

Planning - Diary of a Crazy Woman!

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October 2011



Lecture Notes

Dictionary definition of the word Diary: 1. A daily record, especially a personal record of events, experiences, and observations; a journal.

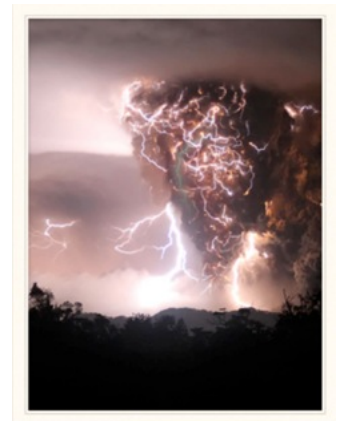
Umm, the title, let's unpack it a little bit - just in case any of you are feeling nervous! Diary, why put the word diary in a heading for a lecture? Well, because I would like to offer you some of my personal thoughts and experiences on the subject of planning. And CRAZY? I have often been called crazy and I've always thought of it as a compliment! When I looked up the dictionary definition it confirmed my feeling that actually I do strongly identify with the word, if the wig fits wear it!

Dictionary definition for the word crazy:

2. *Informal* Departing from proportion or moderation (Moderation has always been overrated don't you think?!)
 - a. Possessed by enthusiasm or excitement (150% at least! Life is too short to be half hearted!))
 - b. Immoderately fond; infatuated (YEP - I am passionate about teaching and learning with young children!)
 - c. Intensely involved or preoccupied (Absolutely!)
 - d. Foolish or impractical (read DARE TO DREAM!)

Planning...so where to begin? I love this quote from Sylvia Ashton Warner, substitute "reading" for planning!

What a dangerous activity reading is, teaching is. All this plastering on of foreign stuff. Why plaster on at all when there is so much inside already? So much locked in? If only I could get it out and use it as working material. And not draw it out either. If I have a light enough touch it would just come out under its own volcanic power.



When I graduated from teachers college a thousand years ago, planning was a process of filling in little boxes, we called this menu planning. Monday: string painting, buckets and spades in the sandpit, etc etc. This is how it was in a lot of centres.

My first teaching position was relieving for a term at Leamington Kindergarten where the head teacher, Lee Timmins, had introduced the Seaco approach. The idea was to resource the environment and support children in their interest rather than having table top activities. I think that was an important beginning to my teaching career.

Fast track a year or two and I am living and working in Auckland. It was the early eighties and I can't remember us doing anything in the way of planning at my first teaching position at Lynfield Kindergarten!

Later on, and a few Head Teacher positions under my belt, we settled into an emergent style of programme planning, we drew up mind maps and webs linking these to Te Whāriki. I remember using a highlighter pen or writing the date beside items on the web when we had done them - there were often lots of items left un-ticked! Term one was often a web around belonging - for all those new children!

Learning Stories came in and we started documenting children's interests in a far deeper way and this became the basis of our planning. Instead of webs we had display boards filled with stories, pictures and art work related to the seams of gold we were following in the children's learning. We didn't have any teacher reflections about what was happening but we did have a few notes about possibilities for extending the learning. This was quite a shift in our practice and it felt like a relief to abandon the webs and have our documentation actually reflect the truth of what was happening in the programme.

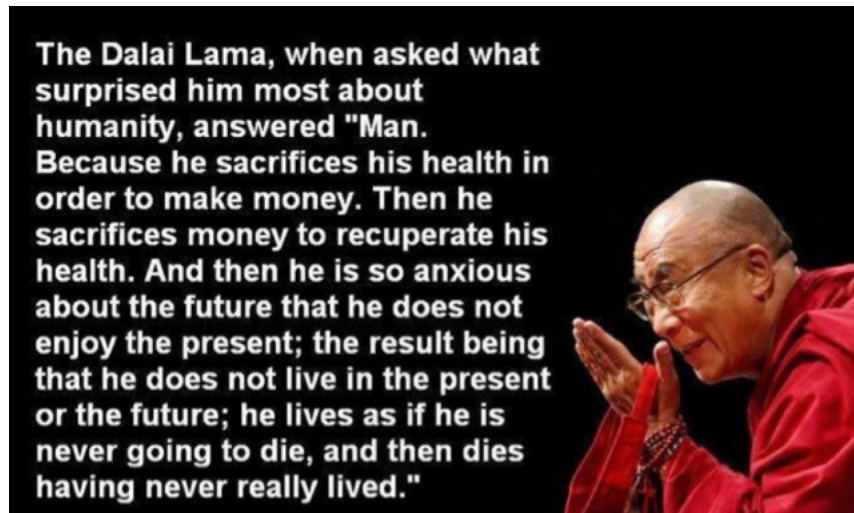
Since then I have been through hundreds of early childhood settings all over New Zealand and a few overseas as well in my capacity as a professional development facilitator. As a general comment I would have to say that the subject of planning is a tricky one for a lot of teaching teams, and often saturated in doubt and guilt! The subject of planning is problematic! I have seen the most amazingly complicated plans that teachers have spent hours and hours creating, often only to discover that actually the plans aren't really working because the children's interest has gone in a completely different direction and any teacher worth her/his salt will realise this and go with where the children's passion is bubbling!

