



Planning and programming for children's learning and development

This is the final instalment of our three-part series about planning and programming for children's learning, which is addressed in Quality Area 1 of the *National Quality Standard* (NQS). In this case study, we visit an outside school hours service in Western Australia.

Case study No.3

YMCA Butler Outside School Hours Care

Outside school hours service

Location: Butler, northern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia

'We meet with the children regularly to gather their input into the program and the experiences that are relevant to them.'

For educators working in Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) reinforces the fact that planning and programming for children's learning before and after school is every bit as important as the planning that supports their learning during school hours.

Belinda Muller is the Supervisor of the YMCA OSHC service in Butler, one of the northernmost suburbs of Perth. After starting her career in early childhood education and care, Belinda moved into OSHC, first in Victoria and now in Western Australia. Over the course of several years, Belinda has experienced a significant change in the sector, starting at a time when there was very little emphasis on programming for school-aged children and moving on to more recent experiences in services with formal program formats, she says.

'Since the introduction of *My Time, Our Place* and the *National Quality Framework*, it's become a more flexible program,' Belinda explains. 'It works very well because it accommodates all the scaffolded learning and spontaneous learning that children have in out of school hours care.'

At the Butler service, educators use the 'YMCA Approach to Learning,' which takes a holistic view of the child. 'It underpins all the values of the YMCA and also embraces the NQF,' Belinda says, 'and that gives me a direction, but a way in which to work that's not overly prescriptive.'

The process of planning and programming is underpinned by educators observing the children's development and interests. 'It's to do with the conversations that they're having with other children, and adults and families and people in the community where we are. It also encompasses their participation and their interactions with families and friends, so that we've got a complete picture of who this child is,' Belinda says. 'We meet with the children regularly to gather their input into the program and the experiences that are relevant to them.'

The role of children's interests is very important in a school-aged setting, where most children can articulate and express their interests



clearly. 'The children's interests are the basic thing, they direct the program,' says Belinda. 'So they might have become interested in a steam train, and we then may extend that on to rocket-making, because it's based on something that they've already shown some interest in. We'll extend that to challenge them as well, to keep them thinking and creating new experiences for them and new interests.'

With an age range of five to 12 years, the children at the service require some differentiation in planning and programming. Belinda says the group is very cohesive, but she does take into consideration their different interests and developmental stages. During school holidays, the vacation care program offers parallel excursions, one for the five- to eight-year-olds and another for the children aged nine and older. This allows each group 'time to themselves—which is part of their belonging,' says Belinda.

The educators at the Butler service try to strike a balance between allowing children to direct their own learning, and stepping in to help scaffold the learning.

'We'll be sitting or playing and see something that's happened, or the children are having a discussion and we will then involve ourselves in that conversation, without interrupting, and keep it going,' Belinda



says. 'And if we see it going along quite fine on its own, we'll let it go and just listen to what they're saying and document that, to then utilise in further programming.'

The older children in the setting frequently provide support and scaffolding for the younger children. 'I see it all the time, particularly with drama,' says Belinda. 'The older ones love dancing and they'll teach the little kids how to dance. I don't know how to dance, so I'm not going to teach dancing!' she says with a laugh. 'But the older children are very good at it. They'll teach and I don't need to step in. I watch and encourage them.'

The educators channel the spontaneous learning back into the program. At the end of each programming period, they consider 'what's been achieved and where the children have directed their experiences', and use that to create the next program.

On top of these reflections and regular observations, the educators in Butler also hold a meeting with the children each day, called 'What do you think about ...?', where they talk about the program itself, including the routines, to seek detailed information about the children's experiences and preferences.

Belinda identifies four principles that her team follows in planning and programming:

- know what is developmentally appropriate
- keep things current and follow the children's interests
- give choice and create excitement
- listen to the children and actively follow up on what you've heard ('don't just jot it down as an idea').

'We've moved to a program format that encourages kids to think for themselves and it gets them interested in their own learning,' says Belinda. 'It gets them engaged in their own community and involved in the world that's around them. I think that's the biggest change and the most positive change from the NQF.'



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