

Curriculum for Wales – In the Moment Planning

Historically, practitioners may have felt overwhelmed by paperwork and planning. Scheduling in time for observations of children and planning the next steps for the following week can be difficult in a busy setting. Many practitioners will be accustomed to an outcome-driven curriculum, where they plan for children to achieve very specific things within their long-term planning and themes, topics and focused activities are abundant. But how engaged are our children in these activities? Are they child-led and tailored to their interests? Or are they planned to enable a nearby adult to tick a box with the outcome?

‘In the moment planning’ is an established concept within the early years and has been around for many years, however, due to a strong focus on child-initiated and child-led learning, its compatibility with the Curriculum for Wales and the non-maintained sector curriculum is strong.

What is ‘in the moment planning?’

Put very simply - it’s all about completing the planning cycle in the actual moment with the children, instead of planning in advance. ‘In the moment planning’ can support practitioners to focus on each child’s individual interests and as a result, the children become more engaged and enthusiastic within their learning and develop more of an ownership over it. Requiring less rigid pre-prepared planning from practitioners can allow for more time to be spent getting to know the children and their interests with stronger relationships being developed which can lead to better progress for the children.

‘In the moment planning’ is often split into three stages – the child’s spark, the teachable moment and the documentation. The spark is the first moment a child shows an interest in something, they are awe-inspired or fascinated. The teachable moment is the opportunity for the practitioner to extend and build upon the interest. This can be through asking the child open-ended questions and considering ways to apply this interest to other parts of the environment. Finally, a record of the observation needs to be made to document the spark, the teachable moment and the next steps. Skilled practitioners will be aware of when to step in and get involved in the play and when to stand back and take the stance of an observer.

The environment and ‘in the moment planning’

In the early years, the environment is essential in the learning and development of children. An environment that stimulates curiosity and enables each child to engage is essential to ensure that their learning can continue without an adult present. Engaged and enthusiastic learners are crucial to ‘in the moment planning’, if children are not engaged, there is no spark and without any spark, there is no vehicle for learning. Remember that you are not planning activities. What you are doing is looking over current interests and planning an environment that is an interesting, intriguing and evolving place for children to develop.

It is important to continuously review the environment to ensure that your current learners are getting everything they need to support their progress. Ensure there is enough provision in place to allow curiosity to flourish and new skills to be learnt or practiced across the setting. Think carefully about how your children access the environment and spend time setting up an environment that is conducive to high engagement levels and opportunities for learning. For example, include books and mark-making materials across the environment to encourage children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills whilst playing with other things.

Through observing your children, try to evolve your environment to support children to develop their skills without having to leave/disrupt their play to go and source what they need. The process of setting up the environment can take a long time with lots of trial and error to get right, and it will be ever-evolving as the children and their interests change.

How do I implement 'in the moment planning?'

Like any big change in your setting, the implementation is the most difficult part of the process. Fully understanding 'in the moment planning,' creating the documentation and putting the whole process in place can seem a little daunting. The most important aspect of the process is to support your staff to get fully onboard. Most practitioners choose childcare as a profession because they want to work with children. At its core, in the moment planning enables practitioners to spend more time helping children develop and less time doing paperwork.

Once your practitioners are onboard with the approach, to ensure high-quality implementation of 'in the moment planning,' you need to support your practitioners with their own professional development. Practitioners who have a secure knowledge of child development, including sustained shared thinking, schemas and a broad understanding of how children develop should be able to highlight a child's interests more precisely. 'In the moment planning' requires skilled practitioners with strong observation skills, the confidence and ability to think on their feet and who have the ability to expand upon the interests of children in a holistic manner.

Ensure that you think about this, when planning for, or supporting, your staff with their own professional learning.

Documenting 'in the moment planning'

Documenting 'in the moment planning' should be an accurate record of the interaction that took place between the practitioner and the child. You may wish to implement a template for staff to use, but you must ensure that it does not become cumbersome and it clearly offers the chance to record the spark, teachable moment and any next steps the practitioner might want to include. Many 'In the moment planning' resources suggest spending an entire term on each child as a focus for learning and development. However, if you are a large setting and you're unable to dedicate lots of time to each child, you could consider having different focus children each week who steer learning for that week. When used effectively, in the moment planning can act as a great tool to focus on individual interests each week/fortnight and create a fun and relaxed way in which to allow each child to make progress in areas that are relevant and of interest to them.

It is important to remember that every setting is different and you may need to experiment to find out what works for you. Don't be disheartened if it doesn't feel right from day one, allow time for

yourself and staff to find their feet. Just because you wish to explore 'in the moment planning', it does not necessarily mean that you have to do it all of the time. The overarching message for your planning cycle is whatever works best for your setting and children.

'In the moment planning' and inspections

As previously mentioned, many practitioners feel reassured when using traditional planning templates as there is a clear process that must be followed, particularly when it comes to inspections. However, education in Wales is changing. Curriculum for Wales and the non-maintained sector curriculum aim to empower practitioners to take ownership of their settings' curriculum and plan for learning in a way that is most suitable for their individual setting and learners.

The inspectorates within Wales support this individual approach and do not recommend or favour a specific approach to teaching and learning, allowing settings to opt for what is most suitable to them. Practitioners are not required to provide reams and reams of paperwork to show their planning cycle, solid knowledge and understanding are key. Practitioners should be able to articulate what they are doing to inspectors and why it works, and what are the next steps, essentially providing evidence and their own reflections as a practitioner on individual children's learning and development. This can be tricky if you have a high turnover of staff or staff change continuously within your setting. Ensure that communication within your staff team is good and practitioners involve all stakeholders in discussions about learner's progress and next steps, so all practitioners would feel confident in picking up where you have left off and would be able to answer any questions directed towards them about an individual child and their learning.

For a more in-depth view on 'in the moment planning' and how to implement it within your setting, please see our ['Planning in the Here and Now' publication](#).

Key topics include:

- Why you should consider changing your approach to child-led play and learning
- Practical examples and case studies of planning in the moment in action
- How the approach helps to build children's confidence and persistence
- Improving your observational skills and reducing paperwork burdens.

Further information and support

- Planning in the Here and Now – NDNA Publication <https://bit.ly/3OC8vy9>
- Curriculum for Wales – Hwb - <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/>
- Curriculum for Wales – NDNA <https://bit.ly/3zReBpZ>

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