Or there's planning that in my opinion is quite superficial, and still very much activity based rather than really serving a purpose to provide high quality learning for children.

There are levels of planning, planning for individual children (most of us do this using the Learning Story model), planning for groups of children (Planning Stories/Stories of Interest), planning for the environment (strategic plans, resourcing etc), teacher initiated planning. There is also parent/whānau initiated planning. The line from a song springs to mind "We're all in this together" (it's been on TV recently promoting the Salvation Army I think!). We certainly ARE all in this together. Lorraine Sands often asks teachers to reflect "Who are the planners?" What a wonderful relief to know that this planning power can and in my opinion SHOULD be a shared thing!

So, let's start at the very beginning...let's start with YOU! Its all about YOU! We teach out of who we are, so I can't go too far into the subject of planning without asking you to reflect on your teacher presence.

Of course a lot about us is a state of constant flux, and some of that change will happen over seconds and some over a lifetime...but generally, who are you? What are you passionate about? What is it that puts a spring in your step and makes your heart sing as you spend all those hours at work? Who are you in relation to yourself? Who are you in relationship with children moment by moment? With the parents/whānau, with the teachers on your team? You are influential beyond your wildest dreams!



A few years back, Carlina Rinaldi was here at a Reggio conference. She said something like, "I can be me because you allow me to." I left the lecture pondering this and cynically thinking, "Oh come on that's a bit rich!" The more I thought about it the more I was struck by the profoundness of it, and the implications for teaching. She was able to be fully who she was because we, the audience, were really interested in what she had to say, we weren't sitting there texting or chatting to the person sitting beside us. We were present, listening, interested - and she felt that. Our presence enabled her to share the richness of who she was and what she had to offer us. This is how it is in our daily lives as teachers. What a responsibility - all those young lives, all those families, how present are we? What is the quality of our listening, the quality of our noticing, recognising and responding? When those children, those families come through our door, what possibilities are there, how affording is our environment?

Do I let you fly? Do you let YOU fly? Are you flying? If you consider this in the privacy of your own thoughts you can be free to answer without fear of judgement. Are you really flying, do you feel joyful and fulfilled as a teacher? Do you feel dynamic and alive, bubbling with enthusiasm? Are your days marked by passionate engagement with the children and community you work with?



Joseph Campbell, a wonderful researcher and philosopher had a saying, “Follow your bliss.” I try to live by that idea! Do you know what your bliss is right now? Then follow it! You haven’t a moment to lose! If you think teaching is not where your bliss really lies, then I respectfully say to you, go and do whatever it is that will bring you into that deep sense of satisfaction, the state of bliss. Maybe about now I may have lost some of you, you may be thinking I am indeed crazy and too extreme, but in my opinion life is far too short to do anything else than be totally passionate and whole hearted. If you don’t want to head for the door, but maybe you have lost a bit of spring in your step, do whatever you can to get it back, and as quickly as possible.



And what has this got to do with planning? Your teacher presence, your passion will have a profound effect on what can happen for the children in your setting and the quality of your noticing, recognising and responding to all those learning and teaching moments. If you are in a designated leadership position you have even more responsibility to consider these questions. You are an important influence in the sort of culture that exists in your team and your teaching and learning community. This is not to take away at all from my belief in the concept of shared leadership!

Ok, let’s look at the semantics! The word ‘planning’ can be a troublesome, it can conjure up the idea of fixed long term thing. The word plan originates “partly from Latin *planum* level ground, from neuter of *planus* level; partly from French *planter* to plant, fix in place, from Late Latin *plantare*” (Websters dictionary).

The dictionary also says: “A detailed formulation of a programme of action.” This sort of plan is very important when building a house - I don’t want the builders to be too spontaneous when constructing my house! However, ... it’s the fixed idea that seems embedded in the word plan that I have difficulty with when it comes to the moment by moment dynamic interactions with children.

