

PREK PLANNING GUIDES FOR INQUIRY AND EXPLORATION

"Our expectations of the child must be very flexible and varied. We must be able to be amazed and enjoy like the children often do. We must be able to catch the ball that the children throw us and toss it back to them in ways that make the children want to continue the game with us, developing, perhaps, other games as we go along." -- Loris Malaguzzi

Planning for Playful Inquiry reflects that we seek to follow children's interests and motivations, to support the questions children are asking of the world and to authentically connect to their lives (*catching the ball they have tossed*) with intention or planning that encourages children to sustain their explorations (*tossing the ball back in ways so that the game continues*). Every teacher seems to have their own favorite method for planning. The tools presented here are not offered as requirements or forms for endless filling, but rather as elements of planning that might be incorporated into existing planning routines.

DETAILED PLANNING

Initially, as we are getting to know children and they are getting to know each other, the classroom, and the materials, it is helpful to think through introductions and combinations of materials in a detailed manner.

Detailed planning helps you identify intention (Why am I wanting to offer this to children? Why am I wanting to *toss the ball* in this way?) and to ensure that your intentions are both varied and responsive. Detailed planning can help you identify what needs to happen before an experience or material is offered. Where might you need to slow down to ensure that children can connect to the exploration opportunity?

INTENTION: WHAT IS IT YOU PREDICT CHILDREN WILL PULL FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

- Could be an intention connected to **Habits of Mind**. *Children will discover details in the ferns.*
- Could be an intention connected to growing classroom **routines**. *Children will experience that there is enough for everyone.*

Planning for Playful Inquiry
Intention:
Materials:
Invitation:
Introduction & Agreements:
Playful Language:
Reflection & Next Steps:

- Could be an intention related to **materials**. *Children will notice the connection between the movement of their hands with the paintbrush and the lines created on the paper.*
- Could be an intention related to **development**. *Children will gain experience coordinating their movements while stacking blocks.*
- Could be an intention related to **interest or motivation**. *These children will connect the classroom dinosaurs to their interest in the creatures, building connection and comfort.*

MATERIALS:

What will you need to pull together for this experience? Do you need to prepare anything to support clean up? What will you need to manage an oopsie or accident (e.g. spilled paint or water or sand, getting to the sink with messy hands)?

INVITATION:

How will you present this opportunity to children? How do you think your presentation might **connect** with children's experiences? What do you think children will find appealing about the presentation – what will draw them in?

INTRODUCTIONS AND AGREEMENTS:

What agreements will you want to develop *WITH* children?

- How will you **introduce** the materials – does it need a full group introduction? A small group introduction? No real introduction? What language will you use? What might you need to demonstrate?
- Where will the materials **live**?
- What elements of use of the materials will you want to find agreements for? How will you help children understand the ways to **care** for the materials?
- How will the materials be cleaned up when a child is finished (to reset for the next child) or put away during clean up time?

PLAYFUL LANGUAGE:

What will you say while children are exploring? What words or phrases might connect to children's existing schema or understandings of the world (e.g. *Remember that I don't like messy hair.* As you describe use of a paintbrush). How will you connect to Habits of Mind as you talk with children about their experiences?

- *What details do you notice in the fern?*
- *I see how you made a connection between touching your paintbrush to the paper and creating dots.*
- *You figured out how to balance the blocks. Show me your strategy.*

REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS:

What will you observe for? What will you seek to document? What kinds of documentation will you want to bring back to the children for reflection and discussion?

PLANNING FOR THE INQUIRY ENVIRONMENT

Over time, as thinking through intentions and details becomes more fluid, it can be helpful to plan from the perspective of the environment in its entirety (outside, inside, the social environment, the physical environment, the resulting documentation). **Planning For the Inquiry Environment** supports reflective planning across the Environment. Use Planning For The Inquiry Environment or elements of this tool to support your reflection on the compiled documentation for the week (photos, observations, quotes, work samples).

The environment planning tool is used dynamically as weeks progress. The **first page** of the Environment Planning guides reflection on the prior week. This reflection should be supported by a review of the week's documentation (photos, written observations, collaborative discussions among the teaching team). This page could be completed in one sitting at the end of a week or could be used to jot notes daily.

