

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

ECIPs as the Foundation for the Intentional Teaching Process



Introduction

Early care and education is a complex process that requires thoughtful, well-informed practitioners who are intentional in planning and implementing best practices for young children.

“A hallmark of developmentally appropriate teaching is intentionality. Good teachers are intentional in everything they do... Intentional teachers are purposeful and thoughtful about the actions they take, and they direct their teaching toward the goals the program is trying to help children reach.” (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 10)

Whether teachers and providers work in a child care center, a school-based or Head Start program, a family child care home, or in a home-visiting situation, they must have foundational knowledge of developmental and learning expectations for the ages of children with whom they work. That knowledge informs how they set up the environment, structure the daily schedule, and design and implement learning experiences. Teachers and providers must also develop knowledge about each of the children in their group in order to individualize their approaches so that every child is successful as well as challenged.

Intentional teachers and providers use their knowledge to plan and implement curricular strategies. As they implement those strategies, they continually evaluate the results to determine how the children respond as well as how they are growing and learning. Observation, documentation, critical thinking, analysis, and reflection are all essential to effective educational practices in every early childhood setting. Teachers and providers must develop keen awareness of the children’s engagement and learning, as well as self-awareness about their own teaching.

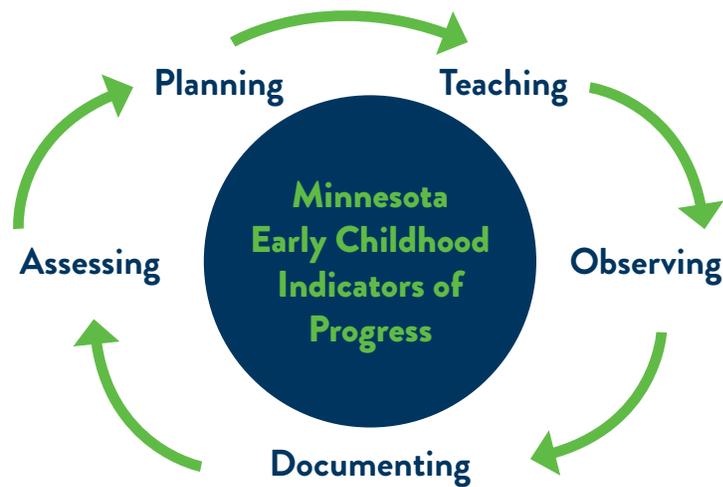
“Reflection allows teachers to take an in-depth look at their teaching practices and gives them the opportunity to consider how child development affects learning. Since we know children do not develop at the same rate, reflection allows us to meet the needs of each child. This can include adaptations for children and changes to our daily schedule and modifications for the classroom environment. Our reflective practice can result in lesson plans built upon children’s strengths and following interests.

...Most importantly, reflection drives home the need to examine whether our...practices really reflect our philosophy about how children learn. We want children to be critical thinkers, so it is important that we are following teaching practices that allow us to also be critical thinkers when planning...experiences for the children.” (Rice 2013) <http://www.ttacnews.vcu.edu/2013/02/reflectivepractice/>

The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs): Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards provide the foundation for the Intentional Teaching Process. The ECIPs are the foundation as teachers and providers

plan, teach, observe, document, and assess. They do so continually with forethought and preparation, and also spontaneously, in the moment with the children.

The following graphic illustrates the steps involved:



The five key steps in the *Intentional Teaching Process* can work together in a cyclical nature in the following order:

1. The assumption is that *Planning* comes first. A teacher or provider plans for experiences, organizes the environment and necessary materials, and determines how he/she will support the children in that experience.
2. Then, he/she implements the plan. That is the *Teaching* step, using appropriate instructional strategies.
3. As he/she teaches, he/she is *Observing*. He/she watches for the children's engagement, where they are successful, how they are challenged, and what they are learning.
4. Along with *Observing*, he/she is also *Documenting*. He/she documents selected observations in written notes, photographs, collection of work samples, and/or recordings.
5. *Assessing* happens throughout the observation and documentation processes, as well as after the fact. The teacher or provider reviews his/her documentation to reflect on how the children are doing. This assessment is directly related to the observed learning in relation to the ECIPs and perhaps to a correlated authentic assessment tool. The intent of using the ECIPs is to inform the next steps in individualized planning.

However, the cycle does not always start at the same place every time nor always flow in one direction. Teachers and providers may start with different steps in the process. They may teach and as they observe, see that a change to the original plan should be made immediately. Perhaps it's not interesting or too hard or too easy for the children. The teacher or provider then makes adaptations to better meet the needs of the children at that time. That's why working in an early childhood setting is so challenging and rewarding at the same time. Intentional teaching recognizes and welcomes the all-important need for flexibility and responsiveness.

Please note the placement of the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress in the graphic above. Each of the five steps involved in the *Intentional Teaching Process* employ the ECIPs. The standards are the foundation for teacher and provider knowledge about shared developmental expectations for what children should know and be able to do at different ages.

Planning Related to the ECIPs

Excellent teachers and providers recognize that there are opportunities for learning throughout the day. But to make the most of those opportunities, teachers and providers need to plan for all aspects of each day.

In Minnesota, teachers and providers use the expectations in the ECIPs to plan for individual children. The standards are incorporated into goals for children's experiences throughout the day. While paying attention to the indicators and subcomponents in specific domains, teachers and providers know that development in one domain influences development in others. They plan with the interrelation of domains in mind, maximizing connections whenever possible.

In planning, there are special considerations for the age group (see Brief #4 Using the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress with Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers) as well as for the diverse characteristics of groups of children. Teachers and providers adapt their plans to reflect what they know about the individual interests, learning styles, and capabilities of the children. They keep in mind that the pace of development is not the same for every child and plan ways to support children as they develop at varying rates. The ECIPs serve as a guide for effective planning.