The majority of marvelous teaching moments happen on the hoof, when the gap between noticing, recognising and responding is very small. My life as a kindergarten teacher is packed with millions of planning moments every day as I respond to what is happening in the moment.

The dictionary has more to offer on the word plan “a method for achieving an end” is getting closer to it and if you drop the word ‘orderly’ out of the next part of the definition it’s getting closer still to what I can feel comfortable with in regards to teaching: “an orderly arrangement of parts of **an overall design or objective**”.

I like the idea of an over design or objective, and of course that’s exactly what we have in Te Whāriki! The reason I’m not so keen on the word ‘orderly’ is because it’s too mechanistic for the process of teaching young children. I prefer to think of early childhood teaching as more of an organic type model, things mutating and connecting in surprising ways, a bit like mushrooms popping up. They grow so quickly almost before you very eyes!



“The part of the mushroom that you see above the ground is only the fruiting part of the fungus. The rest of the plant lies under the surface in the form of a mass of dense white tangled threads.” (Google search) When I write a Learning Story I don’t know if this will be the beginning of something big, or exactly how it might relate to what happens in the future; who could know? But then often it’s like the start of a mushroom crop and other stories are written and after a while the connections become clear.

Do we really understand the meaning of a sociocultural curriculum? How awake are we to the multiplicity of interconnections? We have an incredibly rich early childhood curriculum in Te Whāriki, a document that supports teachers to work in an organic way. I fear in this climate of national standards we may have to put our fighting gear on to defend it!

Let’s look at how some of this might look. At Stanmore Bay Kindergarten we are definitely work in progress, and I am by no means saying that we have arrived at documentation/planning mecca! Maturity is living in the actual while aiming for the ideal! Our overall goal is to show the learning journeys that are occurring both for children individually and some that are happening corporately. Only a small percentage of the learning/teaching that is happening is documented due to the constraints of time etc. The intention is that the group learning that is documented is a slice of the cake, and that while so much is not documented the slice that is represents the rest.

“Why document?” is an important question to reflect on. For me, documenting children’s learning individually through Learning Stories enables me to share what I am seeing and hearing and the interpretation I make of that about what the child is interested in and learning. This in turn influences my teaching practice, i.e. my plan about how I might support that learning to be more complex and to continue.

Planning Stories or, as the teaching team at Roskill South Kindergarten calls them, ‘Stories of Interest’ are a way of showing the learning that is happening for groups and the often mushroomy nature of the interconnections between sometimes seemingly unrelated events. The Planning Story model enables teachers to show how the learning has unfolded and it is often in retrospect that these connections are documented. The Planning Story is displayed as work in progress and while there may be some teacher intentions and possible lines of development listed it’s not something that is fixed in concrete. Why? Because our intention is to as much as possible engage in deep listening and follow the children’s interests, to be spontaneous and responsive.

The curriculum should be in the teacher’s heads and it’s our job to see opportunities to bring that curriculum out in the context of the child’s play, questions and explorations. Children and teachers cooperate in creating rich learning experiences, and all parties can take a leadership role in planning what happens. What might these Stories of Interest include?

- ❖ How this began
- ❖ What learning is happening
- ❖ Teacher reflections
- ❖ Children’s voice
- ❖ Parent/whanau comments
- ❖ Teacher intentions-planning possibilities...
- ❖ Photos
- ❖ Artwork

Remember, there is nothing magical or set in concrete about this - the most important thing is the quality of the teaching and learning journey - you can be creative about how you document it. The purpose of the documentation is to show your journey. I think it’s a good idea to use lots of photos because this is how children will access the information and revisit their experiences. If it’s possible try to get as much documentation at children’s height. Also think about how much writing you put up on the wall, realistically few parents will stand around reading volumes, brief is beautiful, punchy and to the point. Also I think it’s a good idea to make sure the print isn’t too tiny.

I am going to share two collections of work on individual children, Ashleigh’s Song cycle and Zack’s A Portrait of an Artist. I think if we can really come to grips with supporting an individual child’s learning journey we can use the same principles to document planning that happens for groups. I will also share tonight a Planning Story called “Slowing Down for Snails”. This was initiated by the children’s passion for snails and the story shows the amazing journey this took us on. The “Sustainability at Stanmore Bay” Story of Interest/ Planning Story started from Suzi’s passion for recycling and sustainability. I hope by showing you these pieces of work you will see that, as the saying goes, “it’s not rocket science!” There is no one way! Have fun and be creative!



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Killick, J. (2011). Planning - Diary of a Crazy Woman. Lecture notes. Retrieved from http://www.elp.co.nz/EducationalLeadershipProject_Resources_Lectures_and_Conferences.php