First Column. Record what you noticed about children's interests and motivations. What did the children want to do with the materials, invitations and experiences offered? What conversations were held that gave a window into the child's interests or the questions children were seeking to answer? What did you learn about the children's families and lived experiences in the community? Reflecting on interests, motivations, and lived experiences will help you fine tune invitations and explorations for the following week and will support the development of positive connections and relationships.

Summary of Observations and Documentation from the Week First, review collected documentation from the week (photos, observations, work samples).		
What I Learned This Week About Children's Interests and Motivations. Connections to Children's Lives, Funds of Knowledge.	What I Learned This Week About Children's Capabilities. How & Where Did I See Children's Learning and Development?	My Thoughts and Reflections on the Week. Questions I am asking myself. Questions for the Cohort or with Coach. Emerging documentation or plans.

Second Column. Record what **you** learned during the week about children's capabilities. What did children do that provided a window into their gifts and talents? How does this relate to children's emerging Habits of Mind? How did children demonstrate their learning and what or where they are developing? Often, the places in which children are seeking to expand their learning or skills are reflected in what they seek to do repetitively. For

example, if a child is seeking to understand how blocks balance, they might spend most of explore time building towers and knocking them down (Making Connections). If a child is beginning to understand how writing works, they may write numerous love notes to a family member (Communication, Literacy Exploration). Identifying the *high energy* points in learning and development will help you notice when children might be ready to apply a new strategy to their work or when to plan additional experiences that might encourage the child to transfer the exploration to a new medium (What happens when you try to balance clay?).

Third Column. Record your questions that have emerged from the week. Questions help you maintain a constructive, intentional approach to planning. Questions become the foundation for hypotheses that can be tested through adjustments to components such as the schedule, environment arrangement, the materials or experiences offered, and protocols used to communicate with children. Questions might range from something related to planning for a material (e.g. "I wonder if the children are ready to apply their understanding of water to a color mixing experience?") to managing a classroom challenge (e.g. "What could I do to help the transition from the classroom to the playground run more smoothly?") to queries regarding children's emerging understanding of the world (e.g. "What is the meaning of the kitty play for children?" or "What are children seeking to understand in the block area?").

Questions and hypotheses can be tested in the planned invitations and experiences for the upcoming week. They can become the focus of future observations. Or they can be further explored in discussions with the classroom team, Inquiry Cohort or Coach. You may find it helpful to think specifically about a few children each week rather than trying to capture your thoughts about the entire group. It is important, however, to ensure that each child receives your thoughtful reflection and planning time on a regular basis.

Invitation Planning and Needed Materials for the Week of _____ . Note Revisions Throughout the Week

Areas of the Environment For Example: Studio table, sensory table, block area, small world and so forth.	What will you seek to pay attention to? What might you add or change to support area/invitation evolution?	Change over time. Length of time depends on what you observe and notice.		
Example: Sensory Table -- Add cups and scoops to sand table.	How are children using the cups and scoops? What are they doing? Are they aware of what their peers are doing with the sand?	Maintains with sensory exploration begins to transition from affordances to something else.	Reference looking? Add tweezers and spoons Reference the board? Add shells and small sand animals Ask children what else they need.	Notice each other? Scaffolded conversations of collaboration Large parallel play? Consider making number of children in table.
Example: Small World Create farm world with cows and small barn.	Does focus child visit small world? What do the animals do in small world?	Maintains to see if focus child notices. Invite focus child to notice. If FC notices - accepts peer play or stays solitary?	References cow families? Add some small ones. "Searching" for others? Add additional farm animals. Figure out age? Seek more information from FC. Ask focus child what else he needs in his world.	Allows peer to wait ? Add additional seat. Regets peer, materials and protect space. Help FC notice interest of peers.

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The **second page** of the Environment Planning Guide provides space to identify the kinds of experiences and invitations you would like to offer in the coming week based on your observations and reflections. Be certain to note the materials needed to realize the invitation (e.g., check to make sure there is enough red, yellow, black, and white paint for skin tone & portrait painting experience).