Teaching

Good teachers and providers have developed a broad repertoire of teaching strategies from which they can choose as they plan and engage with children in the moment. Teachers and providers determine which strategy to use at any given moment based on the

goal of "...effectively promot[ing] each child's learning and development..." (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 18) and based on their observations of children's successes and challenges over time. Strategies can include:

- Acknowledging what children are doing or accomplishing
- Encouraging children to make choices and plans
- Modeling or demonstrating for children
- Posing problems, asking questions, commenting, or suggesting
- Extending children's thinking with ideas, problems, or experiences
- Challenging children as they develop competence and understanding
- Giving specific feedback rather than generic praise
- Scaffolding children's learning by providing support to enable a child to perform at the next skill level
 - Scaffolding can include giving a hint, "...adding a cue, modeling the skill, or adapting the materials and activities."
- Providing information
- Giving directions

(Copple and Bredekamp 2009, pp. 18-19).

In addition, teachers and providers consider various learning formats and determine when a particular format might be most beneficial for the children with whom they work. Learning formats can include daily routines, play and learning centers, one-on-one adult/child interactions, working in pairs with peers, and small and large group experiences. Formats may involve hands-on activities and movement or be more passive in nature so that children are required to sit, listen, and take in information. Early educators know that young children need opportunities for movement and hands-on engagement and choose more active learning formats than passive ones. The schedule is balanced so that children have active learning times and times that require quiet listening are strategically placed throughout the day.

Learning experiences may be set up so children can choose how to engage with the materials presented or teachers and providers may direct their engagement. Effective educators know that allowing for choices and following the children's lead often brings deeper and more meaningful learning than teacher-directed and determined activities.

As educators make decisions about teaching strategies and learning formats, they also reflect about their particular group of children considering the ages involved and, even more specifically, the characteristics of each individual in the group. They ask themselves:

1. What do I know about this age group that I need to keep in mind?
2. What do I know about individual children's developmental capabilities? How can I plan for experiences where they will be successful (not overwhelmed) and also be challenged (not bored)?
3. What do I know about individual children's personalities, temperaments, interests, backgrounds and families that might come into play as I plan and implement teaching strategies and learning formats?

Observing and Documenting

Teachers and providers observe the children in their care almost all of the time. As they interact with children, they watch. They listen. They touch. They smell. Throughout every day, they take in a huge amount of information about the children with whom they work. In fact, if they tried to write it all down, they would be overwhelmed by the number of pages of notes they would generate.

Teachers and providers have to document selected observations that inform them about the children's growth and progress. They plan to focus their observations in some way so that they are learning important and helpful information about each child. They also plan for the documentation method that will be most appropriate for that observation: a written note, a photograph, a work sample, or a recording. They consider what kinds of documentation are time-efficient and most informative.

The ECIPs come into play in observation and documentation when teachers and providers move toward the final step in the *Intentional Teaching Process: Assessing*.

Assessing Related to the ECIPs

As teachers and providers go through the final steps in the Intentional Teaching Process, they are engaging in authentic, observational assessment. This assessment approach is authentic because observing and documenting is ongoing throughout each and every day and are based on observable behavior during the day. Teachers and providers watch and record as children participate in daily routines, play indoors and outside, and join in small and large group experiences. Then they use the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) to determine where children are performing related to the learning continuum of the indicators in each domain. Once they have determined the child's present level of performance, they look to the next indicator (or possibly the previous indicator) in the continuum to identify meaningful activities that promote further growth and development. They also communicate their plans and goals to children's families and offer supports for at home.

There are two ways that teachers and providers can engage in observational assessment:

1. Through reflection
2. Through intentional planning

Reflective observational assessment requires that teachers and providers remain open-minded as they document observations about what the children are doing and saying. Then, they plan for a time to review the documentation. This involves referring to the ECIPs and determining which indicators in various domains the child was demonstrating. This strategy helps teachers and providers see the interrelatedness of domains in action as children often demonstrate indicators from many domains in one activity or experience. Then teachers can plan for supporting where they see gaps.

There are times when teachers and providers may want to observe for specific domains, components, subcomponents, or indicators in the ECIPs. This is helpful when teachers and providers want to use their curricular planning to encourage development of specific skills and abilities described in the

standards or when they recognize that they are missing information from certain domains, components, or subcomponents.

Realistically, combining both approaches, reflective and intentionally planned, helps teachers and providers gather the most informative information through observation and documentation. Early childhood professionals consider their setting, the needs of each of the children with whom they work, their own organizational styles, and the benefits of teamwork to determine when and how to implement authentic, observational assessment most successfully.

Please note: the ECIPs is not an assessment tool. The ECIPs indicators are general expectations of what children should be able to know and do at the end of an age range. Formal assessments must aligned to the ECIPs so the items assess children's progress on the expectations in the ECIPs. In addition, the ECIPs is important resource to use in the planning process to design the next activities and curricular approach. And the effective teaching cycle begins again.

Conclusion

The Intentional Teaching Process is at the heart of good teaching and developmentally appropriate practices for all young children. When each of the steps (Planning, Teaching, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing) are related to the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs), teachers and providers improve programs, teacher interactions, and individualized planning, which enhance outcomes for children. They are using the ECIPs for their true purpose: to support teachers and providers in offering the highest quality services in care and education for young children and their families.

References

Copple, Carol, and Sue Bredekamp. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*, 3rd ed. NAEYC: Washington, D.C.

Rice, Marilyn. February 5, 2013. "Can Reflective Practice Guide Me in Making Better Decisions for My Early Childhood Classroom?" Virginia Commonwealth University.

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