

Research Digest

Standard 8 Planning and Evaluation

Enriching and informing all aspects of practice within the setting requires cycles of observation, planning, action and evaluation, undertaken on a regular basis.



Introduction

Planning and evaluation are essential building blocks in the process of aiming for best practice, as they are integral to the realisation of achieving quality in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Both activities inform practice, determine review structures and facilitate change. By engaging in regular cycles of observation, planning, action and evaluation, the setting:

- Is provided with a clear sense of purpose
- Has named goals (which should be time-related and achievable)
- Has clearly identified roles, rights and responsibilities
- Should benefit from a high level of organisation

Síolta is a strategic tool for planning and evaluation in early years practice. In addition to being a support for individual and/or team professional practice and development, it is also a tool for management, strategic planning and policy development. Its sixteen Standards provide a benchmark against which all aspects of practice can be observed, planned and evaluated on a regular basis.

Recent Research

Review processes

The purpose of undertaking regular review of practice is to make informed judgements about the quality and effectiveness of the whole service, with a view to enhancing the care and education of the children within the setting (French, 2003). Practitioners, therefore, need to know how to ensure that the sixteen Standards of *Síolta* are supported and sustained. Processes of review require embracing a reflective approach to practice (individually and in teams) within a culture which values pedagogical thinking. The benefits are thoughtful practice which is critically analysed and informed by theory, research and experiences (Adams, 2005).

According to *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), planning and reviewing should be a continuous process, involving careful observation, identification of needs and capabilities, provision of resources, assessment and evaluation. Planning and reflection can be ongoing, on a daily, weekly, term or annual basis. Guidelines for effective planning include establishing current conditions, being goal oriented by setting out objectives and associated goals logically, and adapting service plans to meet these goals. Furthermore, sequencing events is important, by outlining the steps required to meet the goal and the appropriate order in which those steps take place (Kelly, 2000). Finally, having devised a plan, it is essential that the plan be adhered to. Fig 8.1 demonstrates the process of review adapted from the writings of Pascal and Bertram (1994).

Documented review structures

The key to achieving successful monitoring and review is to develop a consistent routine which allows for self-reflection, team reflection and evaluation and, where resources allow, external evaluation (French, 2005). Staff teams need time to reflect individually with children and together on the progress of activities and learning opportunities. This can act as a basis for record keeping; for the management of the curriculum; for the general operation of the service and the work with children and families (Hutchin, 1999). To facilitate good communication



Fig. 8.1: The Quality Enhancement Review Process

between staff, time should be allocated to regularly review practice daily, weekly, and once per term. This facilitates:

- Short term planning focused on individual children's needs informed by observation and assessment
- Medium term planning to support general interests and needs across the group
- Longer term planning to enhance the learning intentions and possibilities over a year (Hutchin, 1999)

The outcomes of all meetings should be recorded.

A commitment to quality and professional development of staff necessitates the operation of appraisal (at the beginning of an employee's contract and then annually) and supervision systems. Staff are provided with a non-threatening, routine occasion to individually evaluate their performance at work and establish setting, professional and personal needs. It is recommended that annual open evaluation of the service by management, staff, children and parents, where objectives for the forthcoming year are set, is undertaken. Broad aims and the specifics of how they are to be achieved are outlined. Every aspect of the service is evaluated. This evaluation should be written out, publicised and made available to all concerned with the service (French, 2003).

Implementation



Rodd (2006) observes that where regular review of practice and policy takes place, change is an ongoing, inevitable and necessary process. The process of implementation involves change in organisational policies and procedures as well as individual attitudes and skills. Consensual and joint decision-making styles in cooperation with management make resistance to change less likely to occur. Rodd (2006) advocates communication and education, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement and preparing for change.

Effective implementation involves change being understood by leaders as a people-oriented process, through maintaining

staff self-esteem, providing positive feedback on staff's implementation, and continual review to evaluate the effects of the change in order to make adjustments. Although the responsibility for monitoring rests with the management, it is up to all adults to ensure that the service continues to meet the needs of the children (Rodd, 2006).

