

- Plan the assessment of ICT capability

Assessments should always be planned and when determining a child's capabilities in ICT there is no exception to this rule. What method is the ideal way for you to ensure that you don't just focus on one particular aspect of their ICT capability, mainly techniques and routines?

- Plan to challenge a child's ICT capability

Children today are fluent with technology even more than the generations before them. As a teacher, you need to set challenges for students with ICT that will help them progress further in their capabilities.



- Plan day-by-day

You mustn't forget about your short-term planning as this can change throughout the duration of the day or even hour. Don't be set in one thing that you planned earlier to ensure that continue to meet the learning needs of children in your care.

By planning for the integration of ICT across the entire early childhood curriculum you will ensure that ICT will be view as a tool to support and enhance teaching and learning, and not simply as a skill to be learned and an 'add-on' to the curriculum.

You can learn more about curriculum planning in early childhood education by joining our online workshops for preschool teachers in our [ICT in Education Teacher Academy](#).

You will learn how to optimise tech in learning and play in the early years learning environment today.

What are the technology teaching methods in early childhood education?

- Conduct a thorough analysis of the situation - effective planning calls for this!
- Maximise formative assessment in early childhood.
- Selecting developmentally appropriate technology in early childhood education.
- Employ evidence-based technology teaching strategies in early childhood.
- Promote literacy and numeracy development with technology.
- Encourage creative uses of technology in early childhood education.
- Integrate and understand technology effectively in STEM in early childhood.
- Implement a universal framework for inclusive education in early childhood education and care.

Maximising the use of technology in the early learning setting is important in an ever-increasing online and digital world. With young children entering preschool and kindergarten or even early years primary with a degree of technology literacy about them, it is the opportunity of early childhood teachers such as yourself to build on these home technology experiences through effective ICT integrated curriculum planning in early childhood education.

Case Study: Documentation

The basis for any kind of programming and planning in early childhood education is the documentation that provides evidence of children's learning. In the case study below, it highlights the EYLF programming and planning documentation.

This list demonstrates the importance of documentation in early childhood education:

- Make learning visible.
- Engage children further in their learning process through reflecting on experiences, so clarifying and deepening their understanding.
- Stimulate children through learning from each other.
- Build on children's sense of identity and their relationships by revisiting experiences and taking pleasure in their learning.



- Share our interest in children's learning, showing them that their intentions, ideas and views are important to us and their families.
- Put children and their processes of learning at the centre of our understanding for planning for children's next steps.
- Encourage the development of shared meanings and experiences between a group of children, their families and other adults and lead into further planning.

(Harriet, 2009, p. 41)

EYLF programming and planning documentation includes:

- Daily diary including the Reflections of Our Day.
- Learning Stories – format used to document learning. It uses 'story telling' to describe a child's learning processes.
- Observations – questions that might help you inform your observations of children using ICT include:

Are they interested in and curious about technology? Do they enter into discussions and make comments?

Do they experiment with ICT applications, finding things out for themselves?

Do they show enjoyment and concentration?

Are they able to use ICT for their own purposes?

Do they talk about ICT tools and applications and show an understanding of their purposes?

Are they able to find and start a program?

Are they able to navigate a program?

Are they beginning to experiment with tapping out letters using the keyboard?

Are they showing an awareness of electronic forms of communication, email, Internet, mobile texts?

Do they know, are they able to find out, what buttons and icons do?

Do they print or save their pictures?

Are they able to insert a tape and press the "Play" and "Eject" buttons?

Are they able to control a toy and make it move where they want?

This is essentially an assessment integrated into the planning of the program in ECD.

- Portfolios – collected information and samples.

The importance of documentation in early childhood education is that it informs your planning of a child development plan. View it as an important part of your work with children and families as part of a cycle of observation, analysis, implementation and planning in early childhood education.

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