Area Planning. Not every space in the environment will need articulated planning each week. Some areas will be dynamic and change daily as you intentionally explore and seek to understand the range of children's interests and skills. Other areas may remain largely static with longer periods of time in between revisions to the area. For instance, the dramatic play area might be a pizza kitchen for a few weeks due to high interest and heavy use. Note that, in high interest areas with high conflict, it will be helpful to plan the social coaching and support that might be provided to support children's adaptive use of the space. It is strongly recommended that you give regular attention to reflecting on and planning for the outdoor environment. There may be some weeks when notes and plans are appropriate for nearly every space in the environment. Additional pages can be attached to the plan as needed.

Weekly Sequence and Adaptations. There are a few things in mind when in the early stages of planning for a new group of children. First, children generally respond to a new environment with functional and sensory exploration. Therefore, the first weeks of a program should feature many opportunities for simple sensory exploration as children explore; How does this work? What can it do? What can I do with it? Second, plan for a consistent sequence to the introduction of new materials, sharing some use options, discussing care of the material and observing where the material "lives" (for clean-up reference). The introduction is followed by ample opportunity for children to explore the *affordances* or possibilities of the material. In Reggio publications, this is called learning the language of the material. Once the affordances have been established, teachers can introduce additional connections, strategies or applications through their planned invitations and provocations. The Detailed Planning Tool may be a better tool to use when thinking through the introduction of new materials at any point during the year.

While teachers will plan for the week to come based on their best thinking and reflections at the time, children's responses to the planned invitations may necessitate mid-week course corrections. For instance, a teacher may believe that children have thoroughly explored the affordances of how water moves through containers, funnels, eye droppers and so, may plan to extend the children's experiences with water to an invitation exploring the evolving patterns made by color when dripped carefully into water. If children respond to this invitation by mixing up the water rather than focusing on the color dispersal, the teacher may realize that she needs to provide some additional experience with water tools and colored water before attempting the invitation again. This change in plans should be noted on the planning form (added directly to the form or through an attached post-it note) and considered during reflections for the following week.

The Role of Questions and Thinking Prompts in Planning

The questions you ask yourself help keep you engaged in your observations of and interactions with children. As you reflect on your questions, you may identify possibilities that might connect to or extend children's explorations.

The questions you ask children should be ones for which you do not know answer; answers that you are authentically interested in hearing. Your questions to children can support their connections to an experience, can extend their exploration, and can give you a window into how children are seeking to incorporate their discoveries into their evolving understandings of the way the world works. However, it is also ok to simply be present and observe. Silence provides space for exploration and thinking. Look for children's cues that indicate they are ready to share their explorations and thinking with you.

Sentence Frames and Thinking Prompts

- I see ...
- I notice ...
- I'm curious ...
- How did ...
- Then what did you ...?
- Why did ...
- It looks like you are ... (trying to ... discovering that ... finding ...)
- I noticed you made a **connection**...
- Tell me/us about your **strategy** to ...
- I wonder how you might **collaborate** with your friend to ...
- I wonder why ...
- I'm curious ...
- What did you **notice** ...?

- How did you **solve** the ... problem...?
- What **details** did you notice?
- What story did you find?
- Tell me/ us about your story.
- What happened next?
- What inspired ... (your building, your creation, your idea)?
- What did you discover?
- How did you figure that out?
- What do you think when you see ...?
- What do you wonder?
- How does it make you feel?
- What could we do?
- What could we invent?
- What's your idea? What's your plan?
- How could you snap your ideas together?
- How could your ideas connect?
- What happens when ---- and ---- play together? (red and yellow, blocks and cars, light and crystals)
- Where will you find ... (joy, inspiration, an idea ...)?

Additional Resources:

- *Playful Inquiry In The Early Years, A Field Guide*: Chapter 2.
- Kristi Mraz *Handbook for Supporting Virtual Play*:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tM7GJRBtTSHpCmDz6NSw9ZCOX2NP9H78UI7V5G-6Os/edit>
- Asking Big Questions (2019). Project Zero and Opal School.
- TEDx Talk. The Power of ummmmm. Kath Murdoch. <https://youtu.be/LFt15lg64Yg>

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Planning for the Inquiry Environment

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