

Reading Assignment

In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program's Solution



In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program's Solution

By Chris Boisvert-Maier

When I became director of the Lowry Early Childhood Education Center (the Oakland University lab school in Rochester, Michigan), I joined an agency that had previously undergone many changes and had many ongoing issues. I decided to interview the teaching staff and build my priorities from their concerns. The most immediate need surfaced almost instantly: It seemed as though every issue brought forward by the staff could be directly or indirectly addressed by *providing team planning time on a regular basis*.

The plan-do-review process and research supporting the value of planning and recall for children are cornerstones of the HighScope approach. It logically follows that providing teachers and caregivers with adequate time to plan and review is just as necessary and valuable in supporting early childhood teaching teams. Many early childhood

practitioners understand the benefits of daily team planning. The logistics of scheduling time for planning can be daunting, however.



Even programs that have incorporated daily anecdotal note taking sometimes have difficulty finding time when the whole team can meet on a daily basis to make plans based on the observations they have recorded.

In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program’s Solution (continued)

Problem: Scheduling Planning Time

When I arrived at the Lowry Early Childhood Education Center, there was no individual or group planning time built into teaching schedules. When asked, “When and how do you do your planning?” one team member responded, “We plan over the children’s heads, or individually at home — it’s the best we can do.” Another issue surfaced: There was very little time (aside from staff’s own personal time) for professional development activities suited to the unique needs of each team.

In the midst of many negative issues that teachers at the center faced, I was struck with some awesome strengths. Teachers were skilled observers of children and systematically used child observations and the Child Observation Record (COR) for ages 2½–6 for assessment purposes. All they needed was the time to discuss, score, and plan together with this valuable

information. Thus, it appeared that we were already halfway there in our quest for better planning!

Brainstorming a Solution

The challenge we confronted was providing time for planning without interrupting continuity of care and predictability for the children. We had children at the center from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., so there was very little time, if any, without child contact. After considerable discussion and brainstorming, we decided to try a creative scheduling solution.

The Lowry Center employs well-qualified head teachers as well as university undergraduate students who serve as classroom assistants. We decided to tackle only the schedules of head teaching staff at first. The overall plan consisted of shifting from a work week of five 8-hour days to one of four 10-hour days. With a bit of appre-

In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program's Solution (continued)

hension and much hope, we launched the new schedule. Teachers now reported for class at 7:30 a.m. and worked until 5:30 p.m. Formal program hours, staffed by teachers, were from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with head teachers available for children throughout the sessions. The hours before and after, used by only a few children, were staffed by experienced students. The head teaching staff were still on the premises at these times, using the early morning hours for room setup and the late afternoon hours for planning. They were available to supervise and back up the student teachers as needed.

At first it seemed we had both solved and created problems at the same time. On the five-day schedule, we had had two head teachers scheduled each day. The four-day schedule made this impossible. Each class now had two head teachers only three days per week because each head teacher took one full

flex day. Initially this was perceived as a problem, however, we carefully staffed each room with an experienced student — one who was considered part of the team and not primarily a classroom maintenance assistant.

Benefits of the New Plan

As could be expected with the implementation of any new procedure, we worked through many issues, and these concerns systematically dwindled in light of the gains we were experiencing. Listed below are some benefits of the new schedule now enjoyed by the entire Lowry Center community:

- Head teachers have three sessions of team planning per week (one and a half hours each) with their head teaching partner.
- Head teachers have one and a half hours each morning for setup and classroom maintenance.

In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program's Solution (continued)

- The director is regularly present during some team planning sessions in order to assist with staff development needs as they come up in conversations about the environment, daily routine, assessment, and adult-child interactions.
- On flex days (when one teacher is not present) a student staff member participates in the teaching and planning process. This provides another perspective for planning and assessment and for on-the-job experiences for preservice teachers.
- Student staff feel empowered and are now more involved in the planning process — their input is clearly needed and valued.
- Student staff receive ongoing mentoring and feedback as they practice team-building skills with other professionals and teaching methods based on child development theory and appropriate interactions with young children.
- With a “day off” built into their work week, head staff take less time off for appointments and personal business, and are less prone to “burnout.”
- Many head teachers are in the process of furthering their education and find the flex day to be of great value for studying and for preparing assignments.
- Head teachers have the time and the opportunity to visit other centers and interact with colleagues in the field.
- The afternoon hours of team planning time are rarely interrupted and hardly ever used for room or activity setup since there are now early morning hours available for that.
- Each team planning session consists of meaningful discussion based on objective observations of children, resulting in a daily teaching plan that is child-centered and responsive to specific developmental needs.

In Search of Time for Daily Team Planning: One Program's Solution (continued)

- Families were initially apprehensive about the absence of a head teacher on certain days, however, parents quickly became convinced of the value of the new schedule after learning about the underlying rationale and its benefits for their children.
- The morale of staff and students has improved considerably since flex time was initiated.

Just as classrooms are constantly assessing and adjusting to meet the needs of children, the Lowry Center is committed to the same process in meeting the needs of staff and supporting them in their own adult version of plan-do-review. Providing teachers with adequate time to plan can have the side benefit of resolving other issues as well.