Recording and storing

Methods of record-keeping, reporting and assessment will vary from setting to setting. A framework for recording may include observations of each child as part of regular and ongoing assessment, observations to check safety, records of parent meetings and their concerns, comments or requests (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002). In addition to the records required by the *Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 2006* (Department of Health and Children, 2006), records of supervision, appraisal and staff meetings should be maintained.

Whatever records are kept in the service, it is essential that a reliable system for their storage and retrieval is devised. A simple filing system with names and numbers that will enable location of information quickly should be devised, and kept regularly 'weeded' of out-of-date information. Five years is the recommended length of time to retain records. All information pertaining to the children, either handwritten, typed or videotaped, is confidential and should be kept in a locked drawer or filing cabinet and shared only as appropriate (French, 2003). ( Research Digests/Standards 10:Organisation and  12:Communication).

Implementing the Standard

In order to achieve the goal of enriching and informing all aspects of practice within the setting, each area of practice should be reviewed regularly through appropriate and tailored processes of observation, planning, action and evaluation. When considering what type(s) of review processes are appropriate to each of *Síolta's* sixteen Standards, the following could be considered:

- Person-centred review
- Structural review
- Resource review
- Evidence and documentation
- Change management review
- External review process

Managers and practitioners, mindful of the needs particular to their own setting, should also recognise that certain aspects of the Standards require more frequent review than others. Mechanisms to ensure that review processes lead to changes in practice need to be clearly identified. When change is deemed necessary by such a review process, the relevant person/people to implement and oversee those changes need to be identified.

As the outcomes of review structures and processes determine the level of improvement and enrichment within a setting, it is essential that they are recorded, stored and, where appropriate, shared. When planning how to effectively document the review process, managers and practitioners could consider referring to the following sources:

- Review templates
- Curriculum/programme planning notes
- Records of decisions

- Minutes of meetings
- Practice diaries
- Evaluation reports
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Conclusion

Good practice in supporting a child's learning and development is rooted in quality issues and in the way these are translated into practice. Enriching and informing this within the setting requires that cycles of observation, planning, action and evaluation are undertaken on a regular basis. Key to this process is the understanding that none of these four processes should stand alone, but should be both inter-dependant and inter-connected. Observations, for example, are not an end in themselves but are a tool for gathering information about a child. They should be analysed to inform planning (e.g., differentiate activities to meet the individual learning needs of different children) and used as the basis for formal and informal feedback to parents, or to address concerns about any aspects of the child's learning and development.

The generation and ongoing use of documentation is an important characteristic of effective planning and evaluation. As well as providing a tangible source of records, it is both an intrapersonal and interpersonal form of communication, offering those who document and those who read the documentation an opportunity for learning and reflection.



Resources for Planning and Evaluation

Adams, S. (2005). Practitioners and Play: Reflecting in a Different Way (in) Moyles, J. (Ed.). *The Excellence of Play* (2nd ed.). Berkshire and New York: Open University Press, pp. 213-227.

Bruce, T. and Meggitt, C. (2002). *Child Care & Education* (3rd ed.). London: Hodder and Stoughton.

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French, G. (2005). *Valuing Community Playgroups: Lessons for Practice and Policy*. Dublin: Katharine Howard Foundation. Accessed at: <http://www.khf.ie>, 31st January 2007.

Hutchin, V. (1999). *Right From the Start: Effective Planning and Assessment in the Early Years*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Kelly, M. (2000). *Good Practice Self-Assessment Manual – A Personal Resource Manual for Child Care Providers*. Dublin: National Children's Nurseries Association.

Ministry of Education (1996). *Te Whariki: Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington: New Zealand. Accessed at: <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index>, 31st January 2007.

Pascal, C. and Bertram, T. (1994). Evaluating and Improving the Quality of Play (in) Moyles, J. (Ed.). *The Excellence of Play*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 161–172.

Rodd, J. (2006). *Leadership in Early Childhood* (3rd ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

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síolta

